



**Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Board  
Meeting Minutes  
August 14, 2024, In-Person & via Zoom at 12:00 p.m.**

<b>Members Attending</b>	<b>Staff &amp; Guest Attending</b>	<b>Staff &amp; Guest Attending Cont.</b>
Mary Lear	Marla Rye	Kimberly Wiggins
Dan Caldwell	Andrea Dillard	Cassandra McNair-Brown
Mark Peed	Meagan Dobbins	Pam Furlong
Paul Webb	Ginger Fussell	Josh Huhnke
Kristi Spurgeon	Alyssa Spaulding	Frank Buoyer
Shoshana Samuels	Kerwin Thompson	Jeremy Tudor
Seth Thurman	George Phillips	
Christopher West	Roe Falcone	
John Zobl	Liz McLaughlin	
Robin Baldree	Tanya Everenson	
Billy Givens	Katina Bass	
Anne Fugate	Patrick Wade	
George "Bo" Callis	Amy Maberry	
David Rutledge	Deniece Thomas	
Greg Jones	Madison Bumpus	
Nathan Garrett	Elizabeth Black	
Freda Herndon	Tiffany Robertson	
Corey Johns	Terry Malone	
Ryan Jolley	Anthony Holt	
	Larry Peoples	
<b>Members Absent</b>	Daniel Jayroe	
Kelly Tyler	Kim Rye	
James Harper	James Starnes	
Tony Adams	Lydia Bennet	
Jordan Osborne	Laura Travis	
	Heather Skelton	
<b>Mayors Attending</b>	Cathy Royals	
Mayor John Isbell	Robert Dancer	
Mayor Rogers Anderson	Patrick Buford	
Mayor Bob Rial	Benjamin Turner	
Mayor Billy Vogle	Trish Farmer	
Mayor Wes Golden	Jeremy Vetter	
Mayor Jack McCall	Brittany Gray	
Mayor Mike Pogreba	Larry Melf	
Mayor Randell Hutto	Tonzia Buor	
Jamari Brown (Proxy Mayor O'Connell)	Ashley Crisp-Randle	
Mayor Kerry McCarver	Erin Hutchens	
	Harold Simpson	

### **Call Meeting to Order- Declaration of Quorum**

The Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Development Board met in person at the Tennessee Bankers Association in Nashville, TN with a virtual option on Wednesday, August 14, 2024, at 12:00 p.m.

The meeting was called to order by John Zobl. Attendance was taken, and a quorum was declared. The Chairman then asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Mark Peed made the motion. Chris West seconded. With no further discussion, the minutes were unanimously approved.

Marla thanked everyone in attendance and recognized the four new Board members: Billy Givens, Mary Lear, Ryan Jolley, and Kelly Tyler. The unemployment rate in the US is at 2.9%, and Northern Middle is at 2.7%. It ranges between 2.7% to 4.9%, with eight of the lowest rates in Tennessee being in the region. The Labor Force Participation rate continues to be lower than the state average. The US is 63%, Tennessee is 55.9%, and the Northern Middle region is 67.2%. However, the LFPR range is from 47.2% in Houston County to 78.8% in Trousdale County.

### **Consortium of County Mayors**

John Zobl then introduced Mayor Rial. Mayor Rial explained that this meeting in partnership with the Northern Middle Board is the annual meeting of the Northern Middle Consortium of Mayors. He gave a brief update on the Interlocal Agreement that all the mayors ratified for the period beginning July 1, 2024 and extending to June 30, 2026. He reviewed the agreement on behalf of the Mayors of the Northern Middle Tennessee area and explained that it defined the roles, responsibilities, and liabilities between the 13 counties. It also designates and confirms Mayor Rial as the Chief Local Elected Official responsible for the certification of the Northern Middle Tennessee Board members. He encouraged every Board member and County Mayor to attend every meeting and keep their local mayors updated as workforce development is a key component of economic development in the counties. Mayor Rial commended the work of the Board and commenced the meeting of the Northern Middle Board.

John Zobl thanked all of the county Mayors. He commented that they have had a long history of involvement with every county mayor over the last twenty years and looked forward to continuation in the future. He then announced that there had been a slight change in the agenda, which required them to go directly to Commissioner Denice Thomas.

### **Reimagining Workforce Development**

Commissioner Thomas began by thanking the board and commenting that it is a true testament to the board to see so many mayors show up despite their busy schedules to participate in workforce development. She thanked the Board members for being available and added that this region is often sought after for its innovation and ingenuity. She then thanked Marla for allowing her to come and speak to the Board because she believes it's important to stay connected with each other. She announced that she wanted to talk about what is being reimagined both in theory and practice and what the impetus is for this board to continue its work. She has traveled across the country in various roles and observed workforce initiatives. She has not been shy about expressing her concern that if the business is not done differently, she can see a future where the State and American Job Center network becomes irrelevant in the evolution of workforce development. It needs to be dynamic, adaptable, and agile.

She continued by defining her vision for the future and how it rests on services to business and industry. She stated that her department is prioritizing customer service and will be rolling out a new business services strategy to become more active in serving the employer customer. She then focused on how the department can become more efficient. By focusing on the returns on investment, she would analyze and divest in initiatives that were not high in returns. She stated that much money has been



spent on bricks and mortar and infrastructure. There will still be a place for bricks and mortar as there are still people who need to physically walk in the door to talk to someone but she also believes that the system must be agile enough to divest in locations where people are not walking through the door. It is possible to not have a base location and take services into the community wherever they may be. Commissioner Thomas brought up the Labor Force Participation. They know the zip codes in Tennessee where people are not actively participating and believe they need to be in these communities instead of waiting for them to go to an AJC. She continues that unemployed individuals only receive a maximum of 13 weeks of unemployment benefits, so getting them connected to services and back into the workforce quickly is imperative.

They are also entertaining any new, innovative models. The NM Board has already found ways to work alongside community organizations and nonprofits to establish a job center wherever possible. To do that, the TNDOL must take back some of the rigorous language and burdens that decide what it means to have a certified American Job Center. They will be revisiting some policy work that stands in the way of her goal of redefining American Job Centers in Tennessee.

Reimagining the workforce in TN means taking a tough look internally, starting just down the road at 220 French Landing. She stated it is not the TDLWD's job to be punitive or in the way; it is their job to resource boards so that they can make sure they're creating models for their region's success. She does not want to be a one-size-fits-all; she doesn't want to standardize everything to the point that they are rendered ineffective. Commissioner Thomas commended her team for their hard work, especially since she feels like she is always throwing new ideas at them. She stated her priority is innovation. She emphasized that she wants to work together to find the right solution for the right region at the right time. There will be more guidance in the future and fewer policies.

She concluded by asking for the Board's help in advance. Northern Middle is typically the first to raise their hand and offer when her department comes up with a new idea. She knows that she will need the Board to help her innovate. She again thanked the Board for everything they do and expressed her appreciation towards Chairman Zobl. He asked how long she has held her position as Commissioner, to which she replied that it will be 2 years in September. He continued that Commissioner Thomas is someone who has progressed through the ranks at TDLWD and he believes that it is refreshing to have somebody in the commissioner's position who understands how things work and has taken the time to have a working relationship with Marla and her team. Marla commented that Commissioner Thomas had invited her to meet with the Office of Management and Budget from Washington, DC on Monday. During the meeting, the OMB official in charge stated that the reason they chose Tennessee for a visit is because he had heard about the great things happening in Tennessee. He contributed the success to Commissioner Thomas's leadership and innovation. He also stated she was known nationally for her innovation and commitment to workforce development. Marla asked the Board to give Commissioner Thomas a round of applause in appreciation of her work.


### **Panel Discussion with Youth & Employers**

Marla then introduced Meagan Dobbins. Meagan presented three YEP participants: Laiklan, Grace and Chloe. Each communicated their experiences with the YEP program. Last, Meagan introduced Kimberly Wiggins, Montgomery County Trustee. She provided insight from an employer prospective and the value to instill work ethics in young adults.

### **One-Stop-Operator Report**

George Phillips presented the OSO report. The report primarily focused on information as of June 30. There were 154 adult enrollments in Q4 (compared to 71 in Q3), more than doubling their adult enrollments. Dislocated worker enrollments were 80 in Q4, almost 4 times more than what they did in

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Q3. He commended contractors on Q4 enrollments. In Wagner Peyser, he stated a 46% increase in participants. Vocational Rehab had another strong quarter. There was a significant increase in foot traffic across the board at 23,000 versus 19,000 last quarter. The Sumner County AJC is still operating on a skeleton crew which has hindered their performance numbers.

### **Federal Performance Update/Negotiations**

Andrea Dillard updated the Board on contractor performance as of June 30. MAC, the youth contractor in Davidson County, achieved their enrollment and placement numbers. EDSI started the year off strong but then lagged behind in enrollments due to aggressive spending earlier in the year. Towards the end of the year, they improved with more strategic direction. Their most significant change was bringing in boots on the ground leadership. The new leadership conducted weekly meetings with the field staff. They strived to achieve 80% of their enrollment goals and realized 77% before they were told to halt on enrolling in late June. Board staff advised EDSI to plan for new fiscal year.


Andrea reviewed federal performance in Q4 of the program year 2023. She reminded the Board that green means 100% or better of the standard has been achieved, and yellow means 90% was achieved, which is passing. All standards are either passing or exceeding targets.

The standards for the new program year have not been finalized yet, as they are still being negotiated. Andrea Dillard gave an example of why Marla is still negotiating these standards. The goal for 4<sup>th</sup> quarter after exit for adults was 80.2 in 2022 and 81 in 2023. The Federal Government negotiated with the state for the standard to be 81.5. The state then proposed that the Northern Middle region's goal be 87%. Marla counter proposed that the goal should be 81.5, the same as the state standard. They came back with 83.8 for the region. Andrea Dillard assured the Board that they will and always have done everything to achieve the highest possible result, but they have had to go on record to say that some of these standards are unachievable. The region is expected, at minimum, to reach 90% of those goals. 90% of 83.8 is 75.42, and early predictive reports of Q1 say 75.7 was achieved, meaning they would barely pass. There are also concerns with all of the enrollments EDSI did at the end of the last program year; there is a possibility that some of the enrollments made to achieve quota will not be the best for the program at that time and will be a challenge to place and retain employment. She added that the only way to get standards lowered is to fail. Chairman Zobl asked if this was the highest goal ever set, and Marla replied that it was. Marla continued that when presented with the 87% proposed goal, she told them they were unattainable. This is a very high goal, and due to some of the challenges faced, there would be no way that it could be achieved. She appreciates their willingness to negotiate but believes the challenges will continue. Marla commented that she felt the region was a victim of its success. They take the benchmark of where it is and only raise it higher. If the region performs exceedingly well, they make it more difficult. If the region performs poorly, they will only increase it marginally.

### **Eligible Training Provider Update & Requests**

Andrea Dillard continued onto the Eligible Training Provider List, which was presented to the Innovations Committee. There are several programs seeking approval. The first few are new programs from an existing provider. Two are from TCAT Murfreesboro, and one is from Volunteer State Community College. All of the programs result in a credential and are in-demand occupations. The next category is programs with a cost increase of over 25% and needing reapproval. The automotive technician development training program with TCAT Dickson has been approved as an apprenticeship program. The remaining programs are 26 former programs that were on the list and fell off. The reason they fell off was not related to performance standards. In most cases, especially in the TCAT Murfreesboro programs, the person on their end for maintaining the ETPL was replaced, and the new individual did not do the renewal within the deadline. Billy Givens motioned to accept all programs

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requesting approval. Mary Lear seconded the motion. With no further commentary, the motion to accept was unanimously passed.

### **Financial Report**

Ginger Fussell briefly presented the Financial Report and asked the Board to refer to their materials for more detailed information. The year ended with \$11.6M in expenditures. An additional \$362K was received as available funding in Q4, bringing the budget up to \$15.5M. More money was spent in the youth category than estimated in the initial 24-25 budget, giving less carry-over to the youth. However, additional dollars carried over in Adult/DW to partially offset it. Of the expiring grants, 99.5% of the available funds were spent. MPCR in Q4 did drop below the 40% target, but she reminded the Board that a Labor Force Participation Project is happening in 4 counties. There was also \$1.1M in Tennessee Youth Employment Program expenditures that could not be counted toward the MPCR. If they had been counted, the MPCR would have been 44.65%. Billing trends in EDSI throughout the end of the year were normal. Of EDSI's total contract at the end of 42 months, they utilized 97% of their grant funding, and MAC was almost 100%. Ginger thanked the work of the contractors and then moved on to the One-Stop Operator. MCHRA contained their billing to 85%, which is favorable as they are an overhead expense. Both contractors met their dollar-driven goals contract to date.

During the May meeting, Ginger Fussell presented a projected 2024-2025 budget. It has been tweaked due to the change in carryover, as less of the formula funded was spent than initially projected, and more was spent in the Tennessee Youth Employment program than initially expected. She noted that she had etched out some dollars for the contractors and some projects would be split in the materials, but changes would be proposed in the November meeting.

She then gave a monitoring update. Andrea previously mentioned that a new management team with EDSI has been boots on the ground. They have made three site visits since the last board meeting, and with their new enrollment strategy, they have met approximately 75% of their Q4 enrollment goals. They have established monthly goals for 24-25, which they met in July. There has been a proposed change with the One-Stop Operator effective October 1 that will be gone over shortly. The external financial auditor, Thurman and Campbell, will not be the auditor this year. At the previous meeting, Ginger mentioned that they had considered doing another year but ultimately decided to go with their original plan to discontinue governmental auditing. She added that that's happening among more audit firms. The Finance Committee approved the selection of Stone, Rudolph, and Henry. The TDLWD's Program Integrity Unit has scheduled entrance conference on August 27, and she hopes to be done with the monitoring by the November meeting. Ginger Fussell then presented the action items to the Board. The first action was to approve the 23-24 financial award of \$15.6M with the addition of \$361K. The second action was to approve the amended budget for 24-25. The third action item was to approve the auditor change. John Zobl asked for any discussion, and Mayor Anderson asked about the Northern Middle Fund Balance and amount of carryover. Ginger Fussell addressed his question by saying that Northern Middle is a cost reimbursement grantee so the terminology of fund balance only means unexpended funds at June 30. She explained that WIOA contracts are for two years and that the finance committee recommends that at least 20% be budgeted to carry forward into the next program year to supplement future allocations in case of a decline in federal allocations. Marla added that it was wise that the Board hold funds in reserve due to the contracting stipulations. Mayor Anderson then asked about the investment portfolio. Marla explained that they did not have access to the funds in advance. The state holds all funding until it's expended and then reimburses it. Thus, there are no federal funds in an investment portfolio. Mayor Anderson thanked Marla and Ginger for the explanation. Finance committee chair, Mark Peed made the motion to approve the action items. Greg Jones made the second. The motion passed unanimously.

## **CSP Demonstration Projects**

Amy Maberry was invited to speak on the CSP demonstration project. Amy is the Deputy Assistant Commissioner for the Division of Workforce Services. She stated that, as the Commissioner mentioned earlier, they are continuing to adapt to a changing workforce and changing needs of businesses and job seekers. It has been a really exciting time to be in workforce development. She thanked Marla for asking the State team to participate in the innovation the Board seeks.

Amy continued by saying that Chairman Zobl and Marla approached the deputy commissioner and told them they would like to be more innovative and relevant in our communities. They held a meeting to strategize how to improve service strategy. The result included three different pilot projects. Each one has a defined purpose. The pilots are focused in Nashville, Gallatin, and Clarksville. She commented that this Board is a leader in the area and that there are some things that the TDLWD can work on in these pilots that will be replicated across the state. The three models prioritize innovation, customer need, and partnership. There are a lot of details still to be worked out.


For the project in Nashville, the AJC will be relocated to a more strategic location with outreach centers or "AJCs in a box." This model will have an individual staff member equipped with their briefcase, laptop, and the AJC sign to go out to the communities and meet job seekers where they are. At the new AJC location, they plan to work with the hospitality sector to meet their needs with a training-based center specifically. She continued that they may not be everything to everyone, but as they look at the priority sectors, there are opportunities to go deeper.

The Gallatin project will be led by State staff. In Montgomery County, the Northern Middle Board will lead services. This will allow the Board to be hands-on with service delivery and have functional supervision of state staff to come together as one team. Amy told Chairman Zobl that there is a fantastic partnership between the TNDOL and the Board, and they have much work ahead of them.

Marla then added that the Executive Committee reviewed this plan early on and approved it since it required a change to the operating structure and a procurement was out. The procurement was canceled, and EDSI and MAC agreed to continue in the ten other counties that were not being piloted. She appreciated their willingness to do that and added that they have been looking to move the AJC in Davidson County for a long time. She believes that meeting people where they are will be beneficial to Nashville. Jamari Brown, a proxy for Mayor O'Connell, asked how they plan to get the word out to citizens about moving around Davidson County. Marla replied that these changes would take effect on October 1, so they had some time to inform the public. She added that they would communicate with registrants and Jobs4TN and do some PSAs to get the word out. Jamari Brown replied that he would love to help get the word out about the model change to make sure they get in touch with the Nashville community if there is any way the Mayor's office can help. Amy Maberry added that a state-led marketing campaign will be released in late fall 2024 to early 2025. It will highlight the agencies themselves and the outreach centers.

Bo Callis asked if these pilots would be included in the calculations for the standards set for this year and if the state would have to share any responsibility. Marla replied that they would be responsible for their share in Sumner. Bo Callis continued asking if they would be held accountable if they didn't meet the goals or if NM would have to take responsibility. She answered that technically if standards are missed for two years in a row, they could choose to dissolve the workforce area. However, she has made it known that the region is still outperforming other areas but fails to meet the given standards, and something is wrong.

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**Bylaws**

The TNDOL requires the Board to update the bylaws every 2 years. The bylaws included in the materials would be from July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2026, and require a 2/3 vote of all Board members. All committees were given these changes two weeks prior. There was not a lot of substantive change, only compliance. The roles and responsibilities of the board language were changed to reflect the state policy and maintain compliance. The actual roles and responsibilities would not change. The motion to approve was made by Greg Jones. Dan Caldwell seconded the motion. With no further discussion, the motion to accept the bylaws was passed unanimously.

No one requested to make a public comment.

**Adjourn**

With no further discussion, Chairman Zobl reminded the board of their next meeting on November 13<sup>th</sup>. The meeting was adjourned.

