Smart Start™
Each Child. Every Community.

The North Carolina Partnership for Children
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
March 17, 2026, 10 a.m. – 12 noon

MISSION: Advance a high quality, comprehensive, accountable early childhood system that benefits each child in North Carolina beginning with a healthy birth.

Members Present: Charles Bowman – Chair, Russ Altenburg, Kevin Austin, Renee Bethea, Cassandra Brooks, Angela Boykin, Tembila Covington, Madison Downing, Karson Hallow, Sherry Heuser, Betty Kennedy, Dr. Lori Langdon, Page Lemel, Rebekah Leonard, Dr. Shivani Mehta, Dr. Laurie Stradley, Dan Tetreault, Dr. Khadijia Tribié Reid, Laurie Urland, Candace Witherspoon, and Paula Yost

Members Absent: Yvonne Copelend, Dr. Anthony Jackson, Aaron Merchen, Dr. Mary Olvera, and Dr. Ereka Williams

Others in attendance: Amy Cubbage, Christine Bauer, Joseph Brownlee, Katie Landi, Safiyah Jackson, other NCPC staff, and Maura Pherson – recording secretary. Guests joined: Mary Sonnenberg, LPAC Chair and Sharon Bell Deputy Director of Division of Child and Family Welfare.

Call to Order and Establish Quorum
The North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc. (NCPC) Board of Directors (Board) met on March 17, 2026 via video conference. Chair Bowman called the meeting to order. The presence of a quorum was established.

Connect to the Mission: Highlights of the Upcoming 2026 Smart Start Annual Conference
Amy Cubbage provided an overview of the Smart Start Annual Conference.

Agenda and Consent Agenda
A motion was made by Page Lemel and seconded to accept the agenda. **Motion carried.**

A motion was made by Page Lemel and seconded to accept the consent agenda. The chair and NCPC president set the agenda. Any member may add items to the agenda.

- Minutes of January 27, 2026 Meeting
- Committee Roster, Appointments and Vacancies
- Conflicts of Interest
- Acceptance of State Audit Report

Motion carried. Russ Altenburg abstained.

NCPC Financial Reports
The Board reviewed the Financial Reports for grants and contracts, private funds, and cash flow.

1. Summary of each grant, contract, and notes related to the period from July 1, 2025, through January 31, 2026.
2. Year-end financial statements, including the Balance Sheet and Statement of Revenues and Expenses for FY2026 in addition to a graphical representation of both.
3. Summary of the cash balances as of January 31, 2026.

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A motion was made by Sherry Heuser on behalf of the Finance & Audit Committee to accept the NCPC FY2026 Financial Reports. **Motion carried.**

Finance & Audit Committee Charter
At its March 6, 2026 meeting, the Finance & Audit Committee reviewed and made changes to its charter. Previous revisions were made in March 2022. The Committee reviewed the charter's suggested revisions. While there are no high risks, significant gaps were identified in the review of the existing charter. The suggested revisions are based on analysis of nonprofit, best practices and NC regulatory requirements for nonprofits.

The Committee suggested the following revisions to strengthen the Finance & Audit Committee Charter for NCPC:

II. Members

Add: At least one member of the Committee should have financial expertise (e.g., CPA, CFO experience, or comparable financial management background). The Board of Directors recommends a member of the Board for appointment to the Committee complying with this requirement or recruit and appoint a non-board member financial expert to serve on the committee, in compliance with the current Guidelines for Non-Board Member Representation on NCPC Board Committees.

IV. Responsibilities #7

Review the ~~Fiscal~~ Accountability Plan, Penalty Policies, and Local Partnership Program Match ~~and the Fundraising Report~~.

#12

Add: "If the NC Office of State Auditor is not the entity performing the audit or has not contracted the audit with another audit firm of their choice, the Committee will advise the President and/or Chief Financial Officer, or a designee, in the process of selecting the audit firm to conduct the NCPC annual financial audit. The Committee shall oversee a periodic competitive review of the audit firm (generally, at least every 5-7 years) to ensure independence and quality."

Add: "The Committee can meet in executive session with the external auditors at least annually, without staff present, to discuss audit findings and concerns."

#16

1. Oversee the Corporation's compliance with NCPC's policies related to c~~C~~onflict of ~~I~~interest, c~~C~~ode~~-~~ of~~-~~ e~~E~~thics, and w~~W~~histleblower activities~~Policies~~, or related policies of similar purpose. The Committee shall review compliance with the organization's Whistleblower Policy and Records Retention and Destruction Policy annually.

#17

2. ~~Review the annual Local Partnership Compliance Report.~~

Reporting Enhancements #20

Add: "The Committee shall provide the Board with written reports summarizing financial oversight activities, audit results, and risk assessments at least annually."

A motion was made by Sherry Heuser and seconded to approve the revisions to the Finance & Audit Committee Charter. **Motion carried.**

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President & Executive Team's Update
Smart Start Modernization
NCPC held several conversations with Board members regarding modernization of the Smart Start network since the September Board Retreat and January Board meeting. Board members were invited to reach out for additional opportunities for discussion, and this topic will continue to be a part of various conversations over the coming months. NCPC is considering several consultants to help with the design of modernization.

There is not enough funding to meet the unmet needs of all young children in the state. Expenses are rising faster than revenue. For survival, Smart Start must change. Phase I is to determine the unknowns and if costs are too great for certain changes. Decision rights for individual organizations' structure will lie with the local partnerships.

Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Request for Application (RFA)
Safiyah Jackson provided an overview of DCDEE's RFA opportunity for federal funding of child care resource and referral "core services," including technical assistance to providers to improve quality and resource and referral services to families.

Smart Solutions Journey Workgroup
A workgroup has been formed, co-led by Safiyah Jackson and Mary Sonnenberg, to find new ways to balance the high-level mandate of the network Accountability Plan with the on-the-ground reality of implementation and capacity as the network identifies challenges - and recommends changes - with the new Smart Solutions journey, including the Smart Solutions, as well as the contract activity descriptions and data collection and reporting of those solutions.

Public Policy Update and Board Toolkit
Amy Cubbage provided public policy updates, including the plan for a breakfast this spring with legislators to share information about Smart Start, and an overview of the toolkit available on the Board Site.

Local Partnership Advisory Committee (LPAC)
Betty Kennedy reported that LPAC has set the priorities for the next two years. Smart Start is seeking more flexibility with the 70% mandate for the expenditure of Smart Start state funds for early care and education and a focus on efforts for stabilization in the early care and education system.

Accountability Committee
Page Lemel reported this committee is reviewing the data collected by local partnerships. At the next meeting the committee will reexamine its charter.

Board Development
Madison Downing reported this committee did not meet as there was not a quorum. The next meeting is April 6 where they will review Board member reappointments, advocacy sessions, and peer partners.

Finance & Audit
Sherry Heuser reported that of the 58 local partnership audits, 56 are completed. All audits happen over the same time each year.

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Fund Development
Katie Landi reported this committee has welcomed new committee members. They are reviewing funding opportunities including Book Harvest and Book Abundance. They discussed the adoption and implementation of the Bloomerang customer relationship management system.

Follow-up and Action Items for the Network

- Acceptance of State Audit Report
- Accepted Financial Statements
- Accepted revision to the Finance & Audit Committee Charter
- Review of Executive Team's report of
    - Network Modernization
    - Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Request for Applications (RFA)
    - Smart Solutions Journey Workgroup"
- Review of Public Policy Updates and Toolkit

Adjourn
Having no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:55 a.m.

Submitted by:

DocuSigned by:
CASSANDRA BROOKS
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Cassandra Brooks, NCPC Board Secretary

Date: 6/16/2026 | 12:46 PM PDT

DocuSigned by:
Maura Pherson
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Maura Pherson, Recording Secretary

Date: 6/16/2026 | 3:27 PM EDT