

NORTHWEST INDIANA WORKFORCE BOARD MINUTES
Center of Workforce Innovations
July 17, 2025

Present:

Kevin Comerford, Chris Beebe, George Douglas, Martina Tovar, Liz Negron-Haniford, Adrienne Carroll, Aco Sikoski, Amy Henninfield.

Absent/Proxy: Lori Tubbs, Jim Clarida, Anna Ortega, Audra Peterson, Mikie Stogsdill

Staff:

Lisa Daugherty, Kathy Neary, Becky Fry, Tammy Stump, Jen Grabowski, Ana Davidson

CALL TO ORDER

Kevin Comerford called the meeting to order.

Ms. Daugherty introduced Ana Davidson from the Fiscal Department to the meeting, congratulated Jennifer Grabowski on accepting a new position within CWI with the Business Service Team and informed that Jennifer's duties are in transition. In addition, Becky Fry will have more engagement around official boards, compliance and legislation.

Consent Agenda

Mr. Comerford asked the Board Members to review the items on the consent agenda.

Motion: A motion was made by Aco Sikoski and seconded by George Douglas to accept the consent agenda as presented. All were in favor. **The motion passed.**

1. Board Business

Dashboard/Performance

Ms. Neary presented the June 2025 Board report

Goal #1 Increase skills of current workforce to align with economic development strategies and key industry clusters. Kathy said that we had an inaugural Work BIG Gary graduation with 19 out of the 21 participants; 2 of the 19 hired, 3 interviewing, Carpenter's Union is interested in 4 candidates, Ivy Tech hired one as a Teacher Assistant, and CWI is considering hiring one individual for a role that is already posted.

Regarding the total number of WIOA – Incumbent Workers – Adult enrollments have been a little bit lower than last year, Tammy commented that is because we didn't have as many dislocated workers enrollments as last year.

Goal #2 Improve employer access to qualified workers and awareness of training resources: The first Career Readiness Workshop series had its final session, supporting over 20 youth with multiple workforce and soft skills presentations across 6 sessions.

Howmet Industries, one of the employers that we profiled with Work Keys, with a real focus on reducing their turnover rate has employed 70 individuals since March.

Goal #3 Ensure Youth in NWI are positioned for continued education/learning and workforce success: A total of 2,340 students across 25 high schools, participated in the Governor's Work Ethic Certificate program in 2024-2025 academic year, and 1,585 certificates were awarded.

Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) Programs (14) exceeded performance goals in nearly every category as follows: Graduation rate of 98.72% (90%), connection rate of 97.93% (95%), Participants achieved full-time outcomes: 87.08% (75%), including 63.31% (60%) placed in jobs (military included) and 42.38% (35%) entering further education.

We have doubled the programs this past year and will have 22 programs for follow up next year.

Ms. Daugherty exalted Kathy's leadership with the Work BIG Project in the city of Gary, through specific strategies, working within the community and partners, a new concept is being implemented, and the histories of success are coming. They city has expressed appreciation and gratitude for the current summer youth program that provides real work experience to the participants.

We are also working on alternatives to keep servicing the youth that are part of the Bridging the GAP program, since there will be no more funds in the future.

We're assessing the youth that are in more distressed areas or don't have a plan to help them understand opportunities they can choose and prepare them to be work ready. We re-engaged 22 individuals through Career Coaching.

Ms. Daugherty asked Kathy to please send the narrative of the Bridging the GAP to share with the hub project.

Goal #4- Increase quality job exposure and experience through apprenticeships, work-based learning, employer supported training programs: We secured \$2,971,500.00 in new funding support

Our apprenticeships are expanding: We have 03 apprentices for Wastewater Systems Operators in Hebron, Kingsford Heights, and Rensselaer plus 2 new farmer apprentices.

\$83,897 in READI Work-Based Learning grant supported 11 organizations as hosts for 17 participants.

Goal #5 Assure compliance and efficient operations of a workforce development system: Hosted Indiana Economic Development Corporation as the first workforce board in the state to showcase and educate the team on the integration of the public workforce system into the various levels of projects from youth to adults and beyond. Ms. Daugherty thanked Kevin Comerford and Chris Beebe, who participated in this event.

Mr. Sikoski wanted to recognize Ms. Daugherty for the two meetings that were conducted on the talent pillar through the Forum because of the environment she has created where all of them can actively participate.

Marcelo Marcos Bio/ Nomination

Ms. Daugherty put forward the nomination of Marcelo Marcos to serve on the Northwest Indiana Workforce Board.

Motion: A motion was made by Aco Sikoski and seconded by Martina Tovar to accept the nomination of Marcelo Marcos to become a member of the Board Director. All were in favor. **The motion passed**

PY25 Budget. Ana Davidson, who filled in for Erin Sizemore, presented the budget.

Motion: A motion was made by George Douglas and seconded by Adrienne Carrol to approve the budget for PY25-26. All were in favor. **The motion passed**

Resolution to Accept Funding

Motion: A motion was made by George Douglas and seconded by Aco Sikoski to accept funding for program year 2025-2026. All were in favor. **The motion passed**

Local Monitoring Policy and Occupations in Demand

Becky Fry brought forward 2 policies that are being updated because DWD has updated their policy

Local Monitoring updated policy provides more details about the CWI monitoring process and includes the Fiscal side in addition to the WIOA program.

Occupations in Demand: The updated policy follows the Indiana Top Jobs in-demand with the current verbiage.

Motion: A motion was made by Liz Negron-Haniford and seconded by Adrienne Carrol to approve the Occupations in Demand policy.

Motion: A motion was made by George Douglas and seconded by Liz Negron-Haniford to approve the Local monitoring policy. All were in favor. **The motion passed**

Youth Provider List Approval

Tammy Stump introduced the provider list for WIOA Youth and requested the Board Director approval.

Motion: A motion with corrections was made by Liz Negron-Haniford and seconded by Aco Sikoski: Ivy Tech Community College – All Campus Locations is the correct name rather than Ivy Tech State College – All Campus Locations. All were in favor. Also, we're dropping Portage Adult Ed from the list.

Motion passed as corrected.

Occupational Skills Training and Providers Policy for Youth and Young Adults

Tammy shared the updated policy for Occupational Skills Training and requested the Board Director approval.

Motion: A motion was made by George Douglas seconded by Chris Beebe to approve the policy. All were in favor. **The motion passed.**

2. Old Business

No old business to report on.

3. REPORTS

Youth Employment Council

The overall participation was down slightly from last year, 2,340 compared to 2,580; nevertheless, 1576 students were awarded the regional Work Ethic certificate this year compared with 672 in 2024.

There were 25 high schools including 5 new schools.

Tammy thanked Martina Tovar, who presented at the awards ceremony at 21st Century Charter School and highly recommended it to anyone who has the opportunity to attend in the future.

New goals were set up for next year: Ensure youth in NWI are positioned for continued education/learning and workforce success. Tammy will incorporate additional items into goals and objectives for the group to review at the next meeting.

Partnerships. We were awarded the Growth Opportunity 5 Grant to serve 100 participants. This grant will focus on young adults between 18-24 who are involved in the justice system and live in Gary, East Chicago, Hammond or Michigan City.

President's Report

Ms. Daugherty communicated that despite the amazing outcomes, the JAG Program (Jobs for American Graduates) was eliminated from the State budget. However, we are shifting some funds from WIOA Youth to keep funding this program but going from 22 to 6 classes. Tammy will provide some updates by the month of November, and the selection of the schools will be based on performance and enrollments.

A drastic reduction on Federal Adult funds is anticipated, but we will keep serving Lake County and some operations in Michigan City.

Ms. Daugherty asked the board members if there is anything specific they want to go deeper about the topics discussed at this meeting and these are some ideas that came from the brainstorming session:

More interaction with the team, being informed about Federal and State changes, strengthening relationships with school counselors to promote more participation in the Youth events, how the board can collaborate to address the impact of less funding bringing some strategic solutions, sharing opportunities to better serve our communities; geographical breakdown per counties, where the participants are receiving the services; how can they all look for other opportunities with local development organizations to fill the gap of less funding in our region; know more about the NWI Roundtable and Ignite. Regarding Work BIG: Have more data to be able to take this model and implement it in other areas.

GOOD NEWS

Mr. Comerford shared dates for some upcoming events in the region:

October 28th Skilled Trades Day in Lake County.

October 31st Business & Economic Outlook

November 18th Skilled Trades Day in Porter County.

Mr. Sikoski mentioned that Ivy Tech was the first campus to host the Community Listening Session.

Save the Dates

NWIWB meeting September 18, 2025

ADJOURN

Mr. Comerford adjourned the meeting.

Ana Davidson, Recording Secretary