

NORTHWEST INDIANA WORKFORCE BOARD MINUTES

Microsoft Teams

March 19, 2026

Present:

Lori Tubbs, Chris Beebe, George Douglas, Martina Tovar, Audra Peterson, Liz Negrón-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

Chris Beebe called the meeting to order.

Consent Agenda

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

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

1. Board Business

Dashboard/Performance

Ms. Neary shared the Dashboard/Performance report across programs for full PY 24-25 and PY 25-26 YTD. Her report reflected that the data is trending positively, with strong growth in distinct individuals served despite a slight dip in total services. Employer engagement has improved through deeper needs analysis, leading to increased placements and stronger talent development efforts. Enrollment across WIOA and non-WIOA programs is rising, supported by multiple funding streams, though overall numbers are slightly behind prior year but expected to align by fiscal year-end due to reporting timing.

Goal #1 Increase skills of current workforce to align with economic development strategies and key industry clusters. Kathy shared that goal 1 reflects meaningful progress in expanding workforce access and strengthening service delivery. Key accomplishments include the launch of Cohort 3 of the Work B.I.G. program in partnership with the City of Gary, targeting 50 residents with a structured work-and-learn model that integrates barrier assessments and coordinated support services. Additionally, digital access to Adult Literacy programs has been enhanced through QR code implementation across WorkOne offices and school campuses, improving visibility and reducing entry barriers. Early data (2–3 applications per day) is already informing outreach and continuous improvement strategies.

From a metrics standpoint, total services and enrollments are currently below prior year levels, but this is balanced by a continued focus on serving distinct individuals and improving service quality. Employer engagement efforts have evolved through deeper needs analysis, contributing to stronger placements and more targeted talent development. WIOA and non-WIOA enrollments remain active across multiple funding streams, with expectations that reporting timing will bring totals closer in line with prior year performance by fiscal year-end.

Goal #2 Improve employer access to qualified workers and awareness of training resources: Goal 2 demonstrates strong progress in workforce readiness and pipeline development through targeted training and strategic partnerships. The successful completion of the first CDL IET cohort, along with a growing waitlist, signals strong demand and program effectiveness. Investments in READI-funded internships and collaborations with regional partners are expanding career pathways, particularly for youth and underserved populations. Additionally, the development of the Employability Skills

Bootcamp is strengthening foundational workforce skills and aligning training with employer needs.

While current enrollment metrics are slightly below prior year levels, the continued focus on high-impact programs, justice-involved individuals, and career pathway alignment positions the goal for sustained growth and improved long-term outcomes.

Goal #3 Ensure Youth in NWI are positioned for continued education/learning and workforce success: Goal 3 highlights strong progress in expanding youth career pathways and strengthening education-to-workforce alignment through strategic partnerships. Key efforts include securing additional Career Coaching Grant funding, developing a senior pathway with Portage High School, and advancing regional collaboration through INFAME and TechPoint to address talent shortages and promote STEM and manufacturing careers.

Although current youth enrollment and participation metrics are lower than prior years, these initiatives are building a more structured and sustainable pipeline for student engagement, career exploration, and long-term workforce development, positioning the program for future growth and impact.

Goal #4- Increase quality job exposure and experience through apprenticeships, work-based learning, employer supported training programs: Goal 4 demonstrates strong progress in expanding career pathways and securing strategic investments to support workforce development. Key initiatives include launching an arborist apprenticeship pathway with the City of Gary, building partnerships to expand CTE and work-based learning opportunities for students, and advancing re-entry programming through restored Adult Literacy services for justice-involved individuals.

Additionally, the organization has secured over \$2.7 million in new funding through grants, donations, and partnerships, significantly strengthening its capacity to deliver career services, training programs, and regional outreach. These efforts position the goal as a major driver of both program growth and long-term sustainability.

Goal #5 Assure compliance and efficient operations of a workforce development system: Goal 5 reflects progress in strengthening organizational visibility, leadership development, and community impact. Key efforts include collaborating with the City of Gary to highlight the Work B.I.G. initiative through storytelling, enhancing Adult Literacy program visibility via a dedicated webpage, and advancing internal leadership development through assessments and strategic planning tied to the organization's growth plan.

From a service perspective, the majority of participants served fall within priority populations, particularly low-income and basic skills-deficient individuals, demonstrating strong alignment with WIOA priorities. Partnerships within the One-Stop system remain active, with increased referrals to WorkOne Centers, though opportunities exist to expand partner engagement further. Overall, this goal positions the organization to strengthen both internal capacity and external impact.

PY25 Monitoring Report

Becky Fry's presentation provided an overview of the PY25 DWD WIOA Monitoring results, highlighting overall strong compliance with a few targeted areas for improvement. The review covered key programs including WIOA Title I (Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth), Next Level Jobs grants, and Apprenticeship programs.

Overall, the organization performed well with no compliance findings in administrative and financial management and recognition of a noteworthy effort, reflecting strong internal controls. However, a few compliance findings were identified in specific areas, including data integrity, physical accessibility at a WorkOne office, and apprenticeship grant expenditures. Additional concerns were noted around file management and participant assessments, indicating opportunities to strengthen documentation and service processes.

Despite these findings, several programs such as Next Level Jobs showed full compliance, and positive practices (like enhanced monitoring tools) were acknowledged. The presentation emphasized that while compliance is strong overall, focused improvements in operational and reporting processes will further strengthen program effectiveness and accountability.

New Member Nominations

Center of Workforce Innovations President & CEO, Lisa Daugherty shared two nominations from Heather Ennis, President & CEO of the Northwest Indiana Forum, who submitted a formal nomination letter recommending Andrew Francis and Jim Campbell for appointment to the Northwest Indiana Workforce Board.

Andrew Francis brings over 25 years of operational and retail leadership experience as General Manager at Advance Auto. He oversees large-scale teams and operations, with expertise in workforce strategy, talent development, and performance management. A

lifelong Northwest Indiana resident, he offers strong regional insight and a commitment to community engagement and workforce alignment.

Jim Campbell, Vice President of Alliance Fabrication and Manufacturing, contributes more than 30 years of experience in advanced manufacturing and business development. He has led organizational growth, implemented systems to improve productivity, and played a key role in expanding apprenticeship programs. His background includes strong community involvement and a focus on building sustainable manufacturing career pathways.

Together, both nominees bring deep industry expertise, leadership experience, and a strong commitment to strengthening the regional workforce.

Audra Peterson asked for a motion to approve both nominees.

Motion: A motion was made by Audra Peterson and seconded by George Douglas to approve both Andrew Francis and Jim Campbell as new members of the NWIWB. All were in favor. **The motion passed.**

2. Old Business

None

3. New Business

Extension of Service Provider, One-Stop Operator and/or Title I Adult & Dislocated Worker Service Provider for 1 year

The Northwest Indiana Workforce Board was informed that the current contract with the Center of Workforce Innovations (CWI), serving as the service provider, fiscal agent, and staff to the board is approaching its expiration at the end of June 2026. The board had the option to either extend the contract for an additional one-year term, as allowed within the agreement, or initiate a new procurement process. It was clarified that there is no requirement to rebid the contract and that extensions can be approved annually at the board's discretion.

Motion: A motion was made a motion by Lori Tubbs and seconded by George Douglas to extend the contract for one year. All were in favor. **The motion passed.**

4. Reports

Youth Employment Council

Tammy Stump shared that the Youth Employment Council continues to strengthen its role as an official committee supporting organizations that serve youth and young adults, with a focus on employability skills, career connections, and workforce readiness. New members have joined, and the council is working to reestablish its structure, including developing a template and potentially reactivating subcommittees to better align goals and objectives.

Key updates included upcoming engagement opportunities such as the NextGen event at West Central High School and the JAG CDC Conference at Ivy Tech, where members are encouraged to participate as judges. The council is also exploring partnerships with organizations like Ready NWI and leveraging the business services team to enhance employer engagement.

Discussions emphasized improving alignment between youth interests and employer needs, expanding career pathway exposure, and increasing hands-on opportunities such as internships and early work experiences. New program ideas include integrating soft skills, customer service training, and content creation. Overall, the council is focused on building stronger connections between youth, education, and employment pathways to better prepare young people for the workforce.

President's Report

Lisa's report highlighted strong alignment between local workforce initiatives and the U.S. Department of Labor's American Talent Strategy, emphasizing pillars such as industry-driven approaches, worker mobility, integrated systems, and innovation. She noted that the NWI Works Opportunity Hubs closely reflect these national priorities, positioning the region as a model for workforce development.

She provided updates on the Elston site in Michigan City, including a 40-year lease with Michigan City Area Schools, \$1.2 million in city investment, and progress toward launching services alongside renovations focused on ADA compliance and facility upgrades. Federal and regional support continues to grow, with engagement from key leaders.

Lisa also introduced the upcoming Fast Track to Top Jobs Boot Camp, launching with the Work B.I.G. cohort and expanding to Elston in late spring. This collaborative effort (CWI, Ivy

Tech, Goodwill, and others) is designed to scale workforce readiness, improve job placement, and create pathways to higher-wage careers.

Additionally, she emphasized ongoing employer-driven strategies, including deeper needs analysis to inform programming, equipment, and training; particularly around critical skills like customer service. She concluded by previewing continued progress updates and the upcoming Midwest Urban Strategies Conference (June 2–4).

GOOD NEWS

None

Save the Dates

NWIWB meeting May 21, 2026

ADJOURN

Mr. Chris Beebe adjourned the meeting.

Eran Armstrong, Recording Secretary