

STARK TUSCARAWAS WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD MEETING

March 4, 2026 at 12:00 p.m.

Zoom

PRESENT	ABSENT	STWDB STAFF
Marla Akridge	Rick Baxter	JoAnn Breedlove
Stephen Carson	Damus Cole	Rebecca Harris
Lauren Dalesandro	Lisa Gould	Aleisha Stout
Andrew Fowler		
Para Jones		
Alison Kerns		
Mike Lauber		
Susan Lenigar		
Stephanie Maier		
Marc Manheim		
Joel McKenzie	Guests	JOB CENTER OPERATOR FISCAL AGENT DESIGNATED PROVIDER
Rick Moss	Michelle Carver-ODJFS	Chuck Byrd
Steve Rippeth	Mary Kate Hastings-(Senator Husted's office)	Carrie Domer
Scott Robinson		Freda Martin
Tracy Sabo		Amy Miller
Joseph Sekely		Renee Steurer
Sarah Spies		Rena Wright
Patrice Yacko		Lori Yager

BUSINESS MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

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

Introductions of Guests *Scott Robinson, Chair*

- Michelle Carver, Ohio Department of Job & Family Services (ODJFS)
- Mary Kate Hastings, Senator John Husted’s Regional Deputy Director-Northeast Region

Meeting Minutes..... *Scott Robinson, Chair*

January 7, 2026, Meeting Minutes.....Scott Robinson, Chair (*Attachment A*)

MOTION: CARSON MOVED FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE JANUARY 7, 2026, MEETING MINUTES. RIPPETH SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

- **Pathways to Progress – Reentry Grant**

Breedlove provided an update on the Pathways to Progress reentry grant. The Board is a sub-recipient through Midwest Urban Strategies. The program goal is to serve 125 individuals with pre- and post-release employment services at the Stark Regional Community Correction Center (SRCCC), focusing on individuals returning to Stark or Tuscarawas County.

The Greater Stark County Urban League is the service provider and has begun forming cohorts to deliver programming inside SRCCC. Breedlove reported strong interest and engagement among prospective participants. She noted that this grant now appears as a separate line item on the Treasurer's Report and will continue to do so for the life of the grant.

- **Business Resource Network (BRN)**

Breedlove reported that the Business Resource Network (BRN) held an in-person meeting in January 2026, bringing together multiple partner organizations. The meeting featured a panel of economic development partners who described their Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) visits with local employers, highlighting how they identify immediate employer needs and connect employers to appropriate resources and solutions.

Breedlove stated that workforce issues remain a top-of-mind topic on most employer visits. The meeting drew strong participation and robust questions from attendees.

She also offered an update on Scott Varian, Workforce Solutions Manager for BRN activities. Scott was introduced to the Board at the January meeting during the early stages of his employment and, within his initial months, has demonstrated active engagement and progress in building relationships with BRN partners.

- **Workforce Trends Dashboards**

Breedlove reminded members that the workforce trends dashboards are available to the community and stakeholders 24/7 via the Board's website at www.stwdb.org, where they are prominently displayed. There are 15 dashboards in total.

The dashboards are produced and maintained by Lightcast. Most dashboards are scheduled for quarterly updates, though certain data elements are updated in real time when source data is available more frequently.

Legislative Updates:

- **Federal Continuing Resolution**

Breedlove reported that a workforce-related continuing resolution passed in early February, extending relevant federal funding through September of the current year. She noted the Board is appreciative that this legislation moved forward, providing additional funding certainty.

- **Workforce Pell**

Breedlove provided a detailed update on the new Workforce Pell initiative. Workforce Pell was signed into law in July 2025, with implementation planned for July 1, 2026. She explained that Workforce Pell will provide Pell funding for short-term credential training programs, typically 8–15 weeks in length and generally 600 hours or less, which historically have been too short to qualify for traditional Pell funding.

She noted that eligible programs must:

- Be identified as in-demand, using criteria to be established at the state level with various stakeholders
- Meet prescribed completion metrics (participant completion)
- Meet job placement metrics
- Meet certain earnings thresholds.

These performance metrics differ from traditional Pell, which primarily funds longer-term degree and career/technical programs.

Breedlove emphasized that this new funding stream is highly significant for the local workforce system, as many short-term, in-demand training programs currently funded by WIOA could potentially be funded by Workforce Pell instead. This creates an opportunity to coordinate and align Workforce Pell with WIOA funds, allowing WIOA resources to be redeployed to other priorities where needed.

She added that Workforce Pell is intended to prioritize portable and stackable credentials—credentials recognized by employers in the community and which can be built upon without requiring individuals to restart programs from the beginning.

Breedlove described the July 1, 2026 timeline as aggressive and noted that rules for Workforce Pell will be published in the Federal Register, followed by a public comment period. That rulemaking has not yet occurred, but she indicated that the local workforce system will continue to monitor developments closely. She emphasized that while Workforce Pell is complex and details are still emerging, it represents “all good news” in terms of additional funding for training in the community.

- **State and Regional Initiatives-Work Ohio**

Breedlove reported on Work Ohio, an initiative launched in January 2026 by Lieutenant Governor Tressel to provide more personalized job-search support to Ohioans. Seven regional Work Ohio job hubs have been designated statewide, with MAGNET serving as the hub lead for the Northeast Ohio region.

She explained that the Work Ohio website serves as a “front door” to job search resources. Individuals complete a short online form if they want additional assistance. When they indicate Stark County residency, those referrals are routed to the OhioMeansJobs Stark County Center, where staff provide basic career services and connect individuals to other resources based on identified needs. The Work Ohio initiative is currently planned as an 18-month effort.

Breedlove also highlighted that the Work Ohio website features a local success story, Ramon Reid, a former participant served through OhioMeansJobs Stark County who was previously a guest at the September 2025 Board meeting hosted by Stark State College. Ramon Reid completed Stark State’s HVAC training program, and Breedlove described him as very inspirational. She expressed enthusiasm that his story is showcased on the statewide platform.

- **National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB) Conference (March 23-26th)**

Breedlove provided an update on the upcoming National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB) conference (The Forum), scheduled for the end of March 2026. Several representatives from the local area will attend the conference.

She highlighted that she has been invited by NAWB to join a solutions-focused conversation with approximately 25 workforce board leaders from across the United States and senior federal officials from the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Education. Expected federal participants include Deputy Secretary Keith Sonderling (DOL), Assistant Secretary Henry Mack (DOL) and Deputy Assistant Secretary Nick Moore (U.S. Department of Education).

The session will focus on critical issues for the public workforce system and the future of workforce programs, including strategies to scale apprenticeships and other work-based learning models. Breedlove referenced the administration’s stated goal of achieving 1 million active apprentices during this administration. She indicated that federal officials are seeking input on how such goals might realistically be achieved and what is needed from the system.

Breedlove stated that she is honored and privileged to participate in this discussion.

Other Updates

- **Growing Regional Independence Together (GRIT)**

Breedlove described the GRIT (Growing Regional Independence Together) project as an initiative that has grown over several years within Ohio’s Appalachian counties, noting that it creates additional opportunities to serve individuals in Tuscarawas County, which is part of Appalachia. She stated that GRIT funding is supported in the state’s biennium budget, with \$10 million per year allocated to the initiative, and that GRIT now appears on the Treasurer’s financial report.

- **Program Policy Timeline Review & Updates**

Breedlove previewed upcoming policy actions for the Board. She noted that Stout would be presenting several policy updates for Board consideration, along with a review timeline that outlines not only the policies coming forward at this meeting but also additional policies to be presented in the next few months. She stated that the proposed policy changes and updates were previously reviewed and discussed by the Executive Committee.

Growing Regional Independence Together (GRIT) Scott Robinson, Chair (Attachment B)

GRIT Overview & Local Plan..... Chuck Byrd, WIA Director

Chuck Byrd provided a brief overview of the GRIT (Growing Regional Independence Together) grant awarded for Tuscarawas County, totaling approximately \$233,000 and running through June 30, 2027. The project centers on the Future Plans career assessment, with a goal of completing 150 assessments for Tuscarawas County residents and providing follow-up career coaching. Participants must (1) reside in Tuscarawas County and (2) complete the assessment. Those who, with staff support, obtain employment aligned with their assessment results may receive a \$100 placement incentive. GRIT also includes funding to support training for about 15 adults and/or youth, using more flexible criteria than WIOA while still guided by assessment results. The project has officially launched; staff have begun training on the coaching component, developed outreach materials, and will offer GRIT on a voluntary basis to customers at OhioMeansJobs Tuscarawas County. Byrd noted that a summary graphic of the local GRIT design was included in the board packet and invited questions from members.

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

Treasurer /Financial Report*Chuck Byrd, Fiscal Agent Representative (Attachment C)*

Chuck Byrd presented the Treasurer’s Report through January 2026, noting that the Board is approximately 58% through the fiscal year and overall spending is tracking as expected. All prior-year WIOA formula funds have been fully expended ahead of the June 30, 2026 deadline, and current-year WIOA funds (PY25) are about 30% spent. RESEA funds from PY24 are nearly fully utilized, with additional PY25 funds and state-level resources available, and the Pathway Home grant is in early implementation with initial expenditures underway. All prior-year TANF funds were fully used, and current TANF spending is at roughly 27%, which Byrd indicated is normal given reimbursement timing and the upcoming summer youth component. MOU cost-sharing expenditures are in line with the fiscal year elapsed, and GRIT project spending has just begun and will increase as activities ramp up.

MOTION: KERNS MOVED TO ACCEPT THE JANUARY 31, 2026, TREASURER’S REPORT AS PRESENTED. LENIGAR SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Program Policy Timeline Review & Updates..... *Aleisha Stout, Assistant Director*

Stout reported on the ongoing comprehensive policy review project, noting that many local policies were significantly out of date, with some not revised for a decade or more. The goal is to review and update all policies by July 1, 2026 with those requiring Board approval clearly identified in the project timeline. For this meeting, she focused on the policies that had been vetted by the Executive Committee and now required Board action.

She summarized revisions to the **Individual Training Account (ITA) Policy**, which governs use of WIOA funds for training. In addition to reorganizing and simplifying the language, the policy was restructured to clearly distinguish program eligibility, individual appropriateness (that is aligned with state guidance), and procedures. The previously embedded self-sufficiency percentage was removed from the ITA policy and replaced with a cross-reference to the separate self-sufficiency policy, so that administrative or procedural changes to ITAs will not require full Board votes tied to a numeric threshold. Stout also highlighted the addition of a priority of lower-cost training options as we want to preserve customer choice when there is a clear reason one option is better than another, but we also need to be good stewards of our funds by encouraging lower-cost options when they make sense for the customer. For example, in the case of CDL programs, a five-week course at a significantly lower cost would be prioritized over a much higher-priced option when both lead to comparable outcomes. She answered questions regarding how federal and state rules are integrated into local policy, pointing to the reference sections (which include links to WIOA legislation and state policy) and explaining that current versions are stored in the internal document management system (DocTract), shared with sub-recipients as needed, and slated to be posted publicly on the website once this review cycle is complete. Following discussion, the Board approved the revised ITA policy, with noted member abstentions.

Stout provided an informational overview of a new policy establishing local criteria for ITA-eligible training providers. Historically, the local area relied solely on state eligibility criteria; the new policy adds a local quality screen, including expectations around completion rates and post-training employment outcomes. It also clarifies how staff will verify that providers meet existing state requirements. Additionally, the policy eliminates ITA funding for degree programs at for-profit/proprietary institutions where credits do not transfer, a change intended to protect participants by emphasizing program quality and credit portability. Board members expressed support for this quality-focused approach.

MOTION: MANHEIM MOVED TO APPROVE THE INDIVIDUAL TRAINING ACCOUNT POLICY AS PRESENTED. LAUBER SECONDED. THE MOTION CARRIED WITH NONE OPPOSED, AND 3 ABSTENTIONS (JONES, MOSS, RIPPETH)

Next, Stout presented changes to the **Local Self-Sufficiency and Family Self-Sufficiency Standard Policy**, which determines income thresholds for various WIOA-funded services, including ITAs. She explained that the area previously treated self-sufficiency in a more blended way; the revised policy now explicitly separates individual and family self-sufficiency in alignment with updated state direction. The most significant substantive change is the adoption of a 300% of federal poverty level (FPL) benchmark for family self-sufficiency, an increase from the long-standing 225% threshold that had been in place since at least 2008. Stout noted that this adjustment is based on evidence and current cost-of-living realities and is intended to, more accurately, identify families still in need of support to achieve genuine economic self-sufficiency. She also outlined clarifications regarding extenuating circumstances, dependency determination, documentation and case file monitoring, and treatment of interim employment for dislocated workers.

Stout previewed upcoming work, stating that the next Board meeting will include proposed revisions to four additional policies requiring Board approval: Supportive Services, Work Experience for Youth, Youth Program Services, and On-the-Job Training. She reiterated that the broader project will result in policies that are current, aligned with federal and state guidance, clearly documented, and ultimately posted on the Board website for transparency once this multi-round review is completed.

MOTION: LENIGAR MOVED TO APPROVE THE LOCAL AREA SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD POLICY AS PRESENTED. CARSON SECONDED. THE MOTION CARRIED WITH NONE OPPOSED, AND 3 ABSTENTIONS (JONES, MOSS, RIPPETH)

Featured Updates

- **Service Provider (Designated)**.....*Lori Yager, Program Mgr., Workforce Initiative Association*
Yager presented a WIOA participant success story from Tuscarawas County, highlighting John, a 49-year-old former "mobile home setter" whose physically demanding, weather-dependent work provided unstable income for his family of six. With support from OhioMeansJobs and his case manager DJ Milburn, John completed the CDL Class A program at American Professional (now Buckeye Career Center), obtained a tanker endorsement, and was hired within 30 days as a tanker driver at \$31 per hour with overtime eligibility, expecting to earn over six figures for the first time. Yager noted that this outcome demonstrates a strong economic and social return on investment that such training provides to the community.
- **Job Center Operator (Procured)***Renee Steurer, Employment Services Mgr., Workforce Initiative Association*

Steurer provided an update on the ongoing partnership between OhioMeansJobs centers in Stark and Tuscarawas counties and the United Way to host IRS-sponsored Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) clinics, which offer free tax preparation primarily to individuals with incomes of \$67,000 or less, as well as those with disabilities and limited English proficiency. She reviewed the program's history in the centers since 2015, noting that Stark County's site was named VITA Site of the Year in 2020, and explained that services shifted from in-person preparation to a hybrid drop-off model during and after the pandemic. Steurer reported that the clinics continue to serve significant numbers of community members, with over 120 customers assisted so far this season and additional Friday clinics scheduled in March. She also highlighted a CCMEP participant who, after serving as a VITA volunteer and gaining valuable skills, moved into a permanent full-time position paying more than \$20 per hour, successfully exiting CCMEP.

Adjourned: 1:04 p.m.

NEXT MEETING: May 6, 2026, OhioMeansJobs-Tuscarawas County