WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD
EMPLOYMENT CONNECTION COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, August 27, 2026

Employment Connection Committee (ECC) Members Present: Esbeydy Ruvalcaba-Vice Chair, Michelle Engel-Silva, John Werner, Krishna Adams, Aleyda Montenegro, Michelle Miller-Galaz, Tami Olson, Victoria Guzman, Paul Prado, Larriann Torrez, Jacky Bader, Mary Alice Escarsega-Fechner

Employment Connection Committee (ECC) Members Absent: Teri Dobson, Jean Cardenas, Mary Rodarte, Misty Bond

1. **CALL TO ORDER**: Esbeydy Ruvalcaba-Vice Chair called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m.

2. **PUBLIC COMMENT**: Esbeydy Ruvalcaba-Vice Chair called for public comments; none were presented.

3. **CONSENT ITEMS**
   a. Employment Connection Committee Meeting Minutes
   Approve May 14, 2026, Committee Meeting Minutes

   Motion by Tami Olsen, seconded by Michelle Miller-Galaz, to approve the Consent Items, The Motion carried by unanimous vote.

4. **GUEST SPEAKERS**
   a. Porterville Development Center
   Jacky Bader, Supervisor of Academic Instruction, presented an overview of Porterville Developmental Center (PDC), a state-operated facility serving court-referred adults with intellectual developmental disabilities and complex support needs.

PDC offers education, high school diploma pathways, competency restoration, career technical training, and paid vocational experience in printing, woodworking, upholstery, landscaping, and culinary arts.

Ms. Bader highlighted employment opportunities in healthcare, education, social services, skilled trades, and support services. Openings are available through CalCareers. The WIB partnership will support recruitment and connect individuals transitioning out of PDC with workforce services.

b. Careers in Care Hub

Staci Chastain, HHSA Deputy Director of Public Health Operations, introduced the Careers in Care Hub, a resource connecting job seekers to local healthcare employers, career opportunities, and pathways into essential healthcare careers.

Larissa Alvarado, Director of Career Pathways with True North Health Works, discussed using the Hub in career coaching, classrooms, and career events. An adult-school pilot involving approximately 60 students received positive feedback.

Planned improvements include career-ladder information, expanded classroom use, and educator outreach. Partners were encouraged to promote the Hub using available flyers, QR codes, and social media materials.

5. PARTNERSHIP ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION: Partners shared updates on services and activities.

6. ONE-STOP OPERATOR ITEMS

a. Partner Action Items & Deadlines

Partners were asked to update their Partner Guide entries, Partner-at-a-Glance information, Training Navigators, and referral contacts through the emailed electronic form. Each organization should identify at least two referral contacts for backup coverage.

Updates were requested by September 30, 2026, with flexibility if needed. Referral contacts were encouraged to attend Employment Connection onboarding.

b. Fiscal Year 2026-27 Infrastructure Funding Agreement Timeline

Most signatures had been received for the Infrastructure Funding Agreement covering co-located partners in Visalia and Porterville. The target completion date was September 14, 2026, followed by distribution of the executed agreement and reconciliation of prior-year and current-year agreements.

c. AJCC Certification

The AJCC certification process for the Dinuba, Porterville, Visalia, and Tulare Employment Connection Centers was scheduled to begin October 19. 2026. The review will address WIOA requirements, accessibility, equal employment opportunity, partner MOUs, service delivery, and continuous improvement. Independent reviews, site visits, and partner input will be included.

7. INFORMATION/DISCUSSION ITEMS

a. WIB Executive Director Report

Jennie C. Bautista provided a federal budget update, noting that forward funding generally protects current workforce operations from immediate budget delays.

The WIB will begin the two-year modification of the 2025-2028 local and regional plans, incorporating labor market data, state priorities, and stakeholder input. David Schinder will facilitate input sessions. An internal kickoff was scheduled for December 9, 2026, with stakeholder meetings to follow.

Ms. Bautista introduced Miriam Vasquez, Career Services Analyst, and Diego Lopez, Youth Services Analyst. She recognized Mary Rodarte's 35 years of service and announced her planned retirement on September 18, 2026. She also introduced the importance of artificial intelligence literacy in workforce services.

b. Employment Connection Integrated Workgroup Update

i. Training & Professional Development

The workgroup resumed implementation of the 2026-2028 Professional Development & Training Plan, researched training resources, and launched the Training Navigator Model.

Next steps include confirming Training Navigators and developing training in four areas: Communication with Success, Advanced Customer Service, Practical Trauma-Informed Service, and Cross-Training & System Knowledge. Training Navigator responses were due September 30, 2026

ii. Partner Relationship Building
The updated EC System Overview & Cross-Training was launched. Updates to the Partner Guide, At-A-Glance resources, and Single Points of Contact continued.

Next steps include reconvening the workgroup and expanding cross-training and networking opportunities to strengthen partner communication and knowledge of services. Partner updates were due September 30, 2026

iii. Customer Experience & Referral Data Collection & Use
The workgroup continued implementing the Referral Guide and Process Map and launched the Partner Referral Customer Survey. Erika Bentancourt became Workgroup Lead.

Next steps include reviewing survey results, establishing referral performance metrics, and identifying service gaps and improvements. The workgroup will determine which data best supports ECC and partner decision-making.

c. Innovators by Design (IBD)
Nicola Wissler provided an update on the Innovators by Design Conference, scheduled for October 7, 2026, from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Visalia Convention Center.

The conference will focus on innovation and regional partnerships. Keynote speaker Dr. Saul Jimenez-Sandoval, President of Fresno State University, will present *Strengthening the Valley Together: Expanding Opportunity Through Partnership.*

d. Business Services Updates
Ryan Leasure reported that recruitment events drew 8,648 attendees and 230 employers, with 1.174 job openings and 760 positions filled.

Events included the Tulare Count Job Fair, Visalia Economic Development Corporation, Healthcare, and Porterville College job fairs, along with Job Connect events in Visalia and Porterville.

Sector partnership efforts continued in industry engagement, career healthcare pathways, and agriculture.

e. Employment Connection Centers and OSO Reports
Reports were provided as handouts.

8. ECC MEETING DATES – 2026

November 12. 2026

9. GOOD OF THE ORDER/ADJOURN

There being no further business, Vice Chair Esbeydy Rubalcaba adjourned the meeting at 11:31 a.m.