

## **GSETA Operations Meeting Minutes: January 5, 2026**

Frank Kuhn called meeting to order at 10:03am, reviewed December 2025 Meeting minutes, Howard Weiss Motioned to approve, Frank Cirii Seconded. Motion was passed.

### **ITA Contracting Adjustments and Cost Caps**

The group agreed on cautious, data-driven use of the new \$7,500 cap on Individual Training Accounts (ITAs), emphasizing local oversight to prevent unjustified cost increases.

- Christopher Peake explained their Workforce Development Board raised their cap from \$4,000 to \$5,000 based on three years of data showing most courses cost between \$4,000 and \$5,500, with a jump to around \$10,000 for higher-priced programs, making \$7,500 unnecessary for most cases.
  - They supplement ITAs with support service funds for certifications and exams to cover out-of-pocket costs.
  - Peake emphasized maintaining flexibility and avoiding automatic increases to the maximum allowed.
- Davidene Alpart shared their board raised their cap from \$6,000 to \$7,500, mainly to help cover high-cost programs like LPN and cosmetology and related fees, but expected few actual expenditures at the higher cap due to vendor pricing stability.
- Kendra Lee confirmed the ETPL unit is monitoring program cost increases and requiring justification for substantial hikes to prevent vendors from simply maxing out at \$7,500.
  - She stressed that customers should choose programs based on need and value, not price alone.
  - The guidance also allows flexibility on retesting fees if a customer fails certification exams.
- Frank Kuhn highlighted regional efforts to set cost boundaries for training programs to prevent private career schools from undercutting each other and causing bidding wars.
  - Some programs like LPN and CDL have historically had higher caps (\$8,000 and \$6,000, respectively) due to higher costs and wage returns.
  - Concerns were raised about some vendors seeking unjustified price increases without program changes.

- Joan Desmarais detailed the strict Section J process requiring vendors to submit documentation and obtain approval for tuition changes before charging higher rates.
  - Prices must be the same for WIOA customers and the general public.
  - Any approved increases only apply to new program cycles; existing students pay original rates.
  - Local boards retain authority to reject vendors or prices that do not meet standards.
- Beth Rodgers and others noted delays of up to 1-2 years in vendor tuition approvals, causing challenges in pricing decisions and contract renewals.
  - Beth shared a case of a new HVAC vendor proposing prices significantly higher than comparable programs, emphasizing the need for local due diligence.
- The group agreed local boards must actively monitor vendor pricing and contract compliance since COE enforcement is limited.
- Kendra Lee provided updated ETPL contacts: DeShann Granville and Tasha Gady to assist local areas with oversight and communication.
  - DeShann Granville: [deshahn.granville@dol.nj.gov](mailto:deshahn.granville@dol.nj.gov)
  - Tasha Gady: [Latashia.gady@dol.nj.gov](mailto:Latashia.gady@dol.nj.gov)

### **SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) Implementation Challenges**

The group discussed ongoing struggles around SNAP E&T referrals, work activity requirements, and coordination with local social services agencies (33:14).

- Atlantic County lacks a formal referral and eligibility structure for SNAP E&T, delaying engagement and risking noncompliance with federal work activity mandates.
- Howard Weiss described Essex County's efforts to partner with 13 NGOs, securing MOUs with 7, for counseling and enrollment services to serve SNAP clients.
  - They encountered challenges ensuring NGOs understand attendance and reporting requirements.
  - MIS adjustments were made to allow staff to enroll clients in counseling services without placing them in training or employment modules.

- In Greater Raritan, Monica Mulligan explained their Workforce Board no longer manages Workforce New Jersey funds; a private entity now handles all SNAP E&T services, requiring strong coordination with county social services.
- Kendra Lee noted efforts to streamline system access for social services agencies and vendors by updating security and interagency agreements.
- Morris County, represented by Beth Rodgers and Victoria Bollhardt, has been actively managing SNAP work activities without waivers, but Sussex and Warren counties are new to this.
  - Morris schedules in-person orientations starting February for SNAP ABAWD clients.
  - Warren County has a backlog of 100+ referrals with unclear SNAP ABAWD status, complicating placement efforts.
  - Staff struggle with paperwork, referrals, and client engagement due to inconsistent processes and communication delays.
- The group expressed concern about the 80-hour work activity requirement starting within 30 days of non-exempt client screening, emphasizing the risk of clients being penalized if work activities or case management aren't promptly established.
  - They recommended delaying screenings until all systems and activities are ready to avoid penalties.
- SNAP E&T supportive services of up to \$120 per month in cash assistance on client cards remain underutilized statewide.
  - Victoria Bollhardt shared a successful case where cash was used for CDL license renewal expenses.
  - This resource supplements transportation and other costs to help clients participate in programming.
- Howard Weiss noted funding constraints limit options for paid work experiences, making reliance on unpaid CWEP placements necessary despite client dissatisfaction and limited skill-building opportunities.
  - Many NGOs lack capacity for 40-hour per week activities, requiring additional solutions.

- The group highlighted the complexity of aligning CWEP with Fair Labor Standards Act rules and welfare benefit impacts, requiring urgent, detailed conversations to clarify these intersections.

### **Communication and Information Flow Among Boards and Operators**

Effective communication and consistent information sharing between leadership, operators, and local partners remain a significant challenge

- Andre Hardy outlined plans for a detailed triage guidance discussion at the upcoming leadership meeting, emphasizing the need for local boards to adapt frameworks to their unique contexts.
  - He acknowledged some boards prefer centralized communication through directors, while others want direct vendor contact, complicating a unified approach.
- Christopher Peake recommended using the GSETA Operations Committee meetings as a neutral platform to disseminate information to operators and avoid communication breakdowns.
- Joan Desmarais and others noted many directors and key staff do not regularly attend operations meetings, creating gaps in message delivery to frontline staff.
  - Joan emphasized the director's responsibility as grantee to ensure all partners receive necessary information.
- Tammy Molinelli highlighted political and structural differences across counties affecting communication flows and decision-making authority, calling for clearer ownership and roles.
- Howard Weiss stressed the importance of open communication among all partner agencies (UI, DVR, ES, WIOA, welfare) to serve customers effectively despite system complexity.
  - He noted physical co-location of partners in some areas helps, while others face challenges due to partners being in separate locations.
- The group agreed this remains an ongoing issue requiring further refinement and coordination to improve operational effectiveness.

### **Program Successes and Employer Engagement**

Workforce boards reported positive developments in employer engagement and tailored outreach efforts

- Fernandel Almonor shared plans for a January 29th recruitment event focused on the disability community, collaborating with DVR and NJ CBVI.
  - The event includes pre-workshops adapted to participants' needs, aiming to boost employment among people with disabilities.
  - They invited other areas to learn from and replicate this initiative.
- Beth Rodgers described their increased employer engagement resulting in a regularly distributed job newsletter linking employers' open positions directly with high schools and training participants.
  - Employers have agreed to interview qualified candidates, enhancing job placement outcomes.
- Frank Kuhn provided an update on a Supported Work Program for TANF clients placing participants in paid work experiences with public sector employers, such as a county nursing home.
  - The program offers stipends rather than wage reimbursement, simplifying employer participation.
  - Some participants have transitioned into permanent civil service roles, marking successful employment outcomes.
  - Discussions are ongoing to expand this model with Atlantic City government.
- The group debated the interaction of these stipends with welfare benefits and noted the need to carefully manage income impacts with social service agencies.
- Howard Weiss cautioned limited funding means many SNAP clients will rely on unpaid CWEP placements, reinforcing the need for scalable solutions.
- The group agreed paid transitional jobs provide better skill-building and client satisfaction compared to unpaid assignments.

### **Dashboard and Data Reporting Updates**

Participants expressed anticipation for upcoming improvements to the Workforce New Jersey dashboard with no current updates available

- Kendra Lee confirmed ongoing work behind the scenes with OTWS to finalize dashboard enhancements.
- She acknowledged stakeholder concerns and promised new information within the next few weeks.

- The group agreed to monitor progress closely to ensure the dashboard effectively supports federal reporting and operational tracking.

### **Waivers and Policy Flexibility**

The group highlighted waiver opportunities to improve program flexibility and requested official state guidance documentation.

- Howard Weiss requested written confirmation of the state's waiver on youth in-school versus out-of-school definitions.
- Kendra Lee confirmed such documentation is forthcoming.
- Kendra also referenced a November TGL 0525 on maximizing innovation for WIOA programs, suggesting future discussions to explore additional waiver options.
- Andre Hardy encouraged collective input on waiver requests to the state to maximize approval chances.
- Joan Desmarais reminded members to include waiver and innovation discussions in state and regional planning processes to align strategies.
- The group agreed to stay engaged on waiver opportunities to increase local flexibility and program impact.

Next meeting is February 2, 2026 from 10-12pm. Teams has been sent out and reminders will be sent prior to the meeting. Any topics of discussion should be given to Fran Kuhn before January 26 to [Kuhn\\_francis@aclink.org](mailto:Kuhn_francis@aclink.org).