

Career Education and Workforce Development Board Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: April 8, 2025

Time: 10:00 AM

Location: Department of Commerce, with some attending via Zoom

Board Members in attendance:

Voting Members

Danny Games, Vice-Chairman
Jeff Marcussen
Kris Carson
Len Pitcock
Butch Rice

Ex-Officio Members

Stephanie Isaacs
Dr. Charisse Childers
Kyla Waters (proxy for Dr. Collin Callaway)
Tina Moore (proxy for Dr. Ken Warden)
Tracy Dowell
Cody Waits
Mike Rogers

Members absent:

Voting Members

Kevin Tipton, Chairman
Cat Hamilton

Ex-Officio Members

Hugh McDonald
Jacob Olivia
Clint O'Neal
Dr. Mike Hernandez
Esperanza Crane
Kristi Putnum
Ross White

Guests

Call to Order

Vice-Chairman Danny Games called the April 2025 meeting to order at 10:10 AM.

Approval of Minutes

Vice Chairman Games asked members to review the minutes from the previous meeting. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Len Pitcock and seconded by Kris Carson. The motion was approved unanimously.

Agenda Item 2 - Overview of Workforce Connections

Cody Waits provided an overview of the realignment of divisions under Workforce Connections. This realignment will include the Existing Business Resource Team, Arkansas Manufacturing Solutions (AMS), Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS), and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs.

He noted that in Adult Education, Arkansas currently ranks second nationally in GED attainment. ARS is the largest division within Workforce Connections and serves individuals

throughout the state. Workforce Connections will also provide centralized points of contact for engagement in economic development projects.

In response to a question from Danny regarding the LAUNCH program rollout, Cody stated that the Training and Support Services (TSS) division is overseeing the implementation. Mike Rogers added that LAUNCH is an initiative of the Governor's Workforce Cabinet.

Tina Moore reported on her attendance at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce meeting, where Arkansas's state government realignment was highlighted as a best practices model.

Agenda Item 3 - Legislative Update

Director Isaacs provided an overview and update on recent legislative activity. Several bills were discussed among board members.

- Senate Bill 390 This bill is expected to be presented on the House floor for a vote today. If passed and signed into law, it will authorize Arkansas to execute documents necessary for the approval of apprenticeships. Upon enactment, the state will begin the process to apply for recognition as a State Apprenticeship Agency (SAA).
- Senate Bill 560: Sponsored by Senator English and Representative Tosh, this bill proposes adjustments to the administration of assessments on the unemployment rate. With the unemployment fund currently in a strong financial position, the bill would allow for administrative savings to be redirected to workforce development initiatives, potentially increasing funding without raising costs to employers.
- Northwest Technical Institute (NWTI): Ongoing discussions have focused on NWTI's role as a leading institution in workforce training. Mike Rogers has played a key role in efforts to identify funding opportunities to support NWTI.
- OSD Transfer Legislation: A clean-up bill was filed on April 7 to officially transfer the Office of Skills Development (OSD) to Workforce Connections.
- Access Bill: Tina Moore provided an overview of the Access Bill, part of the Governor's legislative package. The bill has been signed into law, and a rule promulgation process will follow the conclusion of the legislative session.

The board engaged in discussion regarding the various legislative items presented.

Agenda Item 4- OSD Annual Report To Date

Director Isaacs provided an overview of the Office of Skills Development, including the programs and initiatives the office administers.

During the discussion, Len Pitcock inquired about the range of grant funding available. Director Isaacs noted that while typical awards range from \$30,000 to \$50,000, grants can be awarded up to \$250,000. OSD reimburses up to 75% of eligible expenditures.

OSD plans to propose an increase in professional development funding, citing that there is capacity to expand services in this area. These training programs are often highly specialized and tailored to individual company needs. A formal proposal will be presented to the board at the June board meeting.

Director Isaacs highlighted the Grow Our Own training program as the most dynamic and rapidly growing initiative. The program allows for a quarterly maximum of \$250,000 in awards, totaling up to \$1,000,000 annually. It has seen the most significant growth among

OSD's offerings, with a sharp rise in requests beginning in 2023. As of 2025, the agency has received 603 requests, with 583 occurring in 2025 alone, and has awarded \$577,216 to date this year.

Additionally, OSD has applied for a federal SAEF3 Apprenticeship Grant, with award announcements anticipated in June.

Old Business

None

New Business

Director Isaacs informed the Board that nominations and elections for a new Board Chair and Vice Chair will take place at the June meeting.

Director Isaacs also invited Board members to consider opportunities where OSD or another organization represented on the Board might engage in outreach or help establish valuable connections to support workforce development efforts.

Adjournment

With no further business to discuss, Vice Chairman Games called for a motion to adjourn. A motion was made by Len Pitcock and seconded by Kris Carson. The motion carried, and the meeting adjourned at 11:29 a.m.

Next Meeting: June 10, 2025, 10:00 AM, in the Rockefeller Conference Room of the Commerce building.