

West Central Arkansas Workforce Development Board

Lisa Greene, Chair

The meeting of the West Central Arkansas Workforce Development Board meeting was held on Thursday, June 12, 2025, at National Park College in Hot Springs and via TEAMS.

Members Present In-Person: Darla Crump, Kelli Embry, Herman Grayer, Lisa Greene, Judge Hart, Gary Troutman, and Cindy White-Hamilton

Members Present via TEAMS: Brent Black, Kimberly Darling, Ben Freeny, Mason Robinson, Venorris Webb-Delesline, and Eugene Wilson

Members Absent: Greg Black, Karen Breashears, Pati Brown, Allan George, Cynthia Cleghorn, Jessica Gunn, Tim Hall, Neal Harrington, Jeremy Hughes, and Tammy Passafiume

Staff: Ian Bishop, Martha Boyer (Online), Angela Chupp, Margaret Dearmon, Cora Easterday, Erica Parker, Carrie Pratchard, and Dwayne Pratt

Guests: Jean Campo, Andy Hightower, Josh Holiman, Sarah Perry, Thomas Pittman, Bill Ritter, and Lori Strumpf

Chair Comments:

Lisa Greene opened the meeting at 10:00 A.M. She asked Cora to give the invocation. Lisa greeted the attendees and invited online participants to sign in. She moved on to the first agenda item, which was the approval of the minutes from the previous meeting.

Approval of Minutes:

Lisa Greene asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the April 10, 2025, meeting. Darla Crump made a **motion** to approve the minutes, which was seconded by Jimmy Hart. The motion carried unanimously.

Conflict of Interest

She said it is time to sign the annual Conflict of Interest Form. The form is in the chat. She asked the members online to complete the form and send it to Margaret.

Approval of Excused Absences:

Lisa Greene said that the following members have requested to be excused from the meeting today: Karen Breashears, Tim Hall, Tammy Passafiume, Jeremy Hughes, Allan George, Cynthia Gleghorn and Neal Harrington. A **motion** by Kelli Embry and seconded by Jimmy Hart to approve the requested excused absences. The motion carried unanimously.

Review of PY 24 Budgets:

Lisa Greene turned the floor over to Carrie Pratchard, Finance Manager, who provided an overview of financial activities and funding balances for the current program year. Carrie reported that we have expended our PY23 funds, which had to be spent by June 30, 2025. She reported that the balance on the Outreach grant shows no expenditure. Angela Chupp came on board and she worked to get outreach materials purchased. The invoices did not come in before the end of the reporting period of April 30. The invoices add up to \$13,500 of the \$15,000

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budget for this grant. Carried asked if there were any questions on the budget, and there were none.

Board Staff Report:

Cora reported that West Central's Local Plan for 2024-2027 has been officially approved by AWC on April 30, 2025. She thanked Margaret for her leadership and dedication throughout that process and was instrumental in getting us across the finish line.

Cora reported on the Executive Order that the President issued on April 23 titled Preparing Americans for High Skilled Paying Jobs of the future. The order aligns closely with the goals of WIOA by calling for modernization of workforce development programs to better meet current labor market demands. It emphasizes expanding registered apprenticeships, promoting industry, industry recognized credentials and streamlining efforts across federal agencies. We always focus on in demand driven training and career pathways. Executive order also promotes transparency and outcomes and increases access to alternative pathways to higher wage careers that align with WIOA. His missions are to serve job seekers of all backgrounds, and particularly those facing barriers into employment. They are going to take 90 days to review the programs and within 120 days provide some plans either to consolidate, eliminate or, you know, rebrand those particular workforce programs. We are seeing some of that already taking place.

Cora talked about Career Readiness Certificate (CRC) in our ten county West Central region. She reported there are eight communities that have made applications to become a work ready community. The Work Ready Initiative helps counties demonstrate that they have work ready or job ready workforce by promoting the national CRC, which measures the foundational workplace skills through act work keys assessments. Discussion followed.

Cora gave a brief report of the Monitoring Report from Arkansas Workforce Connections. She talked about the independent external monitoring that is currently being conducted. Cora turned the floor over to Sarah Perry who gave a brief update on the monitoring they are providing. There's two parts, so the state does have a program monitoring tool, which section A covers the programmatic monitoring and Section B covers procurement. So, we're focusing on using the state tool section B to look at procurement and also fiscal. And then in addition to that, there is a programmatic piece here which is participants. So, one of our approaches through the monitoring report that we provide to the team will be to say here's what we've observed. Now let's think about how those 2021 observations are relevant today and how we can just provide some strategic suggestions, opportunities and support there. So that's where we are. We do have a draft version of the monitoring report ready to go and we'll be meeting with the team. And that next Monday, June 16, 2025, to take a look at that. Make any additional document requests that will support us to finalize the report, and we anticipate completing that report and submitting the final version by the end of this month. So June 30, 2025 and again it's our role to provide support through that external monitoring. She asked if there were any questions and there were none.

Committee Reports:

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Lisa reported that the Planning/Performance/Finance Committee and Executive Committee were scheduled to meet on May 21, 2025. The Planning/Performance/Finance Committee did not have a quorum, so we had a joint committee meeting, with the Executive Committee voting on three different items. Lisa said she would be going over them individually since we have to vote on them separately.

Lisa said the first thing that we discussed was MOU and IFA. So right now, we have one MOU/IFA that covers the entire planning district and what we want to do is break that up and have each of the centers have their own and we've got confirmation through the state that we can do that. The reason being, if we need to change one thing because of one center, we don't want to have to redo the entire thing and have to get all the signatures done. We can just redo that MOU/IFA for that center. Lisa asked for a motion to ratify the committee's approval to have three separate MOU/IFAs. Gary Troutman made a motion to ratify the committee approval to have three separate MOU/IFAs, seconded by Cindy White-Hamilton. Motion carried unanimously.

Lisa said the second item that the Executive approved was the pending ETPL applications. The application for Nirvana Massage Academy. This has been tabled until the August meeting to meet the requirements set forth by the Board that the company be in business at least a year. The second application was for River Valley School of Massage. After discussion, the committee voted to approve this program. Lisa asked if there were any questions, Discussion followed. Lisa asked for a motion to ratify the board's approval of the River Valley School of Massage. Darla Crump made a motion to ratify the committee approval of River Valley School of Massage, seconded by Jimmy Harat. Motion carried unanimously.

Lisa asked Andy and Lori to excuse themselves while we discussed the next agenda item. Lisa stated that the committee voted to extend Hightower Initiative LLC's contract to the end of October. The State has given us the okay to extend the contract to allow the Board to go out on RFP for a new One Stop Operator. Cora mentioned that Western Arkansas Planning & Development District will be working with the One Stop Systems Oversight Committee to do the procurement for One Stop Operator RFP. Discussion followed. Lisa asked for a motion to ratify the committee's vote to extend the contract through October 2025. Darla Crump made the motion to ratify the committee's recommendation to extend the contract and allow Carrie and Cora to negotiate the budget. Jimmy Hart seconded to ratify the committee's approval of extending the contract and budget negotiation. Motion carried unanimously. Lisa said the second part this is to ratify the committee's recommendation to allow the Western Arkansas Planning & Development District to do the RFP for One Stop Operator, which will allow an arms-length from the procurement of RFP. It will also allow the West Central Planning & Development District to submit RFP for One Stop Operator. Lisa asked for a motion to ratify the approval of the Western Arkansas Planning & Development District to do the procurement for One Stop Operator. Kelli Embry motioned, seconded by Jimmy Hart to ratify the committee's approval of Western Arkansas Planning & Development District procurement of One Stop Operator RFP. Motion carried unanimously.

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Informational:

One Stop Operator's Report:

Andy Hightower began stating that there has been a lot of activity over the past two months ongoing. Andy talked about the strategic goals that were set in June 2024 and where they are meeting those goals. He talked about the MOU/IFAs. He said they have most all of the data together. Now that the board has approved to do three separate MOUS, IFAs and those drafts are now available to be finalized. We will need to get the Board and CEO representative's signatures and send them to the State to get their signatures. Once that is done it will go out to the partners to get their signatures.

Andy talked about the change of the roles in the Workforce Centers. Cindy and her colleague Neil, who had been the center managers of those centers, were given a different focus to be outreach coordinator for those centers without really specifying who was responsible in their place. Andy said what they did as the One stop Operator, they are the coordinator of partner services, and we put together a task list, which is included in the packet. Cindy and Neil both helped us identify all the things that they do as a part of their day-to-day operation that was really outside of their role now and needed to be filled, that's a lot of important things about who controls keys, about what happens when there is an angry customer out front about who makes sure that in a recent example, someone is contacted when an electric pole is falling on top of the center. It means that those fall instead of to an immediate center manager. It falls on the manager of each program partner and the one stop operator to coordinate that communication in response which is on the task list. We got the point of contact for each partner for these things. They will be writing a Standard Operating Procedures so that everyone knows the communications pattern and the response pattern to each thing, but we don't want those people being contacted by several people. We don't want a disorganized approach to it. We want to make sure that if someone has identified a problem, that it is addressed and we communicate that it's being addressed so that we all are a team together in these one stop centers.

Customer traffic reports are a part of that transition. I've had to create a new method of collecting customer traffic in the centers. I do not have May's numbers yet, but what we've seen January, February, March, April is a cyclical pattern that we see every year, January is usually a very high traffic month and it slowly decreases to February to March to April before increasing again in May and July and June. Andy asked if there were any questions. Discussion followed.

New Business:

WIOA Partner Reports:

Title II – Adult Education: Kimberly Darling provided the following update for Adult Education:

Program Overview: This month we have six of our seven programs reporting.

Kim went over information from each of the Adult Education Centers serving the West Central area.

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UACCM Adult Education serves Conway and Perry counties here in the West Central region. Two points of interest that I would like to note for us during the spring administrators' meeting for Adult Education. Our program was noted for the fact that we served more SNAP E&T clients than any other program during program year 23-24. I do want to make a note on that for our four-county service area for adult education, Faulkner County, which is going to be in that Central Arkansas Workforce Development Board region and of course that is where the bulk of our SNAP E&T participants are located. We had 132 SNAP E&Ts participants. I'm thrilled because our SNAP E&T program is operated by one full time employee. So big kudos to Vicky Shadel and of course she does provide services throughout the four-county area. She was with us here this morning in Conway County and I think later this week maybe she'll be meeting with students in Perry County. We are on target to hopefully in this program year on June 30th with 85 GED graduates.

ASUTR Adult Education - serves Clark and Hot Springs counties. A couple of special notes on their program as well. They're on target to have 65 students earn a GED credential this program year. So very impressive rating. They have a really interesting program that I'm eager to learn about this summer. They are doing in collaboration with the ASU Three Rivers Workforce Services Department. A bridge program. to prepare students for enrollment in the college's CNA program. So those bridge programs are always highly successful, so I look forward to sharing feedback on their accomplishments at our next meeting.

ATU Adult Education - That program serves the Johnson County area in our West Central region. A couple of things I would like to note about their program. They have reported that they are looking at receiving approval for two new integrated education and training programs - Office Support Staff program and an Emergency Medical Response Program office support hopefully will be on target to launch in September and Emergency Medical Responder in July. So we are all eager to see success because we like to emulate the successes of each other. Regina Olsen from Atu Ozark, who is due to retire at the end of this program. Also noted that this year for their program, they have had enrollment increases as well as an increase in IET credentials or industry recognized credentials for their students.

National Park College, which serves Garland County, reported that they had 114 GED graduates this year. It looks like they're going to end this year. But in addition to those 114 GED completions. They have had students earn a total of 106 allied health certifications, so before our next meeting, I will try to talk with Lisa to get a breakdown on the variety of those certifications and you all she did note that for their students that have completed the nursing assisting training program to become certified nursing assistants that their pass rate is 97%. On that examination process, which needs to be noted, that it is definitely a highlight.

UA Rich Mountain Community College, Mount Ida Adult Education campus - Julie Gordon has noted that they hope to start a phlebotomy program this fall, and that they have just started a CNA program earlier this month. I'm always eager to highlight success stories out of Montgomery County.

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Russellville Adult Education - which serves Pope and Yell counties. On May 22, 2025, they conducted their ribbon cutting for their new adult education facility, which is some of you that are familiar with the Russellville area may know the program has moved from what I would call the old Gardner campus over to the former administration building. This facility is going to be a tremendous benefit not only to the community, but for their students. They have exceptional facilities now and they are also interested you all in launching this fall, a new integrated education and training program which we hope to be able to refer some of our students to them for a medical coding and billing program. So those are some highlights from your local adult education programs statewide. We are all racing against the clock to reach Jun 30th with hopefully stellar numbers for GED attainments.

Title III – Wagner-Peyser: Cindy White- Hamilton provided the following update for Wagner-Peyser:

We're part of the workforce center in our area. We have a 10-county region that we serve between three offices. We have been working on getting some more career fairs and seeing trying to get some more people into our office again by opening it up for interviews. So, at this moment, for the month of June, we knew that walking into it, we already had one career fair set. For one of the offices and we also had one employer interview day set for one of the offices.

Cindy reported that, effective March 31, 2025, the Arkansas Workforce Connections (AWC) restructured the roles of Local Office Managers (LOMs) statewide. These positions are now designated as Regional Outreach Managers (ROMs), with a new focus on external engagement rather than internal office management.

As part of this shift, ROMs will no longer enter staff-assisted job orders or manage day-to-day office operations. Instead, their responsibilities will center on coordinating and participating in outreach activities such as job fairs, hiring events, educational programs, and partnerships with nonprofit organizations with direct emphasis on client outreach, engagement, and awareness. She shared that Employment Services staff will continue to provide resume assistance and job search support at the local office level. However, overall service delivery will increasingly rely on collaboration with WIOA partners and the One-Stop Operator to ensure continuity and coverage. Further guidance is expected from the state, and additional meetings will be scheduled to finalize service strategies in partnership with boards and operators. She noted that coverage responsibilities have been divided regionally. Neil Golden will oversee counties in the northern portion of the service area, while Cindy will serve Clark, Garland, Hot Spring, Montgomery, and Pike Counties. She also mentioned she will be covering the Mena area in Polk County. While Polk County is outside of our WIOA service area, she shared this information as an FYI, given her ongoing involvement in that region.

Although not currently tasked with direct employer engagement, she stated that this may change depending on how AWC finalizes the structure and expectations for the new roles. On upcoming initiatives, she reported that the Be Pro Be Proud Draft Day event was successfully held in Russellville and is scheduled to take place in Hot Springs this April.

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We have been working with the board of restructuring how when you come into the Hot Springs Office that we are trying to restructure it. When we moved into the facility, one of our partners was already there and they did not understand how many people that Arkansas Workforce Center actually sees on a daily basis or a weekly basis or a monthly basis. They were overwhelmed by how many people would walk through their facility on a daily basis, then just to get up through the elevator to get up onto the third floor do their unemployment or help them with job seeking and different things like that. Cindy stated when the Governor came and did our visit, that one of the comments that she made was that you had to kind of go all over the place to be able to get services and in our building and she didn't like that. So, what we're doing right now at the moment is trying to meet with all of our partners and the and the director of WIOA and the board and kind of get together on How can we do a better job with restructuring with the building that we have? To see if we can get everybody that does works with people on that bottom floor when you enter and then the people that maybe don't have to see everybody or and see people can get moved up into the other floors where you can get the services and be seen right away on the floor where you're being, we're trying to work on that. We've got some meetings coming up. I think this afternoon we've got just a little meeting and then we're gonna get back together with our partners again tomorrow and bring in plans, see where we can go from there, and then propose a plan on whatever we can do. Discussion followed.

Title IV – Vocational Rehabilitation: Cynthia Gleghorn was not in attendance, but her report was in the packet for the board to review.

New Business:

Changes to By-Laws: Lisa turned the floor over to Margaret to talk about the changes in the By-Laws. Margaret reported that the Information under Nomination of the Board has been revamped to go along with the CEO Guidebook. The individual steps have been elaborated on to state that the CEO Membership Form will be signed by the CEO of the county that the membership comes from. If it is outside our area, Judge Hart will continue to sign for those. The second thing that was changed was Section X part D. The Executive Committee voted in their August 27, 2024, meeting to do away with the excused absence and just have it to say - In the event that a member shall fail to attend three (3) successive regular meetings during the program year, shall be subject to removal from the board. This change was requested because we want a board that all members are coming and being a part of what the board is doing. If they don't show up for any of the meetings, what good are they doing by being on the board other than just a placeholder saying we have a full board. Lisa asked for a motion to approve the changes to the By-Laws. Cindy White-Hamilton motioned, seconded by Jimmy Hart. Motion carried unanimously.

Cora said that there was one item not on the agenda and that is the Ad Hoc Committee Report. She turned the floor over to Darla to talk about this. Darla stated that Cindy, Venorris and herself were elected to the Ad Hoc Committee to choose Officers for PY-25. She reported that they reached out to the current officers by email on April 29, 2025, and they agreed to continue to serve in their roles. Cora opened the floor for any other nominations for officers and there

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were none. Cora asked for a motion to approve the current officer for another term. Darla Crump motioned, seconded by Jimmy Hart. Motion carried unanimously.

Cora read the success story on Robin Cung who graduated in May of 2025 from Arkansas Tech University with the Bachelor of Science and Electrical Engineering. In just nine days later, he began his professional career with Harvest Hill Beverage Company as an electrical engineer with a starting wage of \$82,000.

Open Floor for Discussion

Lisa opened the floor for Workforce Development in Local Communities. Gary gave a report on Hot Springs Draft Day with 1200 students. He said that they are down from 20 schools to 18. It wasn't really a big loss on that because there's a lot of home schools and some tiny schools there, but we're really thrilled about we had 61 companies represented there so. There are 10 others in the state, and I think we were the biggest as far as companies and we had to be in the top three as far as students. I do want to thank Amanda Porter without her; we just couldn't do it. She's a one person, force of nature, and we'll just look to improve again next year. He congratulated Clark County on becoming lit as well as Texarkana. Gary said that they've really put a priority on the whole southwest corner because you got other parts of the stat Millard County that's just killing it. Discussion followed concerning the ACT Work Ready.

Lisa asked if there were any more workforce development initiatives to bring before the board and there were none.

Adjournment:

Lisa Greene adjourned the meeting at 12:26 P.M.



Lisa Greene, Chair

8-14-2025

Date