



New Jersey State Employment and Training Commission

Vacant, Chairman

Philip D. Murphy, Governor

**State Employment and Training Commission
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, December 17, 2025
10am – 12pm
TEAMS Platform**

I. Welcome & Introductions SETC

Interim Director, Keith C. White & Joan Desmarais Deputy Executive Director

Interim Director SETC, Keith C. White called the meeting to order at 10:02 am and welcomed members and guests. In accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act of 1978, notice of this meeting was submitted to the Trenton Times and Star Ledger, shared with the Secretary of State's office and was posted on the SETC website. The roll call was taken and the SETC had a quorum.

Approval of September 17th, 2025, meeting minutes and the 2026 SETC Commission calendars were approved. Joan Desamarais discussed the local approval plans for upcoming 2026-2028. The certifications and upcoming and the two-year WIOA state plans will be due also in 2026. In addition, the SETC is actively working with the Pell Group, along with Assistant Commissioner Leslie Hirsch with the Office of Research Information and collaborating with the Department of Education and the Office of Higher Education. The goal for implementation of this program for July of 2026 is to operate in tandem with the requirement which is aligned with the Omnibus bill act.

II. Perceptions of the Economy: A Survey - Dr. Nicol Nicola, Director, Division of Economic & Demographic Research, Office of Research Information, Department of Labor & Workforce Development

Dr. Nicol Nicola pushed out a survey to the attendees who joined the SETC meeting to gauge the sentiment of how everyone feels the economy is currently under this current administration with the Federal government is handling consumers. Currently, immigration and tariffs are the hot topics. The poll was taken and most felt that our economy is not good.

We are seeing in the poll that workforce development is leading with the most concern. Unaffordable and crushing were the poll words used to describe the sentiment.

Also, there is a huge concern over housing prices.

This means that if a person buys a home now it can take them even longer than usual based on the cost and taking longer nowadays to pay it off.

The poll shows that inflation is a concern based on the survey and that we will get tax credits And have more money in our pocket but this will drive limited supply and inflation and that we will be competing with price increases. As inflation goes up it will challenge the Federal Reserve. The sentiments of people are going down and people feel like more money won't increase the stability long term. People feel like they are doing well but that only tends to be for folks that earn six figures and most people live paycheck to paycheck. Based on this poll it is a concern especially when they have health issues or something breaks in their home or need repairs done etc. One of the polls do show that although the stock market seems to be doing well that the overall economy is not. Seventy percent of people feel it is not good. Over the past year people have felt the economy is declining. If we look at job numbers, they have been growing slower and also the labor market has been softening in New Jersey. We see our unemployment rate is below six percent but that job growth and folks are also reporting prices in food prices and housing supply costs.

Dr Nicol Nicola closed the discussion and the poll and mentioned it is hard to say how the economy will be in the next few years and while we push out policies, it still remains difficult to see the final answer on where the economy will grow and not grow. Lastly, we will remain to keep the inflation reports at the forefront. We also have right now a newsletter and have 50 publications yearly, so please get on our email list to see the most up to date trends and information.

III. **NJ Office of Innovation – “Impact- Activating the Public Presentation”**

Dave Cole, Chief Innovation Officer, New Jersey State Office of Innovation

Mr. Dave Cole with the Office of Innovation opened the discussion surrounding partnerships and the specific partnership that they have made with NJDOL and the SETC. The office has been working on AI services and ways to bring this new technology forward to best serve the departments within the state. Some of the ways our office has helped the NJDOL is by working on unemployment insurance to improve family leave and disability leave. We have worked hard on the applications piece so that they can be better with written questions that make it user friendly and be better with accessibility. In prior years it would take a person four hours to fill out an application, but we have streamlined it to take about thirty minutes. We work with individuals to help develop new technology we work with individuals to improve things which specifically focus on the technology and those state services that will help the users. We bring individuals from around the state departments which knowledge and experience and deep expertise. We want to always remain human centered and to build goals government focused so that we can be efficient.

In the first part of the testing we developed and incorporated AI and marketing campaigns to make sure we reach as many people as possible. The first concrete AI project was with the Department of Labor with Unemployment Insurance. We built forms that are accurate from a legal perspective and have designers recreate the forms so that the communication from a department and information is user friendly when passing the content in ChatGPT, this way

we can get the models to produce some new information to making the generative AI to work for the best way and outcome that the user is trying to get to. We have conducted a lot of research to make sure that the information is reviewed by a human and then we can create a policy and incorporate a review by a real person before we push anything out with AI so that we include the regulations. We understand that the information should be safe and so that there is no bias. The most broad and beneficial programs we have built, as one example, have been working with the Department of Agriculture. This project focused on free school meals and TANF enrollment and other programs. We were able to link the eligible individuals based on information entered.

By way of simplifying things like emails, case management and using AI to find people, we can provide information where the applicant may need benefits. This technology has helped because in some cases the AI is supportive where otherwise the information would be missing. Our focus is the partnerships with all the departments around the state, the projects are benefiting our people around the state that need help in the system.

I also want to highlight we maintain the NJ. Gov website and we have worked with the office of information technology (OIT) to collaborate to help businesses registered faster. By doing so we can help drive the economy faster and move it forward when we collaborate with the other departments. Katie Fiore with the Office of Innovation closed with several key updates and a presentation. Currently, we have a communication lab which is creating a understanding of what type of outreach is being done so we are doing research on what partners NJDOL is using so we can come up with some creative messaging and have started a survey to complete gathering data. The users are mostly Haitian or speak Creole that we are seeing the highest percentage of the users being helped currently. A few key highlights and services by Spanish speaking users were the unemployment system.

One Stops are maintaining the surveys and reporting back to our office so we can collect the data. They are seeing that the respondents are primarily getting information from nonprofits and other areas include information on youth which highlights many users use the phone to reach out and or social media to look for employment including LinkedIn and Instagram. These responses for the surveys are helping so that we can develop a tool kit to show our partners how the outreach is happening currently and how we will use this information to benchmark performance to provide data and tracking. Joan Desmarais with SETC mentioned that there was a great response regarding sharing the information when working with the Office of Innovation and that the surveys were concluded with follow-up needed in the future. Keith C. White thanked both Dave and Katie and mentioned the project was super helpful on how we can make things better.

IV. The Greater Raritan Workforce Development Board: Supporting Job Seekers And Businesses in Hunterdon and Somerset Counties – Paul Grzella, Director, GRWDB

Mr. Paul Grzella, Workforce Development Director of Greater Raritan, opened the discussion about how currently the website has been underway with many features that can serve the public in its best capacity. Currently, the website has many positives features so that it can provide the best resources for our partners and job seekers. We have spent a lot of time building up the website for our community and serving the businesses. We have had good visits on the website and traffic. We have usually two thousand to twenty-five hundred a month on average and see a hike in users after we have a job fair or before.

We cover Hunterdon and Somerset counties and have our own workforce development page and have thousands of followers, which gives us a lot of traction when we post information to understand the needs of the followers which allows us to provide additional feedback to our jobseekers and businesses. We work with vendors and focus on specific programs such as summer youth which we are seeing a high level of traffic with our youth population. Our community outreach specialist does our contract monitoring for our summer youth program and posts on our website which includes our RFP's which scored very well. We also put stories and information on how to apply to RFP and community input. In addition, we allow for a thirty-day comment period and post it on the website, and this helps provide good feedback. We also send out email blasts which on average will go out to six hundred people in the business services pool and the emails consist of our programs and upcoming programs. Also, information such as summaries about the US Department of Labor, to highlight what is happening on a federal level and we are seeing on average about seven hundred readers. Our services also are not always needed so it is important to note that we want to remind the public that we are here when they do need us and we have a lot of great resources to offer. We do include on our website career services and that we are the clearing house of whatever service they need such as a particular training, eligibility process or be sent somewhere that can be of a resource to them.

Our One Stop operator has set up a matrix which speaks to monthly team meetings where anyone can use them for any services within the department and to understand the services. The document can be used by front line staff and job seekers. All our partners and vendors meet once a month. Our training center partners discuss our documents which are posted to ensure that they are developed in a way that can be a better resource and we update the forms as needed. We have also posted our reports as of January of 2025, and we reach out to employers to collect feedback on how they can reach job seekers and provide information about career pathway positions. We identify our needs by having our business services team reach out in our area to business to see what they need and then we have a public notification which anyone can attend and can come to the job fair but that we do ask our local business partners that they should send anyone they know as well looking for a job to have them attend our events.

And lastly, we have our Greater Raritan One Stop Operator upcoming report posted which highlights and has an overview about the Somerset One Stop. They will be hosting a recruitment event on 1/29 from 10am to 12pm. The Workforce Development Board meetings and links which provide the meeting minutes along with information for our job seekers are also on the website. Joan Desmararis thanked Paul Grzella for presenting and closing with this website showcases all the information and is a great resource for employers and jobseekers and can be a tool to mirror for the other Directors. Paul closed with mentioning also the policies and RFPs for vendor services since 2019 are posted for transparency and to show the data of how we reach out to the local area in efficient ways. Keith C. White mentioned that the innovation part and figuring out ways to further help people, whether it be AI and other innovations on our local workforce development board websites can help people benefit in many ways. Fernandel Almanor with the Greater Raritan One Stop mentioned that one of the key outreach tools is that our business service team can send a UI email blast, and we can see a uptick in folks register. This has been a success for our users and helps when the email blast goes out and for all our outreach. The website is very beneficial to the public and we have been successful in helping job seekers.

V. Public Comment – Open

IV. Closing Remarks – Interim Director, Keith C. White SETC

Keith closed out the meeting at asked for a motion to adjourn, the meetings were approved. Keith thanked all the presenters and thanked everyone. We will see everyone at our next SETC Commission meeting on Wednesday March 18th, 2026.

Next SETC Meeting

SETC Commission Meeting on Wednesday, March 18th, 2026

(TEAMS Online Platform)

Present Members and Alternates

Gagliano, John
Idland, Christine
Sarno, John
Vance, Stephens
Jubanyik, Danielle Dr.
Duda, Teri
Nadler, Sally
Debaere, Gregg
Ferrera, Anthony
Trezza, Joanne
Suarez, Jacquelyn
Vierling, Kim

Absent Members

Adelman, Sarah
McMillian-Allen, Angelica
Asaro-Angelo, Robert
Bridges, Brian
Wowkaneck, Charles
Franklin, John
Gacos, Nicholas
Sullivan, Tim
Wilson, McKenzie

Other Attendees

Lamarca, Carlye
Joan Desmarais
Keith C. White
Cinkus, Karen
Nicola, Nicol Dr.
Saa, Silvia
Naik, Umesh
Wear, Samuel
Campbell, Gabriela
Drew, Leslie
Shah, Nimit
Smith, Sandra
Lauridsen, Karen

Lin, Poo
Bicica, John
McClellan, Paul
Polanco, Samantha
Alba, Hector
Macias, Ingrid
Brown, Robert
Masuod, Nahida
Osburn, Nate
Hala, Joanne
Guzman, Ray
Lakshminarayan, Pavithra
Wells, Rob
Althea Ford
Reed, Elizabeth
Robert Croom
Richardson, Ryan
Page-Soncraant, Jeanne
Treacy, Barbara
Marcellus, Judeline
Lorenzo, Christina
Gabriel, James
Hardwick, Jawana

Madrid, Vanessa
Polack_Carol
Murphy, Beth
Plumb, Shakirah
Carroll, Catherine
19087057358
Rodriguez, Ruth
Taylor, Kormasa
Yvette Molina
Cole, Dave
Williams, Anthea
Myers, Mary
Merino, Carlos
Wilson, JaNea
Gehrke, David
Brack, Kidiecia
Arango, Oswaldo
Taylor, Yolanda
Gardner, Soraya
Timian, Jason
12016698378 (Unverified)
Paquette, Kathleen
Compere, Yousena

Andrea Levandowski
Baer, Jessika
Adams, Jamee
Darvalics, Erin
Cassidy, Thomas
Ludizaca, Raul
Paz, Diane
Rodgers, Beth
Ivanov, Iliana
Carvajal, Allyson
Almonor, Fernandel GR One-Stop Operator
Samantha Pfeiffer
Catherine Starghill
Ochse, Maureen
Armour, Iesha
Jez, Craig
Sarria, Carolina
Lindo, Angelica
Vankampen, Mark
Parasnis, Eesha
Fiore, Katie
Corrado, Evanthia
16092403164 (Unverified)
Paul Grzella

