

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
 - Tasha Gady: 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.
 - Per Paul Grzella, the minutes originally shared did not accurately reflect the GRWDB's actions. The Greater Raritan WDB continues to manage WFNJ funds. The board decided to remove SNAP referral responsibilities from the workforce training center vendor so this vendor can concentrate on its WIOA responsibilities. The board has always competitively contracted TANF responsibilities and this year, with the changes in the WFNJ program year, decided to contract out all WFNJ responsibilities to a single vendor rather than funding the training center through programs running on two different fiscal cycles. This competitively contracted vendor is located in the board of social services building in Somerville and has a long-standing relationship with the CSSA. This arrangement expands their responsibilities while allowing the WIOA vendor to focus on their role, which includes training of co-enrolled WFNJ customers as appropriate. This year the WFNJ vendor also included a separate supportive services budget with their RFP response which we hope will improve outcomes.
- 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.