## Northern Middle Tennessee

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name of Entity | Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Development Board |
| Featured Partners | 1. WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth 2. WIOA Title II Adult Education 3. WIOA Title III Wagner-Peyser 4. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Families First |
| Highlighted Features of the Integrated System | 1. [Co-Location](#_Co-Location) 2. [Integrated Functions: Reception, Intake, and Resource Rooms](#_Integrated_Functions:_Reception,) 3. [Co-Enrollment](#_Co-Enrollment) 4. [Unified Business Services](#_Unified_Business_Services) 5. [MOU and Cost Sharing Agreement](#_MOU_and_Cost) 6. [Shared Data](#_Shared_Data) 7. [Regular All Partner Staff Meetings and Cross-Training](#_Regular_All_Partner) |
| Point of Contact | Marla Rye, Executive Director at [mrye@workforceessentials.com](mailto:mrye@workforceessentials.com) |

The [Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Development Board](https://nm-wb.com/) (NMT) coordinates workforce development services for a 13-county area that ranges from booming Nashville to rural counties of less than 10,000 people that together comprise over one-third of Tennessee’s workforce. In addition to Nashville’s huge country music scene, this economically vibrant area is home to many companies such as LG, Beretta, Nissan, Under Armor, and Hancock Tires. Strong manufacturing, logistics, healthcare, construction, retail, and hospitality sectors created one of the lowest unemployment rates in the state (2.7 percent) prior to COVID-19.

NMT has a long history of co-location going back to the late 1990s, which gave partners a strong basis of knowledge and trust to take service integration to the next level after passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Enhanced co-location, co-enrollment, cross-functional teams, streamlined program administration, and cost sharing [with co-located partners sharing costs of the AJCs and One-Stop Operator (OSO)] have improved access to and outcomes from services.

This case study will describe [major integrated design features](#_Northern_Middle_Tennessee’s) from the customers’ point of view, then explore [key systems that support integrated services](#_Systems_that_Support), [how and why these came to be](#_Looking_Back:_How), [what difference they’re making](#_Impact), and some [advice for replication](#_Peer_Advice_for).

### Northern Middle Tennessee’s Integrated Service Design Features

#### Co-Location

NMT has four comprehensive AJCs in each of the four of the largest counties and smaller affiliate or specialized AJCs in the remaining nine counties. WIOA Title I and TANF are located in all of the smaller AJCs, and one of the specialized centers is located just outside of Fort Campbell, where Title I and Jobs for Veterans staff provide assistance to the 400 soldiers who transition to civilian life each month. The comprehensive centers bring together more partners, as the following chart (showing the major co-located WIOA partners) shows:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Clarksville, Nashville, Gallatin, and Murfreesboro Comprehensive AJCs: Co-Located Partners | Full Time | Part Time |
| WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth | X |  |
| WIOA Title II Adult Education | X |  |
| WIOA Title III Wagner-Peyser | X |  |
| WIOA Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) |  | X |
| TANF Families First | X |  |
| Other: UI, RESEA, SNAP E&T, SCSEP, Job Corps, Community Partners |  | X |

Going beyond required partnerships to include Job Corps recruiters and various community service agencies in the AJCs enhances customer service and cuts down on costs for all partners. NMT also partners with community colleges to bring vocational training classes into the AJCs in more rural counties without a community college campus close by.

#### Integrated Functions: Reception, Intake, and Resource Rooms

In the comprehensive AJCs, the OSO staffs the welcome desk; performs intake and triage to understand customers’ needs, barriers, and priority of service status; helps them register or sign in to Tennessee’s case management system (GeoSolutions Virtual One-Stop) at a kiosk; and assists them in the resource room with basic services that don’t require an eligibility determination or with a referral to the appropriate program case manager. The American Job Center branding is on all materials, signage, and name badges, so customers see the staff as part of one AJC system. Costs for the OSO function are shared between the partners in the AJC.

#### Co-Enrollment

NMT has a formal [co-enrollment policy](https://nm-wb.com/images/Co-Enrollment_of_Participants_in_AJC.pdf) that encourages all partners to co-enroll where they share target populations as a way to expand services available to customers and extend the reach of each program’s limited funding. NMT specifically targets co-enrollment of TANF participants in WIOA Title I Adult Services and/or Title II Adult Education to improve outcomes by enhancing access to education and training that can lead to a livable-wage job and a successful transition off time-limited cash assistance. NMT also seeks to co-enroll individuals working on their HiSET (high school equivalency) diploma in WIOA Title I youth services, to be able to offer cash incentives to those who pass their HiSET exam (show skill gains and get a credential).

#### Unified Business Services

Each AJC has a unified Business Services Team with each partner represented. The AJC Business Services Teams focus on working with employers to meet their employment/placement needs, typically via traditional labor exchange functions, referrals, and job fairs. The team structure enables all partners to coordinate employer outreach to make sure different programs are not knocking on the same employer’s door. The Business Services Teams track impact by looking at the number of contacts made and repeat business.

The NMT board also has a business services team comprised of economic development and workforce development staff who focus on incumbent worker training, apprenticeship, layoff aversion, rapid response, and Workforce Essentials’ fee-for-services offerings. Any AJC Business Services team can pull in a business services team member from the board, as needed, if a business is interested in those services.

### Systems that Support Integrated Partner Service Delivery

#### MOU and Cost Sharing Agreement

NMT’s [Memorandum of Understanding](https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:75415bf2-661a-45e0-980e-eb3eaff0f374#pageNum=97) (MOU) identifies and outlines partner roles and responsibilities related to integrated service delivery, including the cross-functional teams previously described for staff involved in the welcome/resource room and business services functions, as well as skills/career management (intensive and training services). These teams provide a structured way for partners to share information, address challenges, and work toward mutually-beneficial projects and improvements.

The one-stop operating agreement divides shared costs among physically co-located partners based on the number of FTEs each has in the AJC. Shared costs include rent, technology, facility maintenance, security, AJC branded materials, and the OSO. The OSO is responsible for the welcome function, property management, performance tracking and reporting, staff cross training, and overseeing cross-functional teams and partnership activities. NMT works to reduce costs to each partner by bringing additional community-based partner tenants into the AJC.

#### Shared Data

Several partners use GeoSolutions’ Virtual One Stop (VOS) system for case management and data sharing: WIOA Title I, Title II Adult Education, and Title III Wagner-Peyser. TANF and Vocational Rehabilitation have separate case management systems that are not linked to each other or the VOS system and require separate data entry for co-enrolled clients. While this is far from ideal, NMT has developed strategies to improve systemwide data collection and sharing and to reduce the burden of duplicative registration steps for customers.

The welcome team uses a paper form to collect basic triage/intake information, which the customer, if referred, takes to the case manager, so that customers do not have to provide that information twice.

The welcome team signs everyone up in the VOS system, so NMT captures basic information on all AJC clients. The OSO tracks referrals and outcomes to populate a performance dashboard for the system.

TANF Family First staff developed an electronic referral system for WIOA Title I (using Salesforce) that allows Family First case managers to send, with a push of a button, basic TANF intake and eligibility information (such as client needs, background, education, and barriers) and proof of SNAP or TANF eligibility from the DHS system to WIOA Title I case managers. Customers receiving SNAP or TANF are eligible for WIOA Title I services, so this system streamlines the eligibility determination and intake process for the customer and case managers. TANF case managers can send this information if they initiate the co-enrollment, or Title I case managers can request this information to complete a client’s Title I eligibility, removing the burden of proving they are receiving TANF or SNAP benefits from clients.

The partners have established agreements on assessment and testing instruments that are acceptable to all partners, and therefore can be shared, accepted, and require less re-testing from co-enrolled clients. All partners use [O\*NET](https://www.onetonline.org/) for career assessments. Title I, Title II Adult Education, and TANF all use the TABE test to assess academic proficiency and progress.

#### Regular All Partner Staff Meetings and Cross-Training

All staff participate in quarterly cross-training coordinated by the OSO so that everyone stays familiar with all of the partner programs and can answer questions and make appropriate referrals. This includes the Welcome Team and Business Services Teams (along with a Case Management Team). Program leaders meet monthly to share information and work on joint projects such as food distribution events, outreach campaigns, and distribution of laptops to 750 adult education, TANF, and WIOA Title I students who had no way to attend class virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic. Program managers also meet quarterly to review the infrastructure funding agreement and expenditures and adjust if needed.

These meetings help keep everyone informed, focused on big, mutually-beneficial goals, and positioned to identify opportunities for improved services. For example, when a local automotive plant shut down, cross-trained WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker staff were able to work with the dislocated workers and offer TAA services. Co-enrolling participants allowed NMT to provide on-the-job training – something the state TAA program could not offer on its own, as the State has no mechanism to provide payments directly to an employer.

### Looking Back: How and Why Did Local Partners Come Together?

NMT has been working at co-location and service integration for more than two decades. The area began with a co-location pilot in a single county in the late 1990s, so they have a history of working out of a single location.

With the passage of WIOA, NMT cites several factors that pushed them beyond co-location and toward greater service integration.

The state of Tennessee laid out a vision for integrated service delivery through comprehensive AJCs and aligned their work and policies in support. They, for example, created a comprehensive state WIOA plan and included TANF as a mandatory partner. The state also established policies around cross-functional teams and tracking co-enrollments, which ensures local areas are focused on co-enrollments. NMT reports that this state-level vision and common messaging pushed them to bring partners together, particularly the new state-required TANF partner, to figure out how to make this integrated vision real.

NMT’s area enjoyed a very low unemployment rate. As a result, those who were unemployed had significant barriers to employment, which required the partners to work together to be successful.

Finally, the required MOU and cost sharing agreement increased participation because, according to Workforce Essentials Vice President of Family Services Natalie McLimore, “Everybody realized if we’re really going to do this we have to come together and be an active partner, and not just a paper partner.” NMT had MOUs before, but at a much higher level. Now, the MOU is very specific and shows each partner’s role and expectations for cross-cutting functions like the teams and partner meetings.

Prior to WIOA, a consortium of partners acted as the OSO. Creation of a separate OSO with responsibility to manage and oversee cross-cutting activities and some authority to address challenges was new.

The biggest challenge was taking the time to show the benefits to each partner. Board Executive Director Marla Rye notes there is a big difference between co-location and integration, but that co-location over a long period of time allowed partners to get to know each other, build trust, and identify shared customers and mutually beneficial goals. These years of co-location in NMT paved the way for the partners to make the leaps expected under WIOA relatively quickly.

### Impact

Co-location offers important cost savings to partners, as well as benefits to customers. As Natalie McLimore, Vice President of Family Services for Workforce Essentials points out: “When you’re serving individuals with more barriers, the fastest way to get them to the successful end goal is to have everything in a one-stop shop and they don’t have to go to six places across town when they already have transportation issues.” Customers can do job search, job readiness workshops, education and training, and interviews in one location.

*“There is a reason that you are in workforce development, and it’s not to get rich. It’s to help people. I believe that the more people you can have on the same page working towards a common goal, the better off that you…and your customers are. And that should be the driving force in everything we do – to make a difference in people’s lives and help people go to work.”*

~ Marla Rye, NMT Executive Director

Offering Adult Education HiSET (GED) classes and testing in some of the AJCs allows adult education students to interact with job seekers and employers in a professional setting and not in the school system where they have already failed once. And now – in more rural areas that do not have a community college campus – the community college is offering training in the AJC, making it easier for customers in these rural counties to upgrade their skills in high-demand occupations like LPN, mechatronics, and industrial maintenance technician. For students completing their HiSET diploma, these on-site post-secondary classes provide a seamless transition into higher education and building a career – all within the space they have become accustomed to.

### Peer Advice for Replication

NMT credits the shared performance measures under WIOA as a primary driver in their collaborative system-building work. WIOA aligns measures across core partners and NMT opted to adopt the same measures for TANF participants as well (in addition to the TANF-required measures). A local performance dashboard keeps the partners focused on their shared performance measures and helped the partners overcome turfism by dispelling worries that customers might be worse off, or programs might not get credit for outcomes.

To bring partners together, partners must see the “what’s in it for me.” NMT staff point to shared customers, increased foot traffic, and improved outcomes for all partners. For example, in NMT, people receiving TAA/TRA services typically were not co-enrolled in any other programs because TAA/TRA provides generous funding for training and cash payments. However, case managers recognized that TAA/TRA provides very limited supportive services, so NMT began to co-enroll all TAA/TRA customers in the WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker program. Customers got a greater array of services and both programs got credit for outcomes — a win-win. (This co-enrollment requirement has since become a federal requirement.)

NMT stresses that this takes time – to grow trust, overcome bumps, and work out collaborative, win-win solutions. Board Vice President of Program Services Andrea Dillard, who oversees the AJCs, is honest about some of challenges along the way for NMT: “Remember that musical group Blood Sweat and Tears? We had lots of them!” From disputes over who controls the thermostat in the AJC to concerns over the way Incumbent Worker Training funds were allotted, NMT’s collaborative approach to problem-solving helped the partners develop better procedures that had more buy-in. And those successes built more buy-in and trust in the collaborative process.

Focusing on shared outcomes, demonstrating with small successes that partners can share customers and get more positive outcomes, and taking lots of time to grow trust and work out collaborative, win-win solutions will — over time — be effective.

*This case study is part of a larger series developed for the Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration’s Chicago Regional Office, which explores how and why local workforce partners came together in six local workforce areas and the difference it is making in those areas. See this ION Community of Practice* [*Resource page*](https://ion.workforcegps.org/resources/2021/04/21/20/58/OneStopPartnershipCaseStudies) *for more information and the full set of case studies.*