



Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Board Inc.

**APPROVED
NOV 12, 2025**

**Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Board
Meeting Minutes
August 13, 2025, In-Person & via Zoom at 11:30 a.m.**

Members Attending	Members Absent	Staff & Guest Attending	Staff & Guest Attending Cont.
Billy Givens	Anne Fugate	Mayor McCarver	Angela Lax
Brandon Phinx	Jordan Osborne	Mayor McCall	Alyssa Spaulding
Corey Johns	Kelly Tyler	Mayor Pogreba	Samantha Roberts
Dan Caldwell	Mary Lear	Jamari Brown	James Starnes
David Rutledge	Robin Baldree	George Phillips	Kim Rye
Freda Herndon	Seth Thurman	Sarah Buckles	Cathy Royals
George Callis	Tony Adams	Tamera Parsons	Heather Skelton
John Zobl		Ginger Fussell	Tracie Eversole
Kaitlin Salyer		Jospeh Johnson	Joely Berg
Kristi Spurgeon		Betsy Foster	Adam Lamb
Mark Peed		Paul Hines	Mae Wright
Nathan Garrett		Moriah Turturice	Pam Furlong
Paul Webb		Amu Maberry	Laura Travis
Sellittia Johnson		Leesa LeClaire	Lee Harrell
Shoshana Samuels		Gena Stuard	Harold Simpson
		Tom Druffel	
		Andrea Dillard	
		Meagan Dobbins	

Call Meeting to Order- Declaration of Quorum

The Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Board met in person at the NSCC AJC East Davidson Campus with a virtual option on Wednesday, August 13, 2025, at 11:30 a.m.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman John Zobl. Attendance was taken, and a quorum was declared. The Chairman then asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Shoshana Samuels made the motion, and Dan Caldwell seconded. With no further discussion, the minutes were unanimously approved. Chairman Zobl thanked everyone for their attendance and invited Joseph Johnson, Executive Director of Workforce Development and Continuing Education at Nashville State, to offer a welcome. Johnson briefly introduced himself and the campus, explaining that it serves as a workforce-driven training site supporting non-credit education in collaboration with the Department of Labor and local workforce partners. He expressed appreciation for the partnership and enthusiasm for continued collaboration with the Board. Marla thanked Johnson for hosting and noted that the campus’s location near the airport and hotel corridor made it a fitting venue for the day’s discussion on hospitality and tourism as a profession.

She then provided a Washington update, explaining that the past few months have been particularly challenging due to uncertainty surrounding two major grants — the Senior Community Employment Services Program (SCSEP) and Adult Education funding. The SCSEP grant, administered through the National Council on Aging, remains unfunded as of mid-August, resulting in the furlough of

approximately 140 senior workers since July 1. If funding is not released by month's end, the program may be discontinued. The Adult Education grant also faced delays, but the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development provided a three-month bridge contract to prevent layoffs and maintain service continuity. Together, the two grants represent about \$4 million in funding for the Northern Middle workforce area.

Marla reported that while funding challenges have persisted, the region's economic indicators remain strong. Northern Middle holds eight of the ten lowest unemployment rates in Tennessee, ranging from 3.2% in Cheatham County to 4.8% in the highest area county. The region's labor force participation rate is 68.3%, higher than both the state average of 60% and the national average of 62.6%, with Trousdale County highest at 77.2% and Stewart County lowest at 51.9%. She added that the Senate's recent budget reconciliation bill rejected the proposal to consolidate federal workforce programs under the "Make America Skilled Again" initiative, opting instead to maintain current program structures, though funding remains reduced by about 13% for the new program year. Marla shared that the U.S. Department of Labor recently announced a \$30 million grant opportunity for employer-based skill-upgrade training. The State Workforce Board, led by Amy Mayberry, is determining whether Tennessee agencies are eligible to apply. She concluded that future federal priorities will likely continue to emphasize employer-driven training models, such as apprenticeships, incumbent worker training, and skill upgrades, in partnership with TCATs and community colleges. She expressed appreciation to her staff for their continued dedication amid multiple funding and service provider transitions since July 1.

Chairman Zobl thanked Marla and her team for their work navigating both funding challenges and expanded responsibilities. He then announced that reports from Sarah Buckles and George Phillips would be deferred, and Andrea Dillard would provide a brief update on AJC operations later in the meeting on behalf of Natalie McLimore.

Strategic Partner Focus-UTCIS Board Certification Project

Marla introduced Amy Mayberry, Executive Director of the State Workforce Board, noting her promotion since the group's meeting a year earlier. Amy thanked John Zobl and Marla for the invitation and outlined a new partnership between the State Workforce Board, the University of Tennessee Center for Industrial Services (UTCIS), and Tennessee's nine local workforce boards. She explained that the initiative, called the Board Certification Project, is designed to strengthen governance and alignment across the state by certifying boards as business-led, high-performing entities. The State Board recently completed its own certification process in collaboration with UTCIS, using a model based on the Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework. Amy said the project goes beyond WIOA compliance to assess innovation, communication, and system leadership. Phase Two will now extend the certification process to local boards, beginning with a Middle Tennessee cohort that includes Northern Middle, Southern Middle, and Upper Cumberland. Over the next four months, boards will participate in assessments and receive reports identifying strengths and areas for growth.

Amy introduced Tamara Parsons, UTCIS Performance Consultant, who provided an overview of the certification process. Tamara explained that the assessment is grounded in the Baldrige criteria and focuses on six core areas, including governance, performance management, and strategic insight. The process includes reviewing policies and procedures, conducting confidential board member interviews, and a brief survey. Boards are evaluated at one of three levels—compliant, competent, or role model—based on the consistency and effectiveness of their practices. Tamara noted that the project requires minimal time commitment from members but will provide valuable feedback and consistency statewide. Amy added that the initiative will also help create shared standards and resources, such as board orientation tools and best-practice materials.

John Zobl thanked Amy and Tamara, noting that the timing aligns well with the recent board reorganization and the addition of new members.

Strategic Priorities – Hospitality & Tourism as a Profession Panel

John Zobl welcomed two new members to the Board: Brandon Phinx, serving as the new TNDLWD representative, and Kaitlin Salyer, Senior Vice President for Education and Workforce Development at the Rutherford CoC. Both introduced themselves and shared their enthusiasm for joining the Board. Marla then introduced a panel discussion focused on Hospitality and Tourism as a Profession, noting the region's position as a hospitality hub and the significant employment opportunities the industry offers. She said the goal of the discussion was to explore how the Board and its partners could better support the industry through career pathways and training initiatives. The panel included Leesa LeClaire of the Greater Nashville Hospitality Association, Gena Shearon of Wilson Works and a former HR professional at the Vanderbilt Holiday Inn, Tom Druffel of Nashville State Community College and Metro Council, and Moriah Turturice of Sumner County Schools' Career and Technical Education program.

In response to Marla's opening question about the industry's importance, Leesa said the hospitality and tourism sector continues to be one of Tennessee's strongest economic drivers, with \$31.7 billion in statewide visitor spending and \$3.3 billion in state and local tax revenue in 2024. She noted that Nashville alone accounts for over a third of that impact and emphasized that the industry offers stable, long-term careers beyond entry-level roles, with opportunities in operations, accounting, marketing, and management. Marla then asked how education and training institutions are helping prepare workers for hospitality careers. Tom explained that Nashville State's hospitality and culinary programs have grown rapidly, now serving more than 250 culinary students and 30 in hotel and restaurant management. He said the programs combine theory with practical experience and emphasize interpersonal and leadership skills that are essential to customer-facing work. He also noted the strong partnership between the college and local hotels in shaping relevant curriculum and providing hands-on learning opportunities. When asked about workforce challenges from an employer's perspective, Gena said the industry must now hire for personality and customer service skills as much as experience. She described innovative partnerships with nonprofits such as Urban League and Project SEARCH, which connect employers with candidates overcoming barriers to employment, including housing insecurity or disabilities. She said such relationships improve retention by fostering loyalty and support networks for employees.

Marla turned next to education, asking how career awareness starts in schools. Moriah described Sumner County's CTE programs, which include culinary arts in three high schools and business and marketing classes in all nine. She highlighted a student-led project converting a retired FedEx truck into a food truck, involving students from culinary, business, and construction pathways. She said these initiatives provide authentic, work-based learning experiences that teach teamwork, customer service, and entrepreneurship. Moriah also shared that several schools operate on-campus cafés where students plan menus, prepare meals, and manage service for faculty and staff. Leesa added that five Nashville high schools now offer culinary programs, and more are introducing hospitality courses and coffee shop enterprises. Tom noted that Nashville's Academies of Nashville model, in place since 2007, has become a national example of business-education collaboration, supported by over 30 hospitality partners. Moriah added that interest in culinary and CTE programs continues to grow, with new schools expanding offerings each year and a shift in perception away from "vocational" training toward diverse career preparation.

Brandon asked how clearly hospitality career pathways are defined for students and jobseekers. Leesa said that while some employers, like Gaylord, offer multiple career tracks, many lack clearly communicated progression models. She and Tom agreed that mapping visible, structured pathways—from entry-level to management—would help attract and retain workers, particularly young people.

Marla concluded the discussion by asking how the Board and its partners could best collaborate to strengthen the industry. Leesa shared that the Greater Nashville Hospitality Association is forming a Workforce Development Task Force for Middle Tennessee, with plans for a Hospitality Day event on September 4, where 200 high school students will tour hospitality venues and meet industry professionals. Tom encouraged continued investment in summer programming and work-based learning to keep youth engaged and develop career interests early, emphasizing the importance of consistency and partnerships to sustain such programs. Moriah added that Sumner County has offered CTE summer camps in recent years, which have proven effective, though grant funding is set to expire.

The panel concluded with examples of successful student placements and a shared commitment to strengthening collaboration between educators, employers, and workforce partners. Marla thanked the panelists for their insights, noting that the discussion generated strong ideas for future engagement and the Board's role in expanding hospitality career pathways across the region.

Eligible Training Provider List

Andrea Dillard reported on ETPL updates reviewed at the Innovations Committee meeting last Thursday. One new private provider, Clarksville School of Dental Assisting, required THEC approval; it was provisionally approved at the time of committee review. THEC has since confirmed official approval. Five new programs from existing providers were also submitted. Nashville State Community College's phlebotomy program exceeded a 25% cost increase and therefore required Board approval. The Tennessee Language Center requested reinstatement, having fallen off in 2024 due to a missed reapplication rather than performance issues. Andrea added one late item received after the Committee meeting was held from Volunteer State Community College for a professional bookkeeping program; she included it because a WIOA participant from the Sumner County AJC needed the class, and the Board only meets quarterly. Billy Givens shared that all requests were approved at the Innovations Committee. Billy then moved to approve the ETPL list as presented at the Committee meeting, and Freda Herndon seconded. With no further discussion, the motion passed unanimously. Billy then moved to approve the Volunteer State bookkeeping program, and Corey Johns seconded. With no further discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

Financial Report

Ginger Fussell delivered the end-of-year fiscal report, noting she would cover highlights and action items due to time constraints. She reported a \$15K increase from a short grant, bringing the total budget to \$13.7M. She reminded the Board that the baseline budget presented in May was built on conservative assumptions of year-end totals due to an additional \$494K in TYEP funds with a June spending deadline. Q4 ultimately performed very strongly: expenditures in Q4 totaled \$3.7M, bringing total annual expenditures to \$10.9M, representing 79.9% utilization of the overall budget. Youth program performance was the "star of the show," supported by program staff, leadership, and employer partners. This success allowed formula funds to be conserved and some administrative costs to be appropriately charged to the youth grant, increasing carryover into the current fiscal year despite a 13% funding reduction. Ginger emphasized that 82.1% of formula funding was utilized, leaving 17.9% unspent; factoring in the 13% reduction, the region is effectively positive by about 4.9%. She asked the Board to again authorize flexibility to request state permission to repurpose up to \$750,000 of Dislocated Worker funds to Adult, if needed.

John Zobl commended the May–June youth work. Marla noted that several other workforce areas declined the funds due to the two-month window, making the team's execution notable. Ginger added that both contractors, EDSI and MAC, stayed fully engaged through contract end, contributed to the year-end push, and some staff transitioned to Workforce Essentials. MAC utilized all funding and slightly over-obligated, which was resolved without additional contract dollars and without penalizing participants; EDSI utilized 97% overall as attention shifted to youth. Across grants with two-year terms,

the region spent 97% of \$11.2 million, leaving \$230K unspent—largely tied to the Titan Stadium project—plus a small remainder in administrative dollars, which Ginger framed as evidence of efficient operations. She noted MPCR performance improved largely due to a new state policy. Without the policy change, the region would have been at 38.56%, adding incumbent workers raised it to 40.73%, and including nearly \$1M of TYEP activity lifted MPCR to 49.91%. She thanked state partners, including Amy Mayberry, for the policy. On monitoring, both pilots gained ground in Q4—Montgomery more than Sumner—and while enrollments and exits progressed, case notes and case management remained an area to tighten. Upcoming oversight includes the PAR team’s visit at the end of this month and the annual audit before year-end.

Turning to the current year, Ginger reported an additional \$924K in carryover beyond what was projected in May and raised the carryover target to 25%. The formula funding budget stands at \$9M, with the total revised FY 2025–2026 budget at \$11.8M. Tennessee Youth funding awarded was \$622K versus the \$1M requested. PROWD funding was increased, with spending likely extending into the next fiscal year. Under the new operating model, the Career Service Provider line that previously funded EDSI or MAC will now be obligated to Workforce Essentials’ Career Service Division. Ginger concluded by listing the action items that had gone through Finance committee: accept the amended \$13.7M budget reflecting the \$15K increase; authorize the flexibility to request up to \$750K in Dislocated Worker-to-Adult repurposing in FY 2025–2026; revise the FY 2025–2026 budget to \$11.8M; and obligate \$10.2M of that to Workforce Essentials, Inc., as Career Service Provider. Dan Caldwell made a motion to approve the listed action items, and Nathan Garrett seconded. The motion carried unanimously with no further discussion.

AJC Operations

Andrea Dillard reported that staff transitions and multiple in-person trainings led by Megan Dobbins focused on working smarter and re-engaging with employers and partners. Three regional managers with prior service provider experience now cover all 13 counties. Due to a \$1M funding cut, Title I staffing moved from a total of 56 to 33; some smaller offices (e.g., Stewart and Trousdale) now operate two to three days weekly, with staff redeployed to higher-demand sites. Staffing was nearly complete with one vacancy in Rutherford; full onboarding was expected by early September. Andrea recognized Betsy Forster for leading Nashville—the largest AJC and currently under-staffed—to the highest first-month enrollments, and credited collaboration with Paul Hines, TDLWD services manager.

Election of Vice Chair

Marla announced that since Chris West had retired from the Board, a new Vice Chair needed to be elected. Dan Caldwell nominated Mark Peed by acclamation to serve as Vice Chair, and Corey Johns seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

Governance & Monitoring

Marla reminded that an external monitor is required under the in-house delivery model. One RFP response was received from an Arizona CPA firm experienced in WIOA monitoring, but the price was far outside of the budget. Staff will negotiate or rebid; the Executive Committee will approve next steps. Marla added that updated AJC operational efficiency figures through June 30 will be presented at the next meeting; early results show that Davidson County improved relative to initial projections.

Public Comment and Adjournment

No public comments were requested. John Zobl thanked guests Amy Mayberry and Tamara Parsons and acknowledged the substantial activity underway across programs and AJCs. The next meeting is scheduled for November 12, 2025.