

FIRST PLANNING DISTRICT WDB MEETING MINUTES

July 30, 2025 – 8:30 a.m.

MEETING INFORMATION

Location	This meeting was held in person at Nunez Community College, 3710 Paris Rd, Chalmette, LA in the Kane Technology Bldg, Rm A-122 Conference Room					
Attendees	Chairperson Mindy Nunez Airhart	P	Mr. Chris Abadie	P	Mrs. Ellis Borque	P
	Mr. Mark Pisani	P	Dr. James Carlson	A	Mrs. Stephanie Dupepe	P
	Mrs. Ashley Eavenson	A	Mr. Keith Espadron	P	Mr. Ross Gares	P
	Mr. Garrett Giglio	P	Mrs. Michelle Hebert	A	Mr. Bill Henley	A
	Mr. Dave Kaufmann, Jr.	P	Mrs. Adriana Kriesen	A	Mrs. Cherie LaRocca	P
	Mrs. Chiquita Lattimore	P	Mrs. Rachel Mackey	A	Mrs. Elizabeth Maillian	P
	Mrs. Kelly Phillips	P	Mr. Jerry Repka	A	Mr. Shawn Torres	A
	Mrs. Michelle Uzee	P	Mrs. Jonika Fisher	P	Mr. Bryan Moore	A
	Mrs. Suzanne Torregano	P	Mr. Dave Maziarz	P	Ms. Stacie Chitwood	P

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 8:28 a.m. by Chairperson Mindy Nunez Airhart and a quorum was declared.

2. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Mrs. Suzanne Torregano introduced the newest board member, Mr. Mrak Pisani, from Associated Terminals, and Mrs. Jonika Fisher, from DCFS. They are replacing Mr. Thomas Cagle and Mrs. Runaija Vicksbrown, respectively. Chairperson Mindy Nunez Airhart swore in both new members.

3. INVOCATION

Mrs. Suzanne Torregano gave the invocation.

4. APPROVAL OF MAY 5, 2024 MEETING MINUTES (ACTION ITEM)

Chairperson Mindy Nunez Airhart presented the minutes from the May 5, 2025 board meeting, and reviewed the action items. A motion for approval was made by Mr. Chris Abadie and seconded by Mr. Dave Maziarz. The minutes were approved by a unanimous vote with no objections or abstentions.

5. REVIEW OF EXPENDITURES REPORTS THROUGH MARCH 2025

Mrs. Suzanne Torregano was recognized to address the board to discuss an overview of our expenditures and performance of our current program year.

The fund utilization report shows our three funding categories. During the previous meeting it was stated that we had approximately \$40,000 in additional funds remaining in youth that needed to be spent by June 30, 2025. Those funds have been utilized. No additional funds were at risk of recapture and obligations were at 75.51%. This is a testament to the entire team working together and being prudent and intentional with spending. Mrs. Torregano explained that obligations were not targeted @ 100% because of the board's practice of placing a portion of allocated funds in reserve for next year. With the uncertainty of allocations, this has been proven to be a beneficial practice, especially this year, to ensure that our tri parish area continues operations while continuous funding is being determined. Mr. Ross Gares inquired about how this works for our staff. Mrs. Torregano explained that this practice is specifically done to protect our staff. We target obligations based on having a planned reserve amount to ensure that no impact on service or staff occurs when funding allocations are in question. Dave continuously monitors this so that he knows when it may be appropriate to slow down funding approvals and limit operational expenses to prevent staff impact. Mr. Gares asked as to how long we are safe until the hold on funding impacts on us, and Mrs. Torregano mentioned that she had Ellen review this ahead of the meeting and it has been determined that we should be safe for approximately 6 months before we would have to discuss any staff impact.

The expenditure to budget report shows what we're spending in accordance to our budget. In salaries, we finished at 92.46%, mostly because we were down 2 staff for part of the program year. One employee that was hired in November left in April, along with a tenured employee who left in February. These two positions were not filled until June, 2025. In terms of operating costs, we budgeted \$154,920 and spent \$130,784 at 84.42%. This is largely in part due to both Mr. Maziarz and Ms. Stacie Chitwood being extremely prudent with monitoring costs. In training and support, we finished at 82.35%. Mrs. Torregano shared that she is confident that with a full staff, this target would

have easily been achieved. Mrs. Torregano also shared that she is again relieved that the full amount was not spent because that allows the remaining \$375,859 to be rolled over into this current year. In admin, we finished the year at 89.61%.

The next report is the annual budget, which shows exactly how much we spent on each category by line item. Mrs. Torregano presented the initial budget approved by the board with actual amounts utilized, and then also an amended budget to balance out any negative categories. An example shared was the negative balance in conference and meetings, that was balanced by moving available funds not spent in travel and mileage. Another category shared was the negative balance in furniture/equipment, which was due to the purchase of three computers to replace outdated equipment in the business center. This was offset and by moving unspent funds from supplies. The amended budget reflects these changes along with the \$580,942 program dollars and \$136,778 admin dollars in reserve for 2025-2026.

Chairperson Nunez-Airhart opened the floor to questions. With no inquiries made, a motion for approval of the budget revisions was made by Mr. Dave Maziarz and seconded by Dr. Cherie LaRocca. The budget revisions were approved by a unanimous vote with no objections or abstentions. A motion to accept all financial reports presented was made by Mr. Ross Gares and seconded by Mr. Keith Espadron. The financial reports were approved by a unanimous vote with no objections or abstentions

6. CONTRACT / MOU REVIEW / APPROVAL (ACTION ITEM)

Mrs. Suzanne Torregano opened this discussion with an update on contracts which include JAG, NTCC, and community grants. The first is the renewal for JAG, effective 7/1/2025 – 6/30/2026. NTCC normally operates an out-of-school JAG program, but because they do not always get enough funds, we typically assist with a contract of \$5,800 to assist with travel expenses for the conferences and meetings they attend. The second is for a renewal to NTCC for the Career Exploration Summer Academy. This contract will be for \$16,875, effective 5/12/2025 – 6/26/2025, to operate this seven-week session with WIOA eligible youth. Previously, we had authorized \$15,000 for this program, but with the increase of overall costs, the agreed costs increased.

The third is for the \$50,000 CDBG Grant that was awarded to be utilized for the Career Exploration Summer Academy. The fourth is the \$20,000 CSBG Grant that was awarded to support the Career Exploration Summer Academy and subsequent Summer Work Experience.

The next contract is for the Fiscal Manager contract under St. Tammany Economic Development. This contract has increased approximately \$2,000 up to \$80,685, due to increased insurance costs. Mr. Abadie inquired as to whether there will be any issues moving forward resulting from the new incoming St. Tammany Economic Development Director. Mrs. Torregano shared that discussions have taken place that the existing leadership will be spending time with whoever is chosen, to share the importance of this relationship and partnership.

The final contract is the One Stop Operator Contract that is effective 7/1/2025 – 6/30/2026 for \$60,000. Year one deliverables include organizing and facilitating, at a minimum, quarterly Partner meetings to be held in each of the three (3) parish areas. Previously, Mr. Moore was hyper focused on St. Tammany and this year he is expected to shift that momentum to the parishes on the south shore. Mrs. Torregano shared that in depth conversations have already been occurring to start canvassing St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes to find out who the partners are that need to be at the table, just as he has done previously in St. Tammany. Another deliverable listed is the formation of the Workforce Alignment Group whose purpose will be to promote workforce programs within the three-parish area and facilitate capacity building within the local workforce system to strengthen the coordination of services through cross agency training and service integration. One of the things still being talked about at the state level is regionalization, and Mr. Moore wants us to be positioned to be a front runner should this come through.

A motion for approval of all contracts mentioned was made by Mrs. Kelly Phillips and seconded by Mrs. Chiquita Lattimore. The motion was approved by a unanimous vote with no objections or abstentions.

Mrs. Torregano also shared recommended policy updates resulting from the monitoring policy that was conducted back in February. We recently received a monitoring report that included a few findings under both fiscal and monitoring. The main administrative concern was regarding the approval of Mrs. Torregano's time and expenses. Our

internal policies were updated to reflect that Mrs. Torregano's timesheet and expenses will now go to the Chairperson of the Board, and then to the Vice Chair in the absence of the Chairperson.

The second finding was regarding Fiscal Management Policy 106-16 needing more definitive language surrounding cost allocation and what is considered an allowable and unallowable cost. This update includes a chart for reference to explain allowable and disallowable costs. The Purchase Order procedure was clarified around requester and approval signatures.

The final update was that all documents requiring a signature will require a printed name moving forward. After all updates were completed, all findings were cleared.

Chairperson Nunez-Airhart asked how often are these updates completed. Mrs. Torregano shared that we conduct an internal review along with the state monitoring every year which usually results in possible updates.

A motion for approval of all mentioned policy updates was made by Mr. Ross Gares and seconded by Mr. Ellis Borque. The motion was approved by a unanimous vote with no objections or abstentions.

7. REGIONAL/LOCAL PLAN SUMMARY/APPROVAL

Mrs. Torregano shared the executive summary of the Local Strategic Plan from July 2024 through June 2027. Because of the delay in WIOA reauthorization, many changes were not made. Rather, if and when reauthorization occurs, changes may be made based on those parameters. Priority remains focused on the same priority groups. All data is still being reviewed to ensure that our funding is utilized on in-demand career fields across our three parishes. Verbiage is included to ensure we are maintaining alignment with Governor Landry's administration. We are staying as involved as possible at a state level to make sure that the voice of our Workforce Board is heard. Mrs. Torregano was recently appointed by Governor Landry to the Workforce Investment Committee (WIC) that is currently working closely with the Department of Educations. Because of the changes within the K-12 systems, we have been actively involved in sectoral partnerships: construction, healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and now the port. Unfortunately, most of those include St. Bernard and Plaquemines, but not St. Tammany. Mrs. Torregano shared that we will continue to work at the state level with sharing our opinions. At this point, as long as we still remain under WIOA, regionalization cannot occur unless all the Chief Elected Officials agree to it. Mr. Maziarz is focused on creating a plan for apprenticeships by actively researching data within the participation rate to help support this. The Local Plan has been reviewed and accepted by the state and only requires approval from the board.

A motion for approval of Local Strategic Plan was made by Mr. Keith Espadron and seconded by Mrs. Kelly Phillips. The motion was approved by a unanimous vote with no objections or abstentions.

8. SUMMARY OF PROGRAM YEAR 2024-2025

Mrs. Torregano began sharing a comparison of the overall budget for the last two years. We had less allocated last year, but in 23/24 we were at 75% in expenditures and at 83% in 24/25. We were able to support additional participants with training and support with 33.31% of our budget and then 40% of our expenditures. We also did a great job with operating costs being 7.5%. By managing our administrative costs well, we were able to roll over 10.38% to the following year. Most of the money spent by staff went to classroom training at \$428,196. The second highest amount was spent on youth work experience at \$228,991. Mr. Maziarz shared that even though we have had less money available than in previous years, we matched amount spent in classroom training this year. He also shared that fewer dollars were spent on OJT because of the decrease in demand along with the loss of the staff member with the dedicated focus on placement. We have shifted focus to cross training for our Business Services Representatives, who usually focus on the employer portion of this activity, to also include the participant process of OJT placement. Mr. Ross Gares asked if there are any numbers on how many of the youth work experience went into full-time employment. Mr. Maziarz shared that he did not have that statistic readily available, but that is also because we have multiple factors that we consider a success, including enrolling in post-secondary training. Mrs. Torregano shared that logistics is still the top industry in training dollars. In traffic, calls to the center have been down but appointments are up. Mrs. Torregano shares that this speaks to capabilities of Mr. Maziarz and his team to keep activities up while down staff members. Mr. Maziarz shared that while he appreciates the kind words, we also must be aware of building the

perfect beast, because while the numbers are up, so are some of the complaints on how long service is taking. We increased our social media and expanded our footprint to create more ways for people to find us, but we want to proceed with caution as to not burn out the team. He shared that he is consistently looking into this and is actively reviewing supply and demand without it showing a burden on our team. Mr. Ellis Bourque asked if Mr. Maziarz is planning to backfill any of these positions. Mr. Maziarz shared that he is looking to backfill all open positions but is also looking for the right person to join the team. We are looking to replace the tenured associate we lost but will review more hires after the budgets and allocations are reviewed. Mrs. Torregano continued with sharing that of the services provided to participants, 55% was classroom training, 4% OJT, and 41% work experience. Mrs. Torregano shared the percentages of barrier characteristics shared by participants with 91% being low-income, and 82% being unemployed. Mr. Dave Maziarz shared the performance record for the program year. In the Adult funding category, all performance metrics achieved above 90% to target. In Dislocated Worker, we achieved two metrics over 90% to target, two metrics within negotiated range, and one under target. In Youth, we achieved four metrics over 90% to target, and one within negotiated range. Dislocated Worker was a struggle this year, especially with median earnings. Mr. Maziarz shared that overall, he is pleased with the performance achieved.

Mrs. Torregano highlighted activated that occurred throughout the year, including:

- Continued on-site Adult Education Classes at Slidell Center through partnership with NTCC
- Recipient of GNO RAAMP grant; Successfully completed a career fair/expo of over 200 attendees with a focus on Aerospace and Advanced Manufacturing
- Continued Summer Youth Programming in all three parishes; Multi-year CDBG and CSBG grant recipient; Developed direct partnership with Phoenix High School.
- Multi-year AARP grant recipient; Continue to set the pace nationally against all other local programs.
- Executive Director receives appt to WIC Board from Governor Landry
- Have become more active across St. Bernard Parish and are working to build a similar platform within Plaquemines Parish
- Will begin working with LAPRI once again within St. Tammany
- Had 2 successful graduates: Leadership Northshore: Stacie Chitwood and Leadership St. Bernard: Eshambraquic White
- Successfully submitted a grant application through US Dept of Commerce for NIST Cybersecurity; response pending

9. UPDATES

Mrs. Torregano opened discussion on updates with sharing that once the notice of award is received she is pleased to announce that we will be receiving an additional \$335,000. Mrs. Torregano also shared that there was a request sent to all board members about the committees that were recently updated within our bylaws. It was asked if any board members have not signed up for a committee to please partner with Mrs. Torregano as soon as possible as to which each would like to join.

10. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Chairperson Mindy Nunez Airhart opened the floor to any questions and public comments. No further comments were made. A motion to adjourn was made by Mrs. Cherie LaRocca and seconded by Mr. Keith Espadron. The meeting was adjourned at 10:01 am.