Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Board Inc.

DRAFT UNTIL APPROVED

Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Board
Meeting Minutes
August 12, 2026, In-Person & via Zoom at 11:30 a.m.

Members Attending	Members Absent	Staff & Guest Attending	Staff & Guest Attending Cont.
Anne Fugate	Billy Givens	Mayor Golden	Joely Berg
Ashley Horan	Jordan Osborne	Mayor Anderson	Cinthya Rodriguez
Cory Johns	Mary Lear	Mayor Hutto	Lydia Bennett- Carnes
Dan Caldwell	Nathan Garrett	Commissioner Thomas	Sematria Ford
David Rutledge	Paul Webb	Justin Attkisson	Kerwin Thompson
Freda Herndon	Seth Thurman	Marla Rye	
George "Bo" Callis	Shoshana Samuels	Natalie McLimore	
John Zobl		Andrea Dillard	
Jordan Osborne		Meagan Dobbins	
Kristi Spurgeon		Alyssa Spaulding	
Mark Peed		Samantha Roberts	
Nestor Reyes		George Phillips	
Sellittia Johnson		Amy Maberry	
Tony Adams		Terry Malone	
		James Starnes	
		Heather Skelton	
		Cathy Royals	
		Laura Travis	

Call Meeting to Order - Declaration of Quorum

The Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Board met in person at Scarritt Bennett Center in Nashville, with a virtual option, on Wednesday, August 12, 2026, at 11:30 a.m. Following attendance, a quorum was declared, and Chairman Zobl called the meeting to order. Mark Peed moved to approve the previous meeting's minutes, and Tony Adams seconded. With no further discussion, the minutes were approved without opposition.

Updates

Marla Rye welcomed attendees and introduced new board members Jim Hughes (Williamson Health) and Nestor Reyes (Department of Labor). Jim described his background in learning and development and interest in helping individuals advance while serving the community. Nestor described his TNWORKS employer engagement role for Northern Middle and prior experience at the Sumner County AJC. Marla recognized outgoing county mayors and reported that six new mayors would join the Local Elected Officials Consortium, representing Cheatham, Dickson, Humphreys, Robertson, Rutherford, and Williamson counties. Chairman Zobl thanked the mayors for their longstanding support and specifically recognized Rogers Anderson's 24 years of service and continued engagement with the workforce system. Chairman Zobl also recognized Randall Hutto's ongoing leadership and welcomed Montgomery County Mayor Wes Golden as the anticipated new Chief Local Elected Official following Dickson County Mayor Bob Rial's departure.

Marla reported that Northern Middle had the lowest unemployment rate among Tennessee workforce areas at 3.2%, with eight counties among the state's 10 lowest. County rates ranged from 3% in Cheatham to 4.1% in Stewart and Montgomery. Regional labor force participation was 67.5%, compared with 61.9% nationally and 59.6% statewide. County participation ranged from 72.6% in Davidson and Trousdale to 51.5% in Stewart. Marla also noted increased layoff activity, which Natalie McLimore clarified later in the meeting. Mayor Golden reported that Montgomery County had more than 10,000 jobs anticipated, underscoring the need for workforce capacity.

Strategic Partner Focus - Tennessee Workforce Development System

Chairman Zobl introduced Commissioner Deniece Thomas of the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development. The Commissioner recognized Northern Middle's innovation, performance, and willingness to pilot new initiatives. She explained that federal scrutiny of rising infrastructure costs and inconsistent outcomes was prompting states to reconsider workforce delivery. She emphasized that those concerns did not describe Northern Middle's performance but affected how the national system was evaluated and funded. Commissioner Thomas then described Tennessee's waiver requests and proposed regional governance model as a response to employer demand, differences in local processes, and the need for consistent services across county boundaries. She cited differences in employer applications and supportive service amounts as examples of practices that could be standardized. TNWORKS already brought six state agencies together under a coordinated, employer-facing approach, and the state wanted local workforce partners to align similarly. She said the intent was to strengthen regional planning councils with governance, resources, and accountability rather than disband local boards. She anticipated performance-based expectations, regional CLEO councils, fewer physical facilities, and service access that was less dependent on geographic boundaries.

She continued that the state would provide transition funding, technical assistance, an FAQ, and additional implementation guidance. She planned to discuss the changes with county mayors later that month. She also described workforce demand associated with nuclear development in the Oak Ridge area, estimating at least 40K workers and more than 100K statewide when related supply chains were included. She said that demand required a stronger workforce response and presented an opportunity to extend effective practices across Tennessee.

Marla asked whether regional board membership would draw from existing local boards. Commissioner Thomas replied that a subset of current members would be an appropriate foundation because of their experience, while mayors would help determine appointments. The state was developing selection criteria emphasizing demonstrated capacity and performance. As an example, she said a regional fiscal agent would need three years of clean audits and experience managing multiple federal grants. Deniece emphasized that the state would evaluate the qualifications of proposed regional leadership before certification or ratification. Amy Mayberry reported that an FAQ was expected soon. The State Workforce Development Board would consider the framework policy August 28, and the department would issue guidance clarifying roles, responsibilities, and selection standards. The framework was available online for public comment, and staff were working with local executive directors to prepare for implementation. Deniece invited suggestions for additional waivers and said local input would help shape the process. She argued that current employer needs warranted moving forward rather than waiting for the next administration.

Chairman Zobl expressed concern about repeating the disruption experienced during the previous consolidation, noting that Northern Middle had reached a stable and effective operating model. He affirmed the board's willingness to support improvement while acknowledging apprehension about the transition. Marla added that committee members were concerned about losing gains made through

recent contractor and operational changes. Commissioner Thomas responded that the state wanted to extend Northern Middle's strengths across a larger region and improve consistency statewide. Regional plans already existed, but she said they lacked clear ownership and governance. The proposal was intended to provide accountability for regional commitments and allow job seekers and employers to access comparable services across local areas. Chairman Zobl asked how Tennessee compared nationally. She replied that other states regularly consulted Tennessee on workforce strategy and waiver development, while acknowledging room for improvement. She encouraged continued feedback from the board and mayors.

Mayor Golden asked for assurance that Montgomery County would retain the benefit of Marla and her team's expertise as new jobs arrived. Commissioner Thomas answered that the redesign was intended to preserve effective assets and create opportunities for strong teams to influence a broader region. Mark Peed emphasized the importance of retaining the progress achieved during the past year. She reiterated that the state intended to build on successful practices, reduce administrative and financial burdens, and support the transition with resources and guidance. Chairman Zobl thanked her for the presentation and leadership and affirmed the board's commitment to helping improve the system.

Strategic Priorities - Career Pathways

Marla introduced Justin Attkisson, who oversees workforce development in Mayor Freddie O'Connell's office. Justin previewed a Davidson County career pathways resource designed to help residents understand current and projected opportunities leading to living wages. The work began with occupations accessible through a high school diploma or equivalent and mapped advancement through specialized and leadership roles. Justin described the resource as an informational tool that would be updated as workforce needs changed. He said the work used JobsEQ, occupational classifications, job postings, and employer feedback to identify growth opportunities over the next 10 years. The analysis examined high-growth occupations within six targeted industries and used employer discussions to validate and supplement the data. Industries discussed included construction, corporate and financial services, healthcare management, medical diagnostics, and music business. Planned deliverables included a 114-page report, downloadable one-page pathway maps, and an interactive website. Maps would show job titles, wages, experience, skills, education requirements, and training partners. Technology skills were incorporated across industries rather than treated as a separate sector. The resource was intended for residents, educators, workforce professionals, community partners, and employers.

Mark asked whether the industry categories contained multiple pathways. Justin confirmed that each included several occupational pathways and that the resource was not intended to represent every available opportunity. He said continued updates would make it a living document. Next steps included public release, employer and workforce roundtables, and skill mapping to help individuals in declining or stagnant occupations transition into growing fields. Justin emphasized that all underlying analysis was specific to Davidson County and offered to share the full materials after publication. Marla asked whether the hospitality and tourism group meeting the following day could connect with the pathways work. Justin said the city would continue supporting hospitality, higher education, and government employers, although they were not the primary targets of this project. He noted challenges in identifying sufficient living-wage advancement opportunities in hospitality. Chairman Zobl said the board's previous hospitality panel had highlighted more substantial career opportunities than he had initially understood and encouraged continued attention to the sector.

One-Stop-Operator Report

George Phillips presented the OSO report while temporarily assisting during Sarah Buckles' absence. He reported that activity rebounded during the second half of the program year following a slow start. Q4 AJC traffic increased by approximately 1,100 visits over Q3. George reviewed enrollment activity across Title I, Adult Education, Wagner-Peyser, and Vocational Rehabilitation and recognized the strong MPCR result. County unemployment rates increased slightly from March 31 to June 30. Title I and Wagner-Peyser enrollments were strong, but co-enrollment between the programs remained below expectations for the second consecutive year and continued to require attention.

Federal Performance

Andrea Dillard reported that preliminary Q4 federal performance met all standards, with finalization underway at the state. She explained that performance at 90% of the negotiated target was considered passing, while 100% or higher was shown in green. Median earnings exceeded the $8,600 target, reaching approximately $9.1K. Andrea reported that negotiations for the next two years resulted in six standards decreasing slightly, six increasing slightly, and three remaining unchanged.

Eligible Training Provider Update & Requests

Andrea presented 11 new programs from existing providers, all offered through state institutions to the ETPL. Nine were TCAT programs, one was offered by Nashville State Community College, and one by Austin Peay State University. All led to credentials, with most lasting 12 months or less and one lasting 16 months. Marla confirmed that Austin Peay's submission addressed the course referenced in a prospective participant's email to board members. Andrea also requested reinstatement of six programs that had lapsed after providers missed subsequent review deadlines. Five were TCAT Murfreesboro programs affected by a staffing vacancy, and the sixth was Excel Barber and Style College. None were removed for poor performance. Kaitlin Salyer reported that the Innovations Committee reviewed the requests August 4 and recommended approval. Kaitlin moved to approve the ETPL requests, and Tony Adams seconded. With no further discussion, the motion was unanimously approved.

AJC Closure Update

Natalie reported that physical offices closed in Houston, Humphreys, Stewart, Trousdale, and Wilson counties, while services in Cheatham, Robertson, and Williamson shifted to a modified outreach model. Staff remained available in every county through libraries, TCATs, Nashville State, and other partner locations. She said the immediate challenge was ensuring residents knew services remained available.

Natalie reviewed the marketing effort with Small Town Marketing, including targeted digital advertising and landing pages to capture customer contact information. The campaign generated 329 leads in its first five weeks, although conversion to enrollments was still being evaluated. Staff reported strong response to the toll-free phone number and internally developed flyers with QR codes. Three business and community engagement coordinators distributed materials at job fairs, chambers, and community events. Billboard advertising was planned in Trousdale County and the Houston, Stewart, and Humphreys area. Staff would continue tracking which approaches produced enrollments.

Natalie explained that approximately 6,000 individuals represented statewide layoff activity, while Northern Middle had 3,381 layoffs during the fiscal year from July 1 through June 30. Chairman Zobl asked about the reporting period, and Natalie confirmed it covered the prior fiscal year. She also reported more than 2,000 openings associated with new businesses, approximately half in Clarksville. Rapid Response job fairs were connecting affected workers with employers, supporting quick reemployment and opportunities for additional training and services through the Dislocated Worker program.

Chairman Zobl commented on the response to QR-code flyers. Natalie said broad distribution by outreach staff was helping customers recognize the availability of training assistance despite reduced walk-in access. Marla cited partner space at the Stewart County senior citizens building and Nashville State in Humphreys County as examples of continued local service. Andrea enrolled 15 youth in Stewart County the previous day. Natalie also reported that SCSEP would be allowed to move from $7.25 per hour to occupation-based prevailing wages, improving participant compensation.

Financial Report

Ginger Fussell presented year-end financial results through June 30. Q4 expenditures increased as expected, and spending rose each quarter during the transition to in-house career services. Annual expenditures totaled approximately $8 M, with overall budget utilization of 62.3%. Ginger explained that the prior year's nearly $11 M included activity under a two-year youth grant and an additional $500K received near year-end. The new year began with a reduced allocation, prompting caution in per-participant commitments. Staff also placed greater emphasis on assessment and case management before enrollment. Spending increased as operations stabilized and staff adjusted participant assistance levels. She then distinguished overall budget utilization from use of grants expiring June 30. The organization utilized 96.67% of expiring grant funds and left no formula program funds unspent. Administrative funds transferred into program services were fully utilized. Some administrative funds expired, but the transfer reduced the unused balance. Ginger said staff would continue closely monitoring expenditure timing and grant expiration dates.

Ginger reported that overall MPCR finished well above the 40% requirement and increased from 45.57% in the prior quarter. She anticipated that lower infrastructure costs following the AJC changes could further strengthen performance. At the CSP level, combined Adult and Dislocated Worker MPCR was 49% against a 50% target, while Youth MPCR was 53%. CSP work experience and in-school youth spending were close to their goals. Mid-Cumberland billed 91% of its One-Stop Operator contract, remaining within budget. She then presented the revised 2026-2027 budget. The preliminary budget assumed a 10% allocation reduction, but the actual allocation increased over the previous year, creating an approximately $1.6 M favorable difference from the initial projection. Two new grants also contributed to the revision. Ginger reviewed balanced revenue and expense schedules and an alternate expense presentation aligned with the auditor's preferred format.

Ginger reviewed utilization improvement strategies. She also reported that Mid-Cumberland's audit had been delayed because of new program activity but had now been received with no findings. A state grants and budgets review identified a property management policy requiring revision to reflect Uniform Guidance changes. PAR monitoring resulted in no findings, and the report was included in the packet. The external financial audit was underway, with on-site fieldwork planned for November. Ginger presented the property management policy revision increasing the equipment threshold from $5K to $10K. Staff limited the amendment to that change while awaiting anticipated state policy revisions. Mark reported that the Finance Committee recommended approval and moved to accept the 2025-2026 financial report through June 30, the revised 2026-2027 budget, and the property management policy amendment. Mark Peed then made a motion to accept, and Dan Caldwell seconded. With no further discussion, the motion was unanimously approved. Chairman Zobl commended Ginger and the fiscal team for their reporting, monitoring results, and accounting work. Ginger credited the finance staff.

Election of Officers & Governance Policy Comment

Marla conducted the officer election and stated that we are in a state of transition with the proposed regional governance policy. She explained that local boards could become advisory councils supporting the regional board and asked Amy to clarify the intent. Amy confirmed that interpretation and said

regional handling of compliance matters such as finance, ETPL approvals, and OSO reports could allow local advisory councils to concentrate on strategy and community workforce priorities. She recognized Northern Middle's leading UTCIS assessment results and said the statewide review supported stronger strategic impact beyond federal compliance. UTCIS would present its final report to the State Workforce Development Board August 28.

Marla acknowledged continued uncertainty but said Northern Middle's employer services, incumbent worker training investments, and experience with statewide healthcare partnerships provided a strong foundation for a broader role. Given the potential transition after June 30, 2027, she recommended retaining experienced officers for continuity. Freda Herndon moved to re-elect the current slate of officers by acclamation. The motion was seconded by Dan Caldwell. With no further discussion, the motion was unanimously approved.

Mark said reducing compliance responsibilities must not remove the local council's accountability of finances, training, and business decisions. He recommended continued briefings or concise financial summaries so members could make informed contributions. Chairman Zobl agreed. Freda emphasized that advisory councils needed meaningful work and substantive recommendations to the regional board to sustain engagement. Amy agreed and said forthcoming guidance would establish standards, while regions would help shape council structure, reporting, and formal and informal communication. She welcomed the feedback as the state continued refining the guidance.

Public Comment Period & Adjournment

No public comments were requested. Chairman Zobl announced that the next meeting would be November 10 since Wednesday, November 11 was Veterans Day. The location would be determined and communicated to the members. With no other business, the meeting was adjourned.