

Governor's Council for Workforce and Economic Development

MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING

Date: April 25, 2025

Time: 9:00 A.M.

Place: Francis Tuttle Technology Center – Northwest Hall

Call to Order/Welcome

Chair Chuck Gray called the meeting to order and confirmed a quorum was present. He welcomed the group and provided a brief overview of the agenda. Chair Gray also introduced the concept of the "parking lot" — a space for ideas that may require additional attention or action outside of the meeting. Maci will be responsible for tracking these items and following up with the appropriate individuals

Opening Remarks – Trae Rahill

Trae Rahill extended appreciation to the legislators in attendance and thanked all members for their continued engagement. He acknowledged that, during the previous meeting, extended discussion led to compressed presentations later in the agenda. He encouraged members to utilize the parking lot: if a strong idea arises and gains support from other members, it should be captured as an action item to explore further between meetings.

Economic Map Presentation – Representative Brian Hill

Representative Brian Hill shared the story behind his initiative, which began with the question: "Who owns workforce?" He emphasized a belief — that having a career tech center, a college or university, and a highway forms the building blocks of economic development.

Historically, workforce efforts have been concentrated around Oklahoma City and Tulsa. Rep. Hill presented a new map that highlighted educational institutions across the state, including colleges, universities, and career tech centers. He added data layers such as airports, hospitals, industrial parks, and military bases, along with traffic count information, which revealed notable geographic patterns.

The purpose of this mapping is to identify areas of opportunity and to invest in locations where people want to live and work. The vision is to establish nine distinct economic hubs, ensuring that every Oklahoman is within one hour of access to economic opportunity. This strategy aims to retain talent in-state and foster long-term economic growth.

Oklahoma Workforce Commission Updates – Kyla Guyette

In Kyla Guyette's absence, Trae Rahill provided an update on her behalf. He shared that Kyla has been actively meeting with stakeholders across the state to get up to speed on workforce efforts in Oklahoma. She is positioned to lead and champion several initiatives.

A key development is the creation of a new data system to support workforce efforts. An RFP for the system was issued, and 12 responses were received. Rather than building a tool from scratch, Kyla has

focused on evaluating existing platforms that can meet Oklahoma's needs, leveraging solutions that are already in use.

The Oklahoma Workforce Commission has identified several strategic goals, and there is strong momentum around this work. Monthly public meetings are being held.

Operations and Industry Pathways – Holly Anderson

Holly Anderson provided an overview of OU Online, which currently offers approximately 60 programs and serves around 4,500 students—85% of whom are enrolled in graduate-level programs. Notably, about 33% of the student population comes from rural areas.

The focus of her presentation was on adult learners who have completed some college but did not finish their degree. Research shows that the primary barrier preventing these students from returning is financial. OU Online was designed with adult learners in mind, emphasizing flexibility and accessibility. Students are able to transfer in previously earned credit hours, and tuition is set at a flat rate of \$500 per credit hour.

The programs were developed based on in-demand careers as well as soft and durable skills critical to today's workforce. To help eliminate financial barriers, OU Online offers a \$2,500 scholarship to cover outstanding bursar balances, along with several other scholarship opportunities.

For industry partnerships, OU offers a 15% tuition discount to companies that enter into an agreement with the university. These partnerships also allow employers to access training services, post job openings, and collaborate on recruitment opportunities.

Approval of January 24, 2025, Minutes

Chair Gray presented the minutes from the January 24, 2025, meeting. A motion to approve was made by Jeanie Webb and seconded by Rep. Brian Hill. The motion passed unanimously.

Washington D.C. Update – Chair Gray

Chair Chuck Gray provided an update on his recent trip to Washington, D.C., where he and Trae Rahill attended the National Governors Association Winter Policy Institute. During the trip, they had the opportunity to engage with representatives from Oklahoma, the U.S. Department of Labor, as well as international delegates from Taiwan and Germany.

Key areas of interest discussed included the nation's labor force participation rate and the importance of supporting individuals seeking to upskill mid-career. A major topic at the federal level is the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Congressman Tom Cole emphasized the importance of planning for a future with potentially declining federal funding. Chair Gray echoed this message, urging members to consider strategies to offset possible funding reductions, such as public-private partnerships, apprenticeships, and internships. He also encouraged members to remain engaged with Oklahoma's federal representatives.

American Job Center Recertifications – DeDe Smith

In DeDe Smith's absence, Trae Rahill provided an update on the American Job Center (AJC) recertification process. He reported that the Southern, Western, South Central, and Central workforce areas have successfully completed their center certifications, and OESC has approved the recommendations for each.

The Northeast and Green Country areas will complete their AJC certifications within 90 days of their official merger, which became effective on July 1st.

All American Job Centers are required to undergo recertification at least once every three years to ensure compliance with federal guidelines and to maintain a high standard of service quality. The official recertification letter is included in the meeting packet for reference.

Committees

Healthcare: The Healthcare Committee held a meeting on March 25th to discuss several upcoming initiatives. One of the major projects in development is a virtual Health Career Day, tentatively scheduled for February 11, 2026. The committee has connected with the Missouri Hospital Association and plans to adapt their successful model as a blueprint for Oklahoma. This initiative aims to reach students across the state and increase awareness of career opportunities in healthcare.

Additionally, the committee is planning in-person career fairs, with one being considered for November in Oklahoma City and another in January in Tulsa. Location scouting and recruitment efforts are currently underway.

Lastly, the committee is collaborating with the Oklahoma Hospital Association to develop a sustainable apprenticeship model to strengthen the healthcare workforce pipeline.

Career Pathways: Career Pathways continues to explore models to strengthen apprenticeship and internship opportunities in Oklahoma. A key focus is on Georgia's Quick Start program, which is being studied as a potential framework. The committee is particularly interested in how the Georgia model builds strong partnerships with private businesses and industries. Plans are underway to meet with representatives from the Georgia Quick Start program to further evaluate how the model could be adapted for Oklahoma. Additionally, Stan conducted research on a similar program in France, although a language barrier presented some challenges in fully understanding the system.

Stan also reported conversations with several businesses that are eager to participate in apprenticeship efforts but are uncertain about how to begin or who to contact.

Partnership Updates – OESC (title 1 & 4), CareerTech (title 2), DRS (title 3)

OESC: Trae Rahill provided updates on behalf of OESC. He began with a legislative update, noting that Senate Bill 911 successfully passed. This bill aims to reduce the SUTA tax burden for Oklahoma businesses. The agency's regular cleanup bill, which typically updates outdated language and makes minor corrections, is hoping to be passed soon.

A major milestone for OESC is the launch of a new claimant portal, which includes a mobile version. This marks the largest technology release in OESC history. The system is currently in a soft launch phase at select office locations.

Additionally, OESC's mobile units are now fully operational and ready to be deployed for various needs—whether in response to natural disasters, business closures, or other workforce-related emergencies.

Finally, Trae reminded the group that the Green Country and Northeast Workforce Boards officially merge July 1st.

Career Tech: Brent Haken provided the update for CareerTech and began by sharing a video highlighting the statewide economic and workforce impact of the CareerTech system. He emphasized the importance of effective collaboration across organizations, asking, “How do we sell each other?” — referring to how partnerships must be meaningful and forward-moving to support workforce development.

Brent noted that this legislative session was a strong one for workforce, and the U.S. Department of Labor has recognized Oklahoma CareerTech as outpacing similar programs across the country. CareerTech is actively bridging the gap between education and apprenticeships, aligning training with workforce needs.

He also addressed the challenge of inconsistent definitions across the workforce system and talked about having clear communication with businesses.

Importantly, CareerTech is expanding partnerships beyond traditional education settings, including short-term options.

Looking ahead, CareerTech hopes to within a year, have high school students actively enrolled in apprenticeships, starting small and building on that.

DRS: Melinda Freundt provided updates on behalf of the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS). She explained that DRS administers the Public Vocational Rehabilitation Program, which includes two key components. The first is the federal funding component, which operates through a matching structure and plays a critical role in the agency’s ability to deliver services. (A handout detailing DRS’s impact was included in the meeting packet.)

DRS is currently housed under the Department of Education, but in the event of any restructuring, the agency’s preference is to be moved to the Department of Labor rather than the Department of Human Services, in order to maintain its alignment with workforce development goals.

Melinda emphasized that everything DRS does centers on preparing individuals to enter, return to, or receive training to re-enter the workforce. She also gave a special shoutout to the DRS Business Services Team, which partners actively with CareerTech and OESC to co-host job fairs, they also organize impact meetings across the state’s regions.

A key part of DRS’s mission is to advocate for individuals with disabilities, working to remove barriers and open new opportunities for employment. Melinda highlighted the success of DRS summer programs, which continue to grow and focus on equipping students with durable, transferable skills for long-term career success.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Governor’s Council will be on July 25, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. at Francis Tuttle Rockwell Campus – Northwest Hall.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at approximately 11:00 a.m.

Attendance

Present: Babu Peringol, Brent Haken, Rep. Brian Hill, Charles Gray, Christopher Fusselman, Cliff Stewart, Dennis Luckinbill, Jacob Matherly, Jacob McHughes, Jamie Payne, Jeanie Webb, Rep. Mark Tedford, Melinda Fruendt, Nico Ciccone, Robin Arter, Stan McCabe, Stephanie Vickers Regan, Trae Rahill, Caleb McDonald, Cassidy Minx, Clint Castleberry, Melissa Lightsey, and Stephanie Roe.

Absent: Bill Coleman, Chase Beasley, John Budd, Daniel Russell, David Reid, Heather Turner, Jack O. Sherry, Kevin McDugle, Kristen Thompson, Scott Fry, Stan Booker, and Terry Adams, Steven Harpe, Ellen Buettner, Sean Burrage, Ryan Walters, and Jennifer Lamb-Hornsby.

*Respectfully submitted,
Maci Majors*