

NORTHWEST INDIANA WORKFORCE BOARD MINUTES

Microsoft Teams

May 21, 2026

Present:

Lori Tubbs, Chris Beebe, George Douglas, Martina Tovar, Natalie Aponte, Adrienne Carroll, Aco Sikoski, Amy Henningfield, Anna Ortega, Kevin Comerford.

Proxy: Kevin Comerford

Absent: Jim Clarida, Audra Peterson, Marcelo Marcos, and Mikie Stogsdill

Staff:

Lisa Daugherty, Jordan Burke, Denise Wright, Tammy Stump, Dominique Smiley, and Eran Armstrong

CALL TO ORDER

Lori Tubbs called the meeting to order.

Consent Agenda

Lori Tubbs asked the Board Members to review the items on the consent agenda.

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

1. Board Business

Dashboard/Performance

Lisa Daugherty introduced Denise Wright, who assumed responsibility for presenting the Workforce Board Performance Report following Cathy Neary's departure from CWI in early May. Denise shared that one of her objectives is to refresh the Board Performance Report and welcomed future feedback from board members regarding the format and content of future reports.

Goal #1 Increase skills of current workforce to align with economic development strategies and key industry clusters. Denise Wright reported continued progress toward increasing workforce skills and expanding access to career pathways across the region. She highlighted the successful launch of Cohort 3 of the Work B.I.G. initiative in the City of Gary, which generated more than 300 applications for 50 available training positions, demonstrating significant community interest and demand. Denise also shared that CWI has continued expanding its Integrated Education and Training (IET) pathways by offering programs such as Entrepreneurship and Commercial Driver's License (CDL) training to increase access to industry-recognized credentials and reduce barriers for underserved populations. In addition, CWI hosted an Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) Power Up event focused on promoting incumbent worker training and upskilling opportunities. The Board acknowledged the continued success of these initiatives in strengthening workforce readiness and supporting regional economic development.

Goal #2 Improve employer access to qualified workers and awareness of training resources: Staff provided an update on efforts to strengthen employer engagement and expand employment opportunities for participants. Through MAESTRO meetings, Business Services continues identifying individuals who may benefit from On-the-Job Training (OJT) opportunities and connecting employers with available workforce resources. Hiring events remain a priority following completion of both the Fast Track to Top Jobs and Work B.I.G. programs to ensure participants transition directly into employment opportunities. Staff also shared that the planned Ports of Indiana Summer Work and Learn initiative has been temporarily paused because the Ports are not yet prepared to host interns. CWI will continue working with the Ports and other employer partners to develop future opportunities as the program progresses. Board members discussed the possibility of scheduling a future site visit to the Ports once the initiative resumes.

Goal #3 Ensure Youth in NWI are positioned for continued education/learning and workforce success: Staff highlighted several youth initiatives designed to strengthen career pathways and workforce readiness throughout Northwest Indiana. The Michigan City Summer Ambassador Program has been finalized as an eight-week pilot initiative serving approximately 30 participants. The program will place high school students in ambassador

roles throughout the city, including City Hall, the Washington Park Zoo, and community beautification projects, while additional out-of-school youth and adult re-entry participants will assist various city departments with neighborhood improvement efforts. Orientation is scheduled for June, with work expected to begin shortly thereafter. Staff also reported submitting an application for the Midwest Urban Strategies RESTART Grant, which would expand employment opportunities for young adults ages 18–24 through skilled trades, advanced manufacturing, and registered apprenticeships, with funding decisions expected in July. Additionally, Work Ethic Certification data was successfully collected and submitted for 21 Northwest Indiana schools, and staff continued collaborating with the Lake Central Career and Technical Education Advisory Board to strengthen partnerships between education, employers, and workforce development programs. The Board recognized these initiatives as important investments in preparing youth for long-term educational and career success.

Goal #4- Increase quality job exposure and experience through apprenticeships, work-based learning, employer supported training programs: Staff reviewed several initiatives focused on expanding work-based learning and employer-supported training opportunities. CWI partnered with Carroll White REMC, in collaboration with another regional workforce board, to support four-year apprenticeship opportunities for critical utility positions. Staff also continues partnering with the City of Gary to deliver industrial hygiene "Train-the-Trainer" programming and HAZWOPER training to municipal employees as part of ongoing workforce development efforts. Additionally, Adult Education staff attended the Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE) Conference to enhance instructional practices and improve career training outcomes for adult learners. Denise also reported continued success in securing grant funding and external investments to expand workforce programming throughout the region. The Board commended staff for leveraging strategic partnerships and funding opportunities to strengthen workforce initiatives.

Goal #5 Assure compliance and efficient operations of a workforce development system: Staff concluded the report by providing updates related to organizational compliance, strategic planning, and operational effectiveness. CWI continues strengthening data security and privacy practices to safeguard participant information and ensure compliance with applicable standards. Staff also participated in several county and municipal community meetings regarding proposed data center developments, providing labor market information to assist local officials with informed economic development planning. Denise reported that CWI has partnered with an Indiana University Northwest economist to develop economic impact models measuring the return on investment for the Gary Hub, with similar analysis currently underway for the Michigan City Hub. Finally, she shared that the organization's Growth Plan has been finalized by Executive Leadership and

has now been introduced to Core Leadership for implementation. The Board acknowledged the importance of these initiatives in supporting organizational accountability, long-term sustainability, and strategic growth.

2. Old Business

None

3. New Business

Youth Employment Council

The Board discussed the need to identify a new Board member to serve as Chair of the Youth Employment Council. Members were encouraged to consider the leadership opportunity, noting that the Council meets every other month, primarily in a virtual format, and remains focused on helping both in-school and out-of-school youth successfully transition into employment through career pathways that align with regional workforce needs. Council members shared that a continued priority is expanding work-based learning opportunities by increasing employer engagement and strengthening partnerships with schools. Discussion emphasized that transportation remains one of the greatest barriers preventing youth from participating in work experiences. Members explored strategies to address this challenge, including identifying employers within close proximity to schools, leveraging natural support systems such as parents, teachers, and school staff, and encouraging employers to create meaningful opportunities for students during the summer and school breaks. The importance of Work Ethic Certification and employer collaboration was also discussed as a way to better prepare youth for long-term workforce success. The Board expressed its appreciation to Martina Tovar for her years of dedicated service and advocacy on behalf of Northwest Indiana's youth. Following discussion, Martina Tovar and Aco Sikoski agreed to serve as Co-Chairs of the Youth Employment Council, allowing leadership responsibilities to be shared while continuing the Council's ongoing initiatives.

4. Reports

President's Report

Lisa Daugherty opened the President's Report by sharing CWI's new promotional video, which highlights the organization's collaborative workforce model through CWI Works and the regional workforce hubs. She explained that the video was recently unveiled during a

Northwest Indiana Times leadership event and is being used to increase awareness of CWI's integrated approach to workforce development. The presentation emphasized that while thousands of jobs are available throughout the region, employers continue to face significant talent shortages. CWI's strategy is to address this challenge by creating a connected workforce system that prepares job seekers through employer-driven training, work readiness, supportive services, and direct connections to employment opportunities.

Lisa reported that early outreach efforts have already generated strong interest from both employers and job seekers. She noted that employers, including Hitachi, have reached out to explore partnership opportunities, and interest in the Fast Track to Top Jobs boot camps continues to grow. To support these efforts, staff developed a two-sided informational handout that explains the CWI Works model and will be used as an outreach tool while additional marketing materials are finalized.

She also provided an update on the continued development of the Elston Workforce Hub, announcing that new tenants are beginning to move into the facility. CWI's Executive Leadership Team will also relocate to Elston, creating a centralized space where workforce integration decisions can be made collaboratively and more efficiently. Lisa emphasized that this approach will allow leadership to make timely decisions throughout the day rather than waiting for scheduled meetings, positioning the organization to scale workforce initiatives more effectively.

Lisa recognized Goodwill Industries, particularly Debbie Coble, for being an outstanding partner in advancing CWI initiatives, including Work B.I.G. She also shared that additional workforce partners have become increasingly engaged as collaborative efforts continue to expand. Looking ahead, she announced that CWI will host the Midwest Urban Strategies Convening during the week of June 2, bringing regional partners together to share best practices and strengthen workforce collaboration.

Additional updates included the continued expansion of the Fast Track to Top Jobs boot camp. Following a successful pilot, a second cohort will launch at Elston with participants selected from WIOA caseloads. Staff are also working to expand the pool of instructors in anticipation of increased demand and the ability to operate multiple cohorts throughout the region.

Finally, Lisa reported on several strategic growth initiatives. She announced that CWI recently submitted an \$11 million funding request through the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) to renovate a workforce training facility in Gary. The proposed project would create additional classroom and laboratory space to support key regional career pathways. Supporting engineering studies and an economic impact analysis have been

completed, and preliminary feedback from the EDA has been highly encouraging. Lisa concluded by expressing optimism about the organization's continued momentum and its ability to expand workforce development opportunities across Northwest Indiana.

GOOD NEWS

None

Save the Dates

NWIIWB Meeting July 16, 2026

ADJOURN

Ms. Lori Tubbs adjourned the meeting.

Eran Armstrong, Recording Secretary