

NORTHWEST INDIANA WORKFORCE BOARD MINUTES
Microsoft Teams
January 15, 2026

Present:

Lori Tubbs, Chris Beebe, George Douglas, Martina Tovar, Audra Peterson, Liz Negron-Haniford, Adrienne Carroll, Aco Sikoski, Amy Henningfield.

Proxy: Marcelo Marcos, Anna Ortega

Absent: Jim Clarida, Kevin Comerford, Mikie Stogsdill

Staff:

Lisa Daugherty, Erin Sizemore, Denise Wright, Tammy Stump, Dominique Smiley, Eran Armstrong

CALL TO ORDER

Lori Tubbs called the meeting to order.

Consent Agenda

Ms. Tubbs 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

Mrs. Wright presented January 2026 Board report

Goal #1 Increase skills of current workforce to align with economic development strategies and key industry clusters. Denise shared the following: We expanded career-focused education through Adult Literacy's IET program by partnering with Drive Co in Gary to help students pass permit tests and working with Indiana Plan to update construction training and connect graduates to jobs. We also grew Child Development Associate training to help workers build new skills and career pathways in childcare.

Digital Literacy offerings increased with weekly Basic Computer Skills workshops in Michigan City and Gary. Meanwhile, NWI Works partners (CWI, Goodwill, United Way of NWI, and Ivy Tech) continue meeting to develop the Employability Skills Boot Camp, with a pilot planned for February/March 2026.

Goal #2 Improve employer access to qualified workers and awareness of training resources:

WorkOne LaPorte launched a targeted marketing pilot with local employers through Explore LaPorte's "Top Jobs & Top Employers" to boost enrollments. Each month, employers with open positions are featured, and Business Services staff work directly with them to promote job opportunities. Jobseekers are then connected with the WorkOne manager, who explains program benefits like resume help, interview prep, job search support, and direct referrals to employers. This approach has increased youth and adult enrollments, including re-entry referrals.

We also supported the Lake County Economic Alliance by providing labor market data and a community profile to help attract new businesses. In addition, a new digital referral form was created to make it easier for Indiana Plan trainees and Adult Literacy graduates to transition smoothly into next steps, improving coordination between staff and Career Advisors.

Goal #3 Ensure Youth in NWI are positioned for continued education/learning and workforce success: We supported the NWI Food Council in recruiting high school students for the Farmer Apprenticeship program and worked with Hobart Community Schools on their early childhood apprenticeship initiative. The City of La Porte and WorkOne also partnered to prepare young adults ages 18–24 for careers in General Services across city departments, parks, and the civic auditorium, with a kickoff event happening this month.

The Career Coaching Grant wrapped up with over 7,500 coaching sessions from CWI-certified coaches, showing strong results: 100% of schools rated the support extremely well, 2,538 students created post-secondary plans, and 86% reported a positive experience, with all participants recommending READY NWI. Construction & Skilled Trades Days in Lake and Porter Counties also saw increased youth participation, with significant growth in both school involvement and attendance. CWI's Business Services team continues building partnerships with regional schools using READY NWI resources to expand long-term opportunities for students.

Goal #4- Increase quality job exposure and experience through apprenticeships, work-based learning, employer supported training programs: Assisted the NWI Food Council on recruiting high school talent into the Farmer Apprenticeship and supporting Hobart community Schools on their early childhood apprenticeship program. Collaboration with PNW College of Business and Career Services to prepare students for career opportunities. Participated in the Society of Innovators workshop, engaging educators and community leaders from multiple counties to review findings, identify insights, and prioritize next steps for strengthening NW Indiana's youth entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Goal #5 Assure compliance and efficient operations of a workforce development system: Through strong collaboration with partners, Charity Tracker became an important referral tool linking clients to WorkOne services, with 14 organizations participating and 235 referrals made. The NWI Works Board also officially launched as regional thought leaders and anchor partners for a growing network of hubs, with Michigan City and Gary currently in development.

Michigan City Area Schools approved a 40-year lease with NWI Works as the Master Lessee to manage renovations and sub-leases at the Elston campus. NWI Works is also partnering with the City of Gary on an EDA grant application to renovate 529 Washington into a training hub, and on November 25, 2025, the Gary Redevelopment Commission approved the redevelopment agreement. During these discussions, Aco Sikoski highlighted the existing partnership between CWI and Ivy Tech through the Career Coaching Grant, Lisa announced the latest funding award, and Denise shared updates on partnerships with Hobart schools, Purdue Northwest College of Business & Career Services, and READY NWI.

PY24 Final Performance Report

Erin Sizemore provided an update on the final PY 2024 performance measures that included Dislocated Worker, Adult and Youth categories for WIOA funding. The goal was to achieve greater than a 50% in each category and 90% in each program which we did overall. The overall indicators reflected 91%, 90%, 95%, 101%, and 103% for year ending June 30, 2025. The group had no additional questions.

NWIWB POL Individual Training Policy & Guidance & NWIWB Youth Occupational Skills Training Provider Policy Change 4

Becky Fry and Tammy Stump stumped presented together due to the changes being relevant to both youth and adult. Over time, we've seen that some training programs are not meeting the performance standards required by DWD. In some cases, participants complete the training but don't earn their certification or secure employment afterward, which is concerning given the time and funding invested. Since DWD does not review these programs frequently enough, we are proposing language that allows funding for a training program to be suspended if it fails to achieve outcomes for at least 60% of participants. Questions were asked and clarification on requirements specifics were explained by both presenters.

Ms. Tubbs asked for a motion to approve both policies.

Motion: A motion was made by Audra Peterson and seconded by George Douglas to approve NWIWB POL Individual Training Policy & Guidance & NWIWB Youth Occupational Skills Training Provider Policy Change 4. All were in favor. **The motion passed**

2. Old Business

None

3. REPORTS

Youth Employment Sub Meeting

Tammy Stump presented the following: After a short December meeting, a survey was sent to members to determine better meeting times due to recent turnover. Based on the results, meetings were scheduled for Thursday mornings in February, April, and June. The group also reviewed key goals for the Youth Employment Council, including improving communication with youth about the skills and credentials valued by local employers and ensuring employer voices are represented, even for jobs not considered top-demand roles.

Additional goals include continuing support for the Work Ethic program in partnership with READY NWI and expanding employer participation in the Governor's Work Ethic Certificate. The council also aims to grow work-based learning opportunities for youth and young adults, helping them build both job skills and soft skills, while addressing insurance and liability considerations so more employers can host internships and related experiences.

President's Report

For this meeting Mrs. Daugherty did not present. Our lead consultant Shelly Moore, Founder and President of Insight Strategic Concepts presented future plans for the NWI Works Opportunity Hub concepts in both Gary and Michigan City.

GOOD NEWS

None

Save the Dates

NWIWB meeting March 19, 2026

ADJOURN

Ms. Tubbs adjourned the meeting.
Ana Davidson, Recording Secretary