

**STARK TUSCARAWAS WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD**

**WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD MEETING**

**January 7, 2026 at 12:00 p.m.**

**Zoom**

<b>PRESENT</b>	<b>ABSENT</b>	<b>STWDB STAFF</b>
Marla Akridge	Andrew Fowler	JoAnn Breedlove
Rick Baxter	Para Jones	Armon Cook
Stephen Carson	Marc Manheim	Rebecca Harris
Damus Cole	Joel McKenzie	Maddy Miller
Lauren Dalesandro	Joe Sekely	Aleisha Stout
Lisa Gould	Darren Van Winkle	Scott Varian
Alison Kerns	Patrice Yacko	
Mike Lauber		
Susan Lenigar		
Stephanie Maier	<b>Guests</b>	
Rick Moss	Mary Kate Hastings (Senator Husted's office)	<b>JOB CENTER OPERATOR FISCAL AGENT DESIGNATED PROVIDER</b>
Steve Rippeth	Dolores Little (ODJFS)	Chuck Byrd
Scott Robinson	Allie New (Representative Rulli's office)	Freda Martin
Tracy Sabo	Nick Ulan (Senator Husted's office)	Amy Miller
Sarah Spies	Nick Wallace -ODJFS-presenter	Dan Sipe
		Renee Steurer
		Lori Yager

**BUSINESS MINUTES**

**CALL TO ORDER**

**Scott Robinson**, Chair called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m.

**Introductions of Guests & New Board Members Present**..... *Scott Robinson, Chair*

- Lauren Dalesandro, Cleveland Clinic Union Hospital (New Board Member-Present)
- Scott Varian, Workforce Solutions Manager (New STWDB Staff Member)
- Mary Kate Hastings, Senator John Husted's Regional Deputy Director-Northeast Region
- Nick Ulan, Senator John Husted's Regional Deputy Director-Southeast Region
- Allie New, Field Representative, Congressman Rulli's office

**Presenter Introduction**..... *Scott Robinson, Chair*

Nicholas Wallace, Bureau Chief, Labor Market Information, Ohio Department of Job & Family Services

**Nick Wallace**, Bureau Chief of Labor Market Information at ODJFS, presented a profile of Ohio’s unemployed in 2024. He reported that unemployment spiked in 2020, then declined, with a recent slow uptick, and that Ohio’s rate closely tracks the U.S.; as of November 2025, Ohio’s unemployment rate was 4.5%, slightly below the national rate. Most unemployed Ohioans are ages 25–54, racial and ethnic minorities are over-represented relative to their population share, and unemployment declines as education levels increase. Unemployment is concentrated in construction, transportation/utilities, and leisure and hospitality, and Stark and Tuscarawas counties’ 2024 unemployment rates were near the national average. Because standard survey data cannot reliably provide county-level detail, Wallace used American Community Survey microdata to approximate a combined local area (Stark, Tuscarawas, Carroll, and Harrison), finding that locally the unemployed are slightly more likely to be female, more heavily prime-age, and more likely to be white than the statewide profile. He emphasized tracking discouraged workers—individuals who want and are available to work, have looked for a job in the past 12 months, but are not currently looking and therefore are not counted in the official unemployment rate—whose numbers have risen again in 2024, and noted that upcoming five-year ACS data will allow more precise local analysis. He concluded by describing tools such as a monthly county-level unemployment claims report and the County Data Hub and offered his team’s support for customized labor market information.

**Updates from Senator Husted’s office**

**Mary Kate Hastings** from Senator Husted’s office, reported on the newly introduced Upward Mobility Act, a federal bill aimed at addressing the “benefits cliff,” in which individuals may decline promotions, raises, or overtime for fear of losing public benefits. The Act would establish a five-year pilot in five states, allowing participating states to use savings generated by the program to design and implement their own preventative benefits-cliff strategies. Hastings noted that Ohio is well positioned to be selected due to prior county-level pilots initiated under Governor DeWine and then-Lt. Governor Husted. She also highlighted the senator’s broader workforce efforts, including the Workforce Families Tax Cuts Act, the Workforce Pell Program (expanding Pell eligibility to workforce training and certifications), and initiatives to strengthen career and technical education. She invited attendees to contact her or colleague Nick Ulan with questions, concerns, or feedback and expressed willingness to engage locally and learn more about regional workforce programs.

**Committee Chair Updates.....** *Scott Robinson, Chair*

**Youth Committee Chair Update:**

Effective January 1, 2026, the Board’s Youth Committee leadership changed. The Executive Committee accepted the resignation of Alison Kerns as Youth Committee Chair at its December 2025 meeting. Kerns served as Chair since 2019 and provided dedicated leadership, contributing significantly to the advancement of youth workforce programming and services.

The Executive Committee also accepted the recommendation for Susan Lenigar to assume the role of Youth Committee Chair effective January 1, 2026. Lenigar serves as Deputy Director of Human Services with Stark County Job & Family Services and has been a long-standing member of the Youth Committee. She brings extensive knowledge of youth workforce programming, including Ohio’s Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program (CCMEP), and has demonstrated a strong commitment to youth initiatives.

**Board Action Items**..... *Scott Robinson, Chair*

**November 3, 2025, Meeting Minutes**.....*Scott Robinson, Chair (Attachment B)*

**MOTION: RIPPETH MOVED FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE NOVEMBER 3, 2025, MEETING MINUTES. GOULD SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

**Treasurer /Financial Report** .....*Dan Sipe, Fiscal Agent Representative (Attachment C)*

Sipe reported in the first section outlined **Formula Funds**, which are allocated based on regional characteristics such as unemployment rates and population, among other factors. All categories of PY25 funds are under 25%. Approximately 42% through the year and are on pace to have carryover.

Under **Other Funds**, the RESEA grants were reviewed. There were two PY24 allocations received, which are 72% spent.

The **Navigator Grant** and Special grants listed at the bottom of the first section are fully spent.

In the final section, the **FY25 TANF allocation for CCMEP** was discussed. The majority of the expenditures occurred over the summer due to youth work experience programming. The grant ended September 30, 2025, and was fully spent at the end of December 2025.

The **One-Stop MOU budget** is currently 42% expended, which aligns with expectations for the first 5 months of the 12-month budget period.

**MOTION: LAUBER MOVED TO ACCEPT THE NOVEMBER 30, 2025, TREASURER’S REPORT AS PRESENTED. CARSON SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

**Director’s Report / Updates**..... *JoAnn Breedlove, Executive Director*

- **Report to the Community Publication Update**

The Report to the Community publication was shared this week. The publication covers a Programmatic timeframe from July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025. The publication, included in the board packet, is also available on the board’s website and included in the January edition of *The Source*. A printed copy was mailed to all board members in December 2025. The Report to the Community publication highlighted the positive transformation of individuals served, businesses supported with workforce services or resources, and board-led initiatives. In addition, it highlighted community-led initiatives that support the greater workforce system.

- **Program Policy Review**

As shared previously with the Board, a goal for this program year is to review all current programmatic policies and develop a plan for updates, as needed. This process includes prioritizing policy revisions, identifying any new policies that may be warranted, and working toward a target effective date of July 1, 2026.

Aleisha Stout developed a policy review timeline that was shared with the Executive Committee at the December 2025 meeting. The plan includes bringing policies forward for the Executive Committee to review at the February and April 2026 meetings, which are intentionally scheduled ahead of the March and May 2026 Board meetings. Policies requiring Board approval will then be presented to the full Board for review and action at the March and May 2026 meetings.

- **Business Resource Network Initiative Update**

The Business Resource Network (BRN) is a workforce-focused model designed to aggregate employer workforce demand data, catalog available workforce solutions, and track the utilization of those resources to provide a comprehensive, data-driven view of employer demand.

The BRN data-tracking system is fully operational using AGS Prime, with data currently being collected from Stark Economic Development Board (SEDB) and Tuscarawas County Economic Development Corporation (TEDC) employer-facing partners. Workforce Solutions Manager, Scott Varian, will deepen engagement with these and other employer-facing and economic development partners. The 2026 BRN partner meetings have been scheduled and shared with participating organizations.

- **Pathway Home 6 Grant Update**

Breedlove presented an update on the Pathway Home 6 grant and noted strong progress to date. The Board serves as a subrecipient to the grantee, Midwest Urban Strategies (MUS), alongside three workforce development boards in Indiana and Mississippi. The grant supports the delivery of pre- and post-release employment services to 125 individuals returning to Stark and Tuscarawas Counties following incarceration at Stark Regional Community Correction Center (SRCCC).

Greater Stark County Urban League (GSCUL) has been selected as the service provider with an executed agreement and service delivery beginning January 2, 2026. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been completed between the Stark Tuscarawas Workforce Development Board (STWDB) and SRCCC, with additional MOUs in development with employers and service partners. All required programmatic policies have been established.

Armon Cook, PH6 Program Manager, in collaboration with Aleisha Stout, Assistant Director, has led implementation efforts, including participation in required grant training, development of the grant timeline, and coordination with the correctional facility and service provider. The PH6 initiative is branded as Pathways 2 Progress. The grant is a 42-month award effective July 1, 2025, through December 31, 2028

- **Operation/Compliance Update & Fiscal Monitoring Letter (Attachment E & F)**

The Operations/Compliance Guide (Attachment E) has been a valuable reference for board staff and supported several required activities over the past year. Key completed items include Job Center Certification, which was submitted in late November 2025 and has been completed, as well as the board's Fiscal Monitoring.

Monitoring—both programmatic and fiscal—is conducted annually, and for PY25, both are anticipated. The Fiscal Monitoring has been completed, and Attachment F includes the monitoring report issued to the workforce area. The report outlines the areas reviewed and

notes a Significant Observation related to Subrecipient Monitoring, along with a submitted and accepted Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP).

## Featured Updates

### **Service Provider (Designated)**.....*Lori Yager, Program Mgr, Workforce Initiative Association*

Lori Yager provided the service provider featured update by sharing the success story of Saizya White, a WIOA Adult participant and single mother who had been out of the workforce and fully dependent on public assistance. With support from Workforce Initiative Association at the OhioMeansJobs center, Pell Grants, and WIOA funding to close the remaining tuition gap, Saizya completed the Canton City Schools LPN program, maintained a 90%+ GPA, graduated in May 2025, passed the NCLEX, and secured employment as an LPN earning about \$30/hour (approximately \$56,000/year). Yager noted this as a strong example of WIOA's return on investment and read an email from Saizya expressing appreciation for the financial assistance and ongoing encouragement from her case manager, crediting the program with helping her change her family's life.

### **Job Center Operator (Procured)** -*Renee Steurer, Employment Services Mgr., Workforce Initiative Association*

Renee Steuer, delivered the job center operator featured update, highlighting the centers' **Priority of Service to Veterans** and recent Veterans Day-aligned outreach efforts. She described two major events: a Tuscarawas County veterans' breakfast that drew over 20 veterans and showcased partnerships with Buckeye Career Center, Redeem 22, and the Vet Center, and a Stark County veterans' resource fair that served as a hub connecting veterans with employers and community resources. The Stark event registered over 70 veterans, including more than 50 new visitors, with over 80% requesting additional services, and featured on-site supports such as free professional clothing in partnership with Jackson Bear Paws, haircuts from local barbers and students, and wellness resources and screenings. Steurer thanked business and community donors (including Mission BBQ, Starbucks, Giant Eagle, and Sam's Club) for contributing food, refreshments, and raffle items, and emphasized that these efforts both honor veterans' service and strengthen their connection to ongoing workforce and support services through the centers.

**Adjourned:** 1:04 p.m.

**NEXT MEETING: March 4, 2026, 12:00 p.m. Zoom**