

Governor's Council for Workforce and Economic Development

MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING

Date: October 24, 2025

Time: 9:00 A.M.

Place: Francis Tuttle Technology Center – Northwest Hall

Call to Order/Welcome

Chair Gray welcomes everyone to the meeting.

Approval of July 25, 2025, Minutes

Chair Gray presented the minutes from the July 25, 2025, meeting. A motion to approve was made by Dennis Luckinbill and seconded by Brent Haken. The motion passed unanimously.

Strategic Overview and Future Performance Presentations

Chair Gray provided an update on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) legislation. Currently, it remains in limbo. The House version proposes approximately a 30% funding reduction, while the Senate version maintains existing funding levels. A clearer picture of the outcome will emerge once the federal government reopens.

Chair Gray noted that significant efforts are underway in Oklahoma to advance workforce development, including several interim studies focused on improving alignment and efficiency.

Representative Mark Tedford shared that Trae Rahill assisted in developing much of his legislative study, which focuses on streamlining workforce processes. He acknowledged that collaboration across entities can be challenging and stated that the study aims to identify ways to improve coordination and share best practices. While it remains uncertain whether new legislation will result from this study, there is consideration that some improvements may be addressed at the agency level. Representative Tedford emphasized that the overall concept is promising.

Trae Rahill expanded on the topic of collaboration and the study's progress. He noted that this work began several years ago, exploring ideas such as board consolidation and realignment of services. Progress has been made in revitalizing and reimagining this council's role. Over the summer, efforts intensified to align services and improve effectiveness in serving Oklahomans. Rahill highlighted ongoing data-sharing initiatives and discussions around co-location of services. While consolidating boards may not result in significant cost savings, it could enhance staff efficiency. He also referenced an email from the Governor encouraging state agencies to evaluate federal funding usage and identifying potential gaps resulting from the government shutdown.

Chair Gray recognized Cassidy Minx and Marissa Lightsey for their valuable contributions to data analysis and reporting.

Representative Brian Hill reflected on the progress since the workforce study began eight years ago, noting its evolution and expansion over time. He emphasized Oklahoma’s potential for continued growth, citing new and emerging industries that did not exist eight years ago. Hill shared recent visits to an Oklahoma Works location and a community college, describing the enthusiasm and momentum seen across the state. He encouraged continued focus and momentum, stating that Oklahoma has significant opportunities ahead. Hill also acknowledged Chair Gray for presenting at recent studies.

Kyla Guyette provided an update on the Commission’s work, noting that although it has been active for only ten months, the progress feels much longer due to the pace of development. She shared that Oklahoma’s State Strategic Plan is expected to be released in December and will outline the state’s workforce strategy moving forward. The plan emphasizes the use of data-driven decision-making and collaboration with employers—approximately 1,500 of whom have already engaged in the process. Guyette highlighted ongoing efforts to centralize workforce resources to simplify system navigation and reaffirmed the goal of building a strong public-private workforce system to meet Oklahoma’s future needs.

WIOA Policies: WSD 10-2025 and WSD 11-2025

DeDe Smith presented two revised WIOA policies for review and approval.

WSD 10-2025: Fiscal and Procurement Policy – Establishes uniform fiscal and procurement standards for WIOA subrecipients.

WSD 11-2025: Grant Management Policy – Outlines standard procedures for WIOA subrecipients in managing grants from OESC, including requirements for internal controls and expenditure tracking.

A motion to approve was made by Rep. Mark Tedford and seconded by Rep. Brian Hill. The motion passed unanimously.

Realignment of Boards: Western Absorbing into Central

Chair Gray apologized for the confusion surrounding this agenda item, noting that it underscores the importance of maintaining transparent communication. The matter concerns the absorption of the Western Workforce Board into the Central Oklahoma Workforce Innovation Board (COWIB). Chair Gray explained that all statutory requirements have been met; however, additional data was requested in the corresponding letter. He acknowledged that communication could have been clearer and took responsibility for that lapse.

Dennis Luckinbill provided background information, explaining that both Trae Rahill and OESC, along with the Workforce Commission, have encouraged board consolidation efforts. Dennis presented the idea of absorption to the Western Local Elected Officials (LEOs) and Board, recognizing that the process of merging the two boards was not easy. The term “absorption” was used to avoid extensive policy changes, as COWIB already manages bookkeeping for the Western region. Dennis noted that Trae prefers to wait until the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) reopens, as federal guidance may be necessary.

Dennis Luckinbill made a motion to approve the absorption of the Western and COWIB Workforce Boards, without conditions other than future approval by the Department of Labor. The motion was seconded by Brent Haken.

Discussion:

Trae Rahill commended the progress made by both boards, recognizing the challenges of consolidation and expressing OESC's appreciation. He explained that OESC's process involves consulting with DOL to ensure compliance and accuracy. Rahill expressed some hesitation about proceeding while DOL remains closed, noting that the regional office may not share Oklahoma's level of innovation. He reminded members that DOL retains oversight on compliance and monitoring. While OESC supports the consolidation in principle, he emphasized the need to remain mindful of regional boundaries, as federal regulations prohibit splitting regions in ways that hinder coordination. Much of OESC's recent partnership work has focused on aligning regions to strengthen collaboration.

DeDe Smith added that under current regional configurations, the proposed absorption would cross existing regional boundaries—something that has not been done before. She explained that each region and local area must submit aligned local and regional plans consistent with the state plan. The alignment of these regions will be discussed again by this council, which will be responsible for approving regional designations. These discussions will take place during upcoming state strategic planning meetings.

Kyla Guyette provided additional context, explaining that regions are formed from one or more local areas, and local areas are not split across different regions. If an area exists, it can also serve as a region. She noted that she has not seen DOL oppose consolidations, and in cases where local areas resisted, final decisions have rested with the Governor.

Representative Brian Hill recommended that as regions and areas of interest are evaluated, the council should consider legislative efforts to identify economic hubs across Oklahoma. He emphasized the importance of ensuring that no area is left out of future strategic investments.

Jamie Payne asked for clarification on the purpose of the boards and what could be done collectively to ensure the success of the consolidation if no policies are changing.

Dennis Luckinbill responded that Ashley already attends most Western board meetings, and while there are some structural differences, the boards share many similarities. Central Oklahoma has one county commissioner per county, covering 25 counties in total, whereas Western previously had 75 board members. The consolidation would reduce that number to 34, with one representative per county. He explained that since COWIB already manages Western's finances and the two boards work closely together, the transition should be smooth. Staff hiring has been delayed in anticipation of this merger, and approval is needed now to prepare for implementation by January 1.

Stephanie Roe asked whether the state's position on consolidation has recently changed.

Trae Rahill clarified that the state's stance remains the same—there is no set number of workforce boards. The priority is to create a system that effectively delivers services. With more boards, service delivery becomes more complex. Rahill emphasized that the state's approach has not changed but is now being implemented in a more detailed and deliberate way. He noted that the progress reflects a positive step forward.

Dennis Luckinbill called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously.

Committees

Healthcare: Lara Morris shared the successes of the Virtual Healthcare Career Field event, held on September 19 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The event featured nine hospitals and medical systems, each

creating videos highlighting various healthcare professions and participating in live question-and-answer sessions. A total of 1,733 participants attended.

Lara announced that in-person healthcare career fairs are scheduled for November in Oklahoma City and January in Tulsa. Maci will distribute additional event information, which is also available on the CareerTech website. Promotional efforts are underway, including potential radio and television advertisements to increase awareness and participation.

Career Pathways: Stan McCabe gave a quick update. The Career Pathways committee is currently regrouping and plans to support the Workforce Commission efforts.

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

OESC: Trae Rahill shared that performance presentations have been conducted internally within OESC for some time. It is now the goal that the programs we fund bring these presentations before the council, allowing members the opportunity to ask questions and gain a clearer understanding of ongoing programs and outcomes.

Trae also announced a new workforce training grant developed in partnership with the Workforce Commission and CareerTech. The initiative, titled the *Oklahoma Talent Accelerator*, received nearly \$6 million in funding—surpassing the amount awarded to Texas. He expressed appreciation to Brent for his leadership in identifying the high-demand, skilled occupations that will be prioritized through this grant.

Chair Gray and Trae appeared on the news!

Career Tech: Brent Haken reported that CareerTech has participated in seven interim studies, all centered on how the state can better collaborate to move workforce development forward. From CareerTech's perspective, this partnership approach is straightforward—there is ample work to be done, and significant momentum is already underway.

Brent emphasized the importance of reaching individuals who are currently not in the workforce while continuing to train students through traditional pipelines. Two key areas of focus are mental health and childcare, both of which face challenges related to wages and workforce training. CareerTech plans to expand training programs in these critical sectors.

He also shared that exposure to CareerTech programs in K–12 classrooms has grown to 151,000 students—two years ahead of the original goal. This success is attributed to strong partnerships and a willingness to innovate. Additionally, full-time enrollment increased by nearly 5,000 students this year. Brent noted that progress is not always about funding but about people being willing to do things differently.

DRS: Stephanie Roe, filling in for Melinda, provided an update on behalf of DRS. She noted that October was Disability Employment Awareness Month and emphasized the agency's ongoing mission to connect Oklahomans with disabilities to meaningful careers.

DRS consists of five divisions and served 13,565 Oklahomans through its employment divisions this year, completing 3,021 employment plans for 2024. Stephanie highlighted a significant increase in youth seeking services, reflecting a national trend—nearly two million students with disabilities have been served

nationwide. DRS is placing greater focus on this growing population and is actively expanding outreach into rural Oklahoma.

During the summer, 477 students participated in transition camps across 38 locations, and 781 students applied for the BEST STEP program, with 403 attending. The Business Services Team continues to host Impact Meetings statewide. The rescheduled date for the statewide job fair is October 30.

Future Meeting Dates

Chair gray presented the following dates for next year:

- January 23, 2026
- April 24, 2026
- July 24, 2026
- October 23, 2026

There was discussion regarding potential meeting locations. Jacob McHughes volunteered to host the January meeting in Norman. Other members will review their schedules for the remaining dates, and final meeting locations will be determined at a later time.

A motion to approve was made by Brent Haken and seconded by Trae Rahill. The motion passed unanimously.

Adjournment

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

Attendance

Present: Babu Peringol, Brent Haken, Brian Hill, Charles Gray, Cliff Stewart, Dennis Luckinbill, Jacob Matherly, Jacob McHughes, Jamie Payne, Mark Tedford, Robin Arter, Scott Fry, Stan McCabe, Trae Rahill, Cassidy Minx, Clint Castleberry, Marissa Lightsey, Stephanie Roe

Absent: Bill Coleman, Christopher Fusselman, Daniel Russell, David Reid, Jack O. Sherry, Jeanie Webb, John Budd, Kristen Thompson, Melinda Fruendt, Nico Ciccone, Stan Booker, Stephanie Vickers Regan, Terry Adams

*Respectfully submitted,
Maci Majors*