Local Elected Officials (LEO) Board Meeting
October 29, 2026
3:00PM

Minutes

The Local Elected Officials (LEOs) met on October 29, 2026 at 3:00 p.m. The meeting was held at Camp Glisson located at 690 Camp Glisson Rd., Dahlonega GA 30533 and virtually by zoom at https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86839527573?pwd=scB7qHocZg4n3X1zdD6FQODdCu8BpL.1

Call to Order

Greg James, Chairman of the Local Elected Officials (LEOs), called the meeting to order and thanked everyone for attending. A quorum was not established. Due to the lack of a quorum the meeting started with the reports to allow more time to establish a quorum. The following were present:

Members Present
Greg James, CLEO
Courtney Long (Franklin County)
Travis Turner (White County)
Marshall Sayer (Hart County)
Rhett Stringer (Lumpkin County)
Chris Rickman (Stephens County)
John Walden (Mayor of Dawsonville)

GMRC Staff
Heather Feldman, Executive Director
Gina Kessler, Executive Assistant
Whitney Blair, WorkSource Director
Diane Jackson, Administrative Assistant
Danielle Avelar, Adult/DW Supervisor

Reports / Announcements:

Whitney Blair, WorkSource Georgia Mountains (WSGM) Director, presented an update on WorkSource activities. Ms. Blair reported that regular PY25 funding, which ended in June 2026, totaled $2.2 million. The PY26 allocation increased slightly to approximately $2.3 million. Although funding remained substantially below levels received five or six years earlier, the program received essential level funding compared with the prior year.

Ms. Blair reported that the Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs served 405 occupational skills training participants during PY25 and enrolled 129 new participants. Participants served included students in occupational skills training, individuals receiving case management assistance with job searches, and individuals monitored for one year following completion of training. Eligible training participants received assistance with tuition, books,

supplies, and supportive services, including transportation and childcare. Ms. Blair attributed the reported decrease in participation partly to a conservative enrollment approach intended to ensure sufficient funding for students already enrolled in training.

During PY25, WorkSource expended nearly $553,000 to support students attending occupational skills training. Approximately 25% supported transportation, childcare, and other supportive services, with the remainder applied to tuition, books, and supplies. The median wage for participants who completed training was $18 an hour, and 84% were employed after one year. Ms. Blair noted an increase in participants facing greater barriers to employment during recent months. She reported that program outcomes remained among the highest in the state, although these barriers were reflected to some extent in median wages and one-year employment outcomes.

Ms. Blair reported that the growth and demand list was updated to align with the latest list from the Governor's office. The list is reviewed every few years to determine whether occupations should be added or removed and is kept broad to connect as many training programs as possible with eligible occupations. It was also shared with stakeholders at the Department of Labor, Employment Services, Georgia Department of Economic Development, and the Technical College system. The only change was the addition of hospitality, reflecting tourism's significant role in regional employment.

The online screening tool introduced the previous year continued to support effective intake and outreach, particularly during periods when the program maintained a waiting list. Ms. Blair encouraged members to refer prospective participants to the screening tool on the WorkSource website. Staff use the information submitted to discuss available services and program suitability with prospective participants. The tool helped reduce ineligible or premature applications and improved intake efficiency.

Ms. Blair reported continued growth in demand for short-term training, including CDL-A training through Dalys and other providers. WSGM continued to identify and promote short-term programs responsive to job seeker and employer needs. The partnership with Arrendale Transition Center, NGTC, and Kubota continued to provide training and employment opportunities for women at the center. The ninth Cohort focused on welding to meet Kubota’s needs. Participants began full-time employment at Kubota during training and became eligible for raises upon earning certifications. The partnership had helped 90 women prepare for manufacturing employment. Ms. Blair reported that each $1 invested in WIOA funding generated approximately $8.10 in economic value through sustained employment.

The 2026 Manufacturing Challenge provided nine graduating seniors from Stephens County with hands-on training and advanced manufacturing career opportunities. Conducted in partnership with North Georgia Technical College, the two-week bootcamp included 80–90 hours of technical and career-readiness instruction covering OSHA 10, forklift operation, blueprint reading, precision measurement, Lean Manufacturing, safety, First Aid/CPR, teamwork, resume development, and interview preparation. Participants toured local manufacturing facilities, explored technical education opportunities, and met with employers regarding employment, internships, and apprenticeships. All nine participants completed the program, resulting in a 100% completion rate, and earned industry-recognized credentials and skills to support entry into manufacturing careers.

Ms. Blair reported that, in 2025, GMRC used State Apprenticeship Expansion Fund (SAEF) resources to expand Registered Apprenticeships and establish a four-county pre-apprenticeship pipeline in partnership with employers, training providers, and the Technical College System of Georgia. The initiative strengthened the regional talent pipeline and prepared individuals for high-

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demand, long-term careers. The project received a NADO Impact Award, marking the organization's sixth consecutive award.
In January 2026, WSGM received an additional $500,000 SAEF grant to promote apprenticeships and provide funding to regional employers. Ms. Blair reported that only five areas in Georgia received this funding and that the state sought to register 500 apprentices by the end of June. Slightly more than $250,000 of the award had been expended. Staff continued encouraging regional employers to convert existing in-house training into registered apprenticeships to access available funding.
Ms. Blair reported that state monitoring for PY25 would begin shortly and would cover both program and financial operations. PY24 monitoring was completed in December 2025 with no findings or observations. She also reported that WIOA was pending reauthorization at the federal level and identified H.R. 8210, the *Stronger Workforce for America Act of 2026*, as the proposed legislation. As described in her report, the proposal would update program requirements, increase accountability, and emphasize employer-driven training and measurable employment outcomes.
Ms. Blair noted that Georgia Mountains remained one of the few areas in Georgia providing most WorkSource services in-house. She expressed appreciation for the staff's continued commitment to participants and the region during a period of uncertainty and acknowledged their contribution to the program outcomes presented.
Ms. Blair thanked Board members for their support of WorkSource and the Regional Commission and invited members to contact staff for assistance or additional information.

Ms. Blair shared a success story and appreciation email written by a participant that received assistance attending North Georgia Technical College for the Nursing Program. The customer was a mother of 8 children under the age of 18.

Consideration of Minutes

Due to lack of quorum minutes were not considered.

Adjournment

Chairman James adjourned the meeting at 3:30 p.m.

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Greg James, CLEO

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