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Nebraska Workforce Development Board Meeting
Friday, September 18, 2026, 9:30a – 12:00p
Nebraska Public Media
1800 North 33rd Street, Lincoln, NE 68503
<https://dol.nebraska.gov/ReemploymentServices/Training/WIOA/NWDB>

Agenda

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Call to order | Bradley Schroeder |
| 2. Roll call | Kelly Flanagan |
| 3. Notice of publication | Kelly Flanagan |
| 4. Approval of June 12, 2026 meeting minutes ¹ | Bradley Schroeder |
| 5. Old business | |
| a. Workforce Pell Update | Erick Carrillo |
| b. Selection of board representatives to the State Rehabilitation Council and the Aging, Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementia Advisory Council | Bradley Schroeder
& Stacey Gydesen |
| 6. New business | |
| a. Board Purpose and Functions Overview | Bradley Schroeder |
| b. Introduction of new board members | Bradley Schroeder |
| c. Alignment Workgroup & Career Pathways Workgroup Updates | Erick Carrillo |
| d. Workforce Development Grant Process Feedback | Bradley Schroeder |
| e. Pathways to Success Toolkit | Tammy Green |
| 7. Next meeting of the Board | Bradley Schroeder |
| 8. Public comment | Bradley Schroeder |
| 9. Adjournment ¹ | Bradley Schroeder |

¹ Requires voice vote.

² Requires a motion and roll call vote.



Nebraska Workforce Development Board

Draft Meeting Minutes

June 12, 2026

Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Center

1800 North 33rd Street, Lincoln, NE 68503

<https://dol.nebraska.gov/ReemploymentServices/Training/WIOA/NWDB>

Agenda item 1. Call to Order

Acting Chair Bradley Schroeder (Brad) called to order the meeting of the Nebraska Workforce Development Board (hereafter referred to as the Board) on June 12, 2026, at approximately 9:00 a.m. at the Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Center, 1800 North 33rd Street, Lincoln, Nebraska 68503.

Agenda item 2. Roll Call

Brad asked Kelly Flanagan to call roll for purposes of establishing a quorum of the Board. Kelly called roll and advised Brad that quorum was established (13 of 21 Board Members attending).

Board Members *attending*

1. Jim Bulkley
2. Joanna Estrada
3. Shannon Grotirian on behalf of Steve Corsi
4. Jim Hansen
5. Thomas Helget on behalf of Sen. Kathleen Kauth
6. Tate Lauer
7. Don Nordell
8. Sara Riffel
9. Brad Schroeder, Acting Chair
10. Keisha Thomas
11. Katie Thurber
12. Kevin Wetuski
13. Courtney Wittstruck

Board Members *not attending*

1. Governor Jim Pillen
2. Senator Kathleen Kauth
3. Steve Corsi
4. Gary Dixon Jr.
5. Lindy Foley
6. Michael Geary
7. Jennifer Sedlacek
8. Paul Turman
9. Lisa Wilson
10. Mark Wright

Also attending were the following members of the Nebraska Department of Labor (NDOL) Board support team.

1. Kathy Cedillo, Program Coordinator, Division of Reemployment Services
2. Kelly Flanagan, Administrator, Division of Reemployment Services
3. Stephanie Geery-Zink, Policy and Grants Management Coordinator, Division of Reemployment Services
4. Joel Green, Agency Legal Counsel, Office of the General Counsel
5. Gerald Pankonin, Attorney, Office of the General Counsel
6. Joseph Tisko, Program Analyst, Division of Reemployment Services
7. Ahtasham Qaisar, Policy Program Coordinator, Division of Reemployment Services

Agenda item 3. Notice of Publication

Kelly Flanagan announced that public meeting notices were published, in accordance with the [Nebraska Open Meetings Act](#), in the Beatrice Daily Sun, Columbus Telegram, Grand Island Independent, Hastings Tribune, Kearney Hub, Lincoln Journal Star, Norfolk Daily News, North Platte Telegraph, Omaha World-Herald, and Scottsbluff Star-Herald. Kelly announced that public meeting notice was also published on the [State of Nebraska Public Meeting Calendar](#).

Agenda item 4. Approval of March 13, 2026 meeting minutes

Brad called the next order of business, which was the approval of the draft meeting minutes from the March 13, 2026, meeting of the Board. The draft minutes from the March meeting were emailed to Board Members on June 10, 2026. The meeting minutes were included in Board Member packets as Handout 1.

Brad opened the floor to Board Members for comment on the draft minutes. Board Members did not comment on the draft minutes. Brad opened the floor for public comment on the draft minutes. Public comments were not provided.

Jim Bulkley motioned to approve the March minutes, as provided, and Joanna Estrada seconded the motion. Members of the Board voted on the motion by acclamation vote. The motion carried unanimously.

Agenda item 5. Approval of May 4, 2026 meeting minutes

Brad called the next order of business, which was the approval of the draft meeting minutes from the May 4, 2026, meeting of the Board. The draft minutes from the March meeting were emailed to Board Members on June 10, 2026. The meeting minutes were included in Board Member packets as Handout 2.

Brad opened the floor to Board Members for comment on the draft minutes. Board Members did not comment on the draft minutes. Brad opened the floor for public comment on the draft minutes. Public comments were not provided.

Courtney Wittstruck motioned to approve the March minutes, as provided, and Katie Thurber seconded the motion. Members of the Board voted on the motion by acclamation vote. The motion carried unanimously.

Agenda item 6. Old Business

a. Workforce Pell Eligible Programs

Labor Commissioner Katie Thurber said Nebraska is ahead of other states in preparing for implementation of Workforce Pell on July 1. Several businesses have signed up to take part in Workforce Pell, directing board members to the letters of support in the board packets. Each board member received a packet of information including forms and policies that are on the website at <https://dol.nebraska.gov/ne-workforce-pell>

a. Medicaid Work Requirements

Craig Steele, contractor with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Medicaid and Long-Term Care, presented Medicaid work requirements. He said Nebraska is the first state to implement new work rules (including school/apprenticeship, in a work program, and community service) in conjunction with receiving Medicaid. Work requirements only apply to those who are eligible for Medicaid under Medicaid expansion. There are about 70,000 people who are enrolled in Nebraska Medicaid expansion. Total Medicaid enrollment is around 336,000. Expansion members include adults aged 19-64, have low income defined as 138% of the federal poverty level, and are U.S. citizens or meet Medicaid immigration rules. Nebraska started enforcing the work requirements on May 1. The expansion members all needed to be contacted to inform them of the new rules. Board members Sara Riffel and Joanna Estrada asked questions regarding how many of the 70,000 expansion members have responded to letters sent about the new work requirements. Steele said no one needed to respond back, but that NDHHS needed to send letters to each person and conduct a member outreach effort through public service announcements and begin a social media campaign. More information on Steele's presentation is available in the board packet.

b. Building Nebraska's Future Workforce: A Statewide Landscape Assessment

Isaac Hill, Division Director at the Nebraska Department of Labor, presented about the Building Nebraska's Future Workforce: A Statewide Landscape Assessment report. The State developed and executed a comprehensive workforce program inventory across state agencies and public post-secondary institutions. Workforce program information, including program names, goals, performance metrics, and funding were collected to map workforce programs to create a clear, organized view of existing programs and initiatives. As part of the process, a survey on the state of workforce development was conducted. The conclusion was that there is untapped potential for Registered Apprenticeships and that labor demand remains high in several service priority sectors. Hill said the workforce system is extensive but fragmented across many agencies, creating navigation challenges for employers and individuals.

c. Nebraska Manufacturing Alliance Credential

Doug Rood, Senior Operations Manager at Collins Aerospace, spoke about the Nebraska Manufacturing Alliance Credential through the Nebraska Manufacturing Advisory Council. He said that NeMAC examined best practice in other industries and created core competencies for manufacturing in Nebraska. They considered the Six Regions-One Nebraska model and engaged all six community colleges to allow for local regional effort with a consistent statewide curriculum. This curriculum has been developed and aligned with Nebraska's industry expectations. There are eight modules to achieve the credential and four of the community colleges have already completed or began teaching the curriculum.

Labor Commissioner Katie Thurber said this is a model of success that we could replicate across the state for different industries. If there are other employers who are interested in this, they should reach out.

d. Nebraska State Apprenticeship Agency

Delta Wilson, Apprenticeship Coordinator at NDOL, presented an update on the Nebraska State Apprenticeship Agency. In answering a question by Joanna Estrada, Wilson said if an employer approached NDOL, already has an apprenticeship in place, but would like to have a Registered Apprenticeship program, the hardest part has already been completed – establishing an apprenticeship program.

Wilson reviewed results of Apprenticeship Week and that the move towards a State Apprenticeship Agency has begun with the passage of LB 847, the Nebraska Registered Apprenticeship Act. She also summarized the advantages of having the SAA in the state, as opposed to having an Office of Apprenticeship. With an SAA, NDOL will provide outreach and education to employers, assist in program creation, and will serve as an intermediary between Nebraska employers/partners and USDOL. The SAA will have direct access to the records in the national database so NDOL personnel can look up information and run reports directly. The next step will be for NDOL apply for SAA recognition from USDOL.

e. Title II and Workplace Literacy

Laura Ruppert, Adult Education Specialist at the Nebraska Department of Education, said her agency works with businesses to determine what their literacy needs are to tailor the learning to the needs. She summarized the workplace adult education and literacy activities as collaborative instructional programs developed with employers or employee organizations, delivered at the workplace or at off-site locations, and designed to improve workforce productivity by strengthening essential adult education and literacy skills. The instruction is customized to employee roles and workplace needs and is geared towards what the employee needs in the workplace, including safety procedures, workplace expectations, and employee benefits awareness. She said the benefits include improving collaboration and teamwork, promoting a safer work environment, and lower turnover while improving job satisfaction. WIOA Title II adult education providers include the six community colleges and Crete Public Schools.

f. Lexington Response Efforts

Erick Carrillo, Reemployment Director at NDOL, told the board about NDOL's response efforts at helping those who lost their jobs from the Tyson plant closure in Lexington. The Rapid Response personnel activated quickly, within two weeks of the plant closure announcement in November. One of the difficulties was finding translators to be able to communicate with those who were going to lose their jobs. Lincoln Literacy and the Lexington High School soccer team were able to translate Spanish, Arabic, and Vietnamese. Of the 3,200 who lost their jobs, 740 participated in Rapid Response activities and 280 registered for NEworks. Carrillo also discussed the Transportation Pilot program to transport former Tyson workers to their new jobs in North Platte. The bus has an average of 75 daily riders to and from Sustainable Beef and the Walmart Distribution Center. He said many of those laid off from Tyson want to remain in Lexington and are trying to find ways to do so.

Agenda item 8. Next meeting of the Board

The next meeting of the Board will take place on Friday, September 18, 2026, from 9:30 a.m. to noon at the Nebraska Media Center, 1800 North 33rd Street, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Agenda item 9. Public comment

Brad opened the floor for public comment.

Carla Stucky Shuck with the Nebraska Department of Education said she was happy to announce that Nebraska was only one of two states that exceeded national targets in the top quartile in performance with the WIOA Title II metrics. She said this is thanks to partnerships across the state and 9,000 students.

Jody Stutzman, Regional Director at Proteus, said that her program is ready to partner with the Title I program.

Jay Ignowski shared information on a new apprenticeship program IBEW 22 is establishing with Heartland Workforce Solutions in Omaha.

Agenda item 10. Adjournment

Brad asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting of the Board. Joanna Estrada motioned that the meeting be adjourned. Courtney Wittstruck seconded the motion. Members of the Board voted on the motion by acclamation vote. The motion carried unanimously. Brad adjourned the meeting at approximately 10:30 a.m.

DRAFT

Nebraska Workforce Development Board

Purpose of the Board

- Strengthen Nebraska workforce system to better serve employers, workers, and communities.
- Improve how workforce programs work together.
- Ensure federally funded and other workforce investments lead to strong, measurable results.
- Support Nebraska's economic growth by helping build a strong, skilled talent pipeline.
- Bring together key workforce partners so the system can meet the goals of WIOA.
- Help Nebraska achieve the goals in the Combined State Plan, which outlines the state's workforce vision, strategies, and priorities.

What the Board Does

- Convenes state, regional, and local workforce partners
- Improves performance and coordination of workforce programs
- Supports employer, jobseeker, and community workforce needs
- Advises on State Plan development and oversight
- Guides statewide workforce priorities

Nebraska-Specific Responsibilities

- Reviews Workforce Development grant proposals
- Advises on Workforce Pell program implementation
- Oversees Alignment and Career Pathways workgroups
- Reviews statewide workforce performance

Board Membership and Structure

- Members are appointed by the Governor
- Board includes business, labor, education, and community representatives
- Chair and Vice Chair appointed by the Governor
- Executive Committee acts between Board meetings
- Committees and workgroups support ongoing initiatives

Transparency and Public Responsibilities

- Meetings follow WIOA Sunshine Provisions and Nebraska Open Meetings Act
- Meetings and minutes must be publicly accessible
- State Plan materials must be posted prior to submission

Member Participation

- Members provide expertise from their sectors
- Help guide statewide workforce strategies
- Review proposals affecting Nebraska's workforce system
- Support continuous improvement of the workforce system

Board Bylaws

- If you cannot attend a meeting, notify the Board support team ahead of time.
- You may send a designee in your place if they have policymaking or hiring authority.
- Board members must follow conflict-of-interest rules outlined in Article V.
- A majority of voting members is required for quorum, which is needed before the Board can vote on any action.



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TO Nebraska Workforce Development Board
Career Pathways Workgroup

FROM Bradley Schroeder, Acting Chair, Nebraska Workforce Development Board

DATE July 17, 2026

SUBJECT Career Pathways Workgroup membership

Brad Schroeder
7/30/2026

Sections II.b. and II.c. of the [Combined State Plan for Nebraska's Workforce System for Program Years 2024 through 2027](#) define Nebraska's two-part statewide goal and strategies for preparing an educated and skilled workforce that meets the needs of employers:

1. selection and prioritization of development of career pathways; and
2. alignment of the state's workforce development system.

In 2021, the Nebraska Workforce Development Board (the Board) established the Career Pathways Workgroup (the Workgroup) to implement statewide goal number 1.

As permitted under Sections 3.1(b) and 6.2 of the Board's bylaws, I hereby appoint the Workgroup Chair and other Workgroup members listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Career Pathways Workgroup membership

First	Last	Workgroup role	Workforce system role	Professional affiliation
Delta	Wilson	Chair	Registered Apprenticeship	Program Coordinator, Reemployment Services Division, Nebraska Department of Labor
Elliott	Cain	Member	Registered Apprenticeship, Reemployment Services Programs, Greater Nebraska Workforce Development Area	Administrator, Reemployment Services Division, Nebraska Department of Labor
Joanna	Estrada	Member	Nebraska Workforce Development Board (business representative)	Talent Acquisition Manager, Valmont Industries
Steve	Fannon	Member	Reentry Services	Assistant Deputy Director – Reentry, Nebraska Department of Correctional Services
Katie	Graham	Member	Career and Technical Education	Administrator/State Director, Nebraska Career and Technical Education, Nebraska Department of Education
Sydney	Kobza	Member	Career and Technical Education	Assistant State Director, Nebraska Career and Technical

First	Last	Workgroup role	Workforce system role	Professional affiliation
				Education, Nebraska Department of Education
Tate	Lauer	Member	Adult Education	Director – Adult Education, Nebraska Department of Education, Office of Adult Education
Erin	Porterfield	Member	Employment and Training, Greater Omaha Workforce Development Area	Executive Director, Heartland Workforce Solutions, Greater Omaha Workforce Development Area
Keisha	Thomas	Member	Nebraska Workforce Development Board (business representative)	Vice President, Human Resources, North End Teleservices
Paul	Turman	Member	Nebraska Workforce Development Board (workforce representative)	Chancellor, Nebraska State College System
Melissa	Weyer	Member	SNAP, State Plan Partner	Program Manager, Children & Family Services, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Lisa	Wilson	Member	Nebraska Workforce Development Board (business representative)	Plant HR Manager, Case New Holland Industrial (CNHI)
Dylan	Wren	Member	Employment and Training, Greater Lincoln Workforce Development Area	Workforce Administrator, City of Lincoln, Greater Lincoln Workforce Development Area



TO Nebraska Workforce Development Board
Alignment Workgroup

FROM Bradley Schroeder, Acting Chair, Nebraska Workforce Development Board

DATE October 23, 2025

SUBJECT Alignment Workgroup membership

Sections II.b. and II.c. of the [Combined State Plan for Nebraska's Workforce System for Program Years 2024 through 2027](#) define Nebraska's two-part statewide goal and strategies for preparing an educated and skilled workforce that meets the needs of employers:

1. selection and prioritization of development of career pathways; and
2. alignment of the state's workforce development system.

In 2021, the Nebraska Workforce Development Board (the Board) established the Alignment Workgroup (the Workgroup) to implement statewide goal number 2.

As permitted under Sections 3.1(b) and 6.2 of the Board's bylaws, I hereby appoint the Workgroup Chair and appoint other Workgroup members listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Alignment Workgroup membership

First	Last	Workgroup role	Workforce system role	Professional title and affiliation
Kim	Neesen	Chair	Employment and Training, Business Services and Partner Collaboration	Program Coordinator, Nebraska Department of Labor
Andrew	Baumgardner	Member	WIOA Title I One-Stop Operator, Greater Nebraska Workforce Development Area	Program Coordinator, Nebraska Department of Labor
Erin	Brandyberry	Member	WIOA Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation, State Plan Partner	Deputy Director of Services, NCBVI
Erick	Carrillo	Member	WIOA Title III Wagner-Peyser, JVSG, TAA, State Plan Partner	Director, Nebraska Department of Labor
Lindy	Foley	Member	WIOA Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation, State Plan Partner, Nebraska Workforce Development Board Member	Director, Nebraska VR Program
Angela	Fujan	Member	WIOA Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation, State Plan Partner	Program Director, Nebraska VR Program

First	Last	Workgroup role	Workforce system role	Professional title and affiliation
Catrina	Gray	Member	Apprenticeship	Area Wide Apprenticeship Director, Central Community College
Julie	Henningsen	Member	SNAP E&T, State Plan Partner	Program Manager II, Office of Economic Assistance, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Billie	Kitcheyan	Member	WIOA Title ID Native American Program	COVID 19 Grant Coordinator, Winnebago Tribe
Tate	Lauer	Member	WIOA Title II Adult Education, State Plan Partner, Nebraska Workforce Development Board Member	State Director, Adult Education, Nebraska Department of Education
Jennifer	Lewis	Member	WIOA Title ID National Farmworker Jobs Program	Eastern Regional Director, Proteus, Inc.
Janelle	Mahood	Member	Labor	Director, Nebraska Department of Labor
Colleen	Plasek	Member	WIOA Title ID Native American Program	Workforce Development Program Director, Ponca Tribe
Richard	Prince	Member	Unemployment Insurance, State Plan Partner	UI Benefits Administrator, Nebraska Department of Labor
Erica	Sanchez	Member	SNAP E&T, State Plan Partner	Program Specialist, Office of Economic Assistance, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Jody	Stutzman	Member	WIOA Title ID National Farmworker Jobs Program	Western Regional Director, Proteus, Inc.
Becca	Tangeman	Member	SCSEP, State Plan Partner	Program Coordinator, Nebraska Department of Labor
Will	Varicak	Member	TANF, State Plan Partner	Program Manager II, Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
DeJuan	Reddick	Member	WIOA Title I Regional One-Stop Operator, Greater Lincoln and Greater Omaha Workforce Development Areas	WIOA Title I Regional One-Stop Operator Manager, Dynamic Workforce Solutions
Dylan	Wren	Member	Employment and training, Greater Lincoln Workforce Development Area	Workforce Administrator, City of Lincoln, Greater Lincoln Workforce Development Area
Melissa	Zeiler	Member	SNAP E&T, State Plan Partner	Program Manager I, Office of Economic Assistance, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services

Evaluation of the Workforce Development Cash Fund Grant Process

Summary of Feedback Submitted:

Committee Structure & Deliberations

- Combine both committees into one review group to simplify the process.
- Allow committees to deliberate without applicants present for candid discussion.
- Provide more structured discussion time before the full Board votes.

Timeline & Process Flow

- Start the grant review process earlier to avoid a compressed timeline.
- Clarify next steps and proposal status for applicants throughout the process.

Funding Strategy & Prioritization

- Ask committees to prioritize proposals within defined funding limits.
- Allow partial funding recommendations when only certain components of proposals meet high standards.
- Consider staged multi-year awards based on project progress and outcomes.
- Explore tiered funding categories for small, mid-size, and large projects.

Evaluation Tools & Criteria

- Use a consistent scoring rubric, possibly a simplified 1–5 scale.
- Share the evaluation rubric or criteria with applicants in advance to improve proposal quality and transparency.

Commissioner Communication

- Provide clearer follow-up from the Commissioner on final funding decisions and reasons for modifications or denials.

Full Text of Feedback Submitted:

Brad Schroeder

I liked the breakout of the smaller evaluation teams, and having the organizations present to us. That was much more effective than just reading from their applications. I think a common scoring sheet would be good. We had one and it was helpful, but maybe we could give them a 1-5 rating or something. And I still think hearing more from the commissioner on the outcome will be helpful.

Michael Geary

1. New process and everyone was on learning curve. Believe it will go smoother in future.
2. Liked that state tried to create an interactive process—groups were able to put best request forward and be heard on importance. Board members were also solicited for their opinions
3. Did not like that process was broken up into two groups (Industry and statewide). Should have one process where it is done in a working meeting as a whole. I believe by combining that state will get a more comprehensive and complete list that truly meets the needs of state with the limited dollars. This can be done in one meeting with all groups getting to make short presentation.
4. Start process earlier—felt like we were under the gun to meet deadline. I believe state had no choice this past year.
5. Question: What is process to follow-up on funds and for accountability of performance?

Sara Riffel

I appreciated being included in the process as a board member - it was a great way to learn about the innovative workforce programs happening across the state and celebrate that work. I also liked that the organizations had a chance to talk about their proposals – so much can be learned from them directly that we wouldn't get from only reading the proposals.

The available funding amount wasn't always clear to the board during the review process, which made it harder to consider proposals and think strategically about which combination would have the greatest impact by geography, industry, and population/priority.

It would also help to build in more board discussion time prior to voting. Since we don't all have expertise across every industry, hearing why other members are considering their vote of yes or no, and talking through what's needed or oversaturated in specific industries, would lead to more informed decisions. Our committee did not engage in these discussions prior to the full board meeting, but maybe the other committee did, and we were supposed to do that in the committee.

Finally, I heard from several applicant organizations who weren't clear on their proposal status, process/next steps, and/or why some organizations presented to the full board and others in committees only. More consistent communication with applicants throughout the process would help. It sounds like this guide will do just that.

Jim Bulkley

I think the process went about as well as could be expected. When you consider the diverse group involved there is no perfect way to make something like this happen. I think the mix of zoom and in person was the right combination to accomplish the goal.

Paul Turman

As I reflected on the process, several observations and recommendations came to mind that may be helpful as you develop guidance for next year's funding cycle.

Committee Deliberations

One of my primary observations relates to the committee review process. Because two separate review committees were established to evaluate applications and develop recommendations for the Commissioner of Labor, I have wondered whether the current interpretation of Nebraska's Open Meetings Act requires those committee deliberations to occur in the same public format that was used this year. I appreciated having representatives from applicant organizations briefly present their proposals and answer clarifying questions. However, once that portion concluded, having applicants remain on the call during committee nominations and discussion limited the level of candid conversation and debate among committee members. There were occasions where more open discussion regarding the relative strengths and weaknesses of proposals would have been beneficial in narrowing the field and refining recommendations.

If the Workforce Development Board's formal meeting is the appropriate venue for public deliberation before recommendations are forwarded to the Commissioner, I certainly understand that requirement. However, if the law provides flexibility regarding advisory committee discussions, it may be worthwhile to explore whether committees could have more substantive deliberations before presenting formal recommendations to the Board. That would likely result in more focused recommendations and a more efficient Board meeting.

Prioritizing Recommendations

Another challenge was the sheer volume of worthy proposals relative to the available funding. As currently structured, nearly every proposal deemed viable advanced to the Board, ultimately representing requests totaling five times the funding available. It may be beneficial to establish funding thresholds or allocation targets for each review committee and ask committees to prioritize proposals within those funding limits. While additional meritorious projects could certainly be acknowledged, providing the Commissioner with a prioritized recommendation that better reflects available resources may make the final decision-making process more manageable.

Partial Funding Recommendations

I also believe the committees should have the ability to recommend partial funding of proposals where appropriate. In other competitive grant programs I have participated in, review panels frequently recommend funding only those components of a proposal that receive the highest evaluation. Applicants are then given the opportunity to either accept a reduced award and adjust the scope of work or decline the funding altogether. Providing the Commissioner with recommendations that include proposed funding levels (not simply fund or do not fund) would offer considerably more useful guidance during final award decisions.

Multi-Year Awards

Several proposals requested substantial multi-year commitments. While I recognize that meaningful workforce initiatives often require multiple years to demonstrate impact, I would encourage consideration of a staged funding approach. Rather than committing the entire multi-year award upfront, projects could receive first-year funding with continuation funding contingent upon satisfactory progress and demonstrated outcomes. This would provide greater accountability while still supporting longer-term initiatives.

Evaluation Rubric

I relied heavily on the evaluation rubric during my review, and I found it to be a useful assessment tool. One observation, however, is that the rubric was not shared with applicants. As a result, several otherwise strong proposals received lower scores from me simply because they did not explicitly address elements that reviewers were instructed to evaluate. Providing the rubric (or at least the evaluation criteria) to applicants in advance would likely improve proposal quality and create greater transparency in the review process.

Tiered Funding Categories

Finally, I wonder whether a tiered award strategy would better accommodate the diversity of proposals submitted. Some proposals represented relatively modest, innovative pilot projects, while others sought transformational investments exceeding one million dollars. Evaluating these proposals within the same competition proved challenging. Establishing funding categories could allow projects to compete against similarly sized initiatives. For example:

- Small Innovation Grants (up to \$200,000) – 5 Awards Annually
- Mid-Size Workforce Implementation Grants (up to \$1 million) – 2 Awards Annually
- Strategic Transformational Investments (greater than \$1 million) – 1 Award Annually

Allocating a portion of the available funding to each category would help ensure promising smaller projects are not overshadowed by large-scale requests while still allowing the state to invest in transformational initiatives.

Overall, I believe the inaugural process was successful and demonstrated the strong interest organizations across Nebraska have in advancing workforce development. With a few refinements, I think the process can become even more effective in future funding cycles.

Pathways to Success Toolkit

Building learner-centered pathways from
education to meaningful employment

A practical framework developed through the ACT
Work Ready Communities initiative

Metropolitan Community College-
Pathways to Career Success

Why this toolkit matters

Learners experience the pathway as one journey, even when services come from many organizations.

The challenge

Even “free” training can remain out of reach when learners must choose between class, income, transportation, or family responsibilities.

The response

Connect education, workforce, employers, and support services around a shared learner experience with clear steps toward a thriving-wage career.



A two-community learning laboratory

MCC and the College of Southern Nevada tested locally driven approaches from December 2023 through December 2025.



Purpose

Expand talent development for underserved and high-priority populations while improving recruitment, enrollment, persistence, and credential attainment. The work that both community colleges is actually impact economic development, employment and reducing poverty. The goals was to provide a toolkit that helped other communities create Workforce Ecosystem.

Supported by ECMC Foundation through the ACT Work Ready Communities initiative.

The pilot produced measurable learner progress

The strongest results show reach, credential attainment, continued education, and improved persistence.

6,060

additional learners
enrolled. Goal was
2000

87%

earned a locally
relevant
stackable credential.
Goal was 70%

98%

continued education
within
one year. Goal was
30%

126%

increase in quarter-
to-quarter
Persistence. Goal was
70%

34% of participants improved their ACT WorkKeys NCRC scores between the first and second assessments. This also addressed the importance of addressing academic foundation gaps while participating in a credential program.

Source: Pathways to Success Toolkit, Measures of Success, p. 3.

Five strategies work as one pathway

Communities can enter the toolkit at any point, but learner success depends on the connections among all five.

1

Align shared goals

2

Leverage resources and funding

3

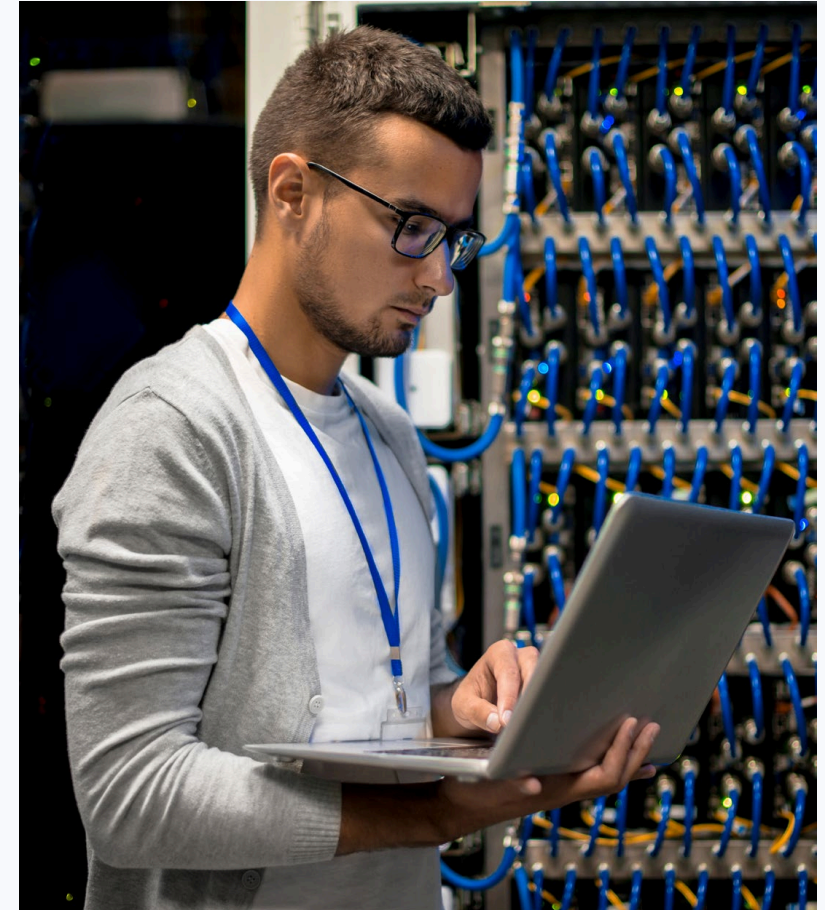
Create tailored education and training

4

Expand community outreach

5

Integrate career and support services



Shared goals turn partnerships into accountable action

The toolkit moves partners from goodwill to defined roles, common measures, and visible progress.



Partnership Canvas

Clarify each partner's goals, value, role, and next commitment.

Employer-education checklist

Connect regional demand with college capacity and employer insight.

Metrics alignment workshop

Agree on progress, retention, placement, and data-sharing measures.

One 30-day action per partner

Braided funding supports the whole learner

The funding strategy coordinates multiple sources while preserving each source's rules, reporting, and intended use.

\$10M

MCC braided funding case study

A small, data-driven pilot grew into a regional initiative by combining public, private, and philanthropic resources around shared outcomes.

Toolkit resources include

- strategic grant alerts
- joint proposal guidance
- braided funding worksheets
- streamlined student access steps



Source: Pathways to Success Toolkit, MCC braided funding case study, p. 54.

Training connects short-term credentials to longer-term mobility

The toolkit helps communities build stackable, employer-informed pathways that recognize where adult learners begin.



Examples of Statewide success--Nebraska Manufacturing Tier 1 and the Logistics IET program.



Community outreach begins with relevance

Effective outreach reflects how people receive information, who they trust, and what questions keep them from enrolling.



The toolkit helps teams

Map community voices and trusted messengers

Build collaborative campaigns and events

Tailor messages to learner priorities

Celebrate milestones with learners and families

Integrated supports protect momentum

A shared intake process and career coaching help learners navigate academic, financial, and personal barriers before they derail progress.

SHARED INTAKE

One coordinated starting point reduces repetition and identifies needs early.

CAREER SKILLS COACHING

A consistent relationship supports decisions, problem solving, and transitions.

ACADEMIC + TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Targeted skill development helps learners meet program and employer expectations.

The goal: fewer handoffs that leave the learner responsible for stitching the system together.

STREAMLINING ACCESS TO BRAIDED FUNDING

1 Map Available Funding Streams

2 Align Eligibility Criteria

3 Establish Centralized Intake

4 Integrate Data Systems

5 Educate Stakeholders

6 Advocate for New Funding

**STREAMLINED
ACCESS**

The toolkit is designed for action

Teams can use one tool in a meeting, facilitate a larger workshop, or adopt the full framework as a community roadmap.

1

**Choose the most
urgent pathway
gap**

2

**Bring the right
partners and
learner voice
together**

3

**Select a tool, case
study, or
workshop guide**

4

**Define measures,
ownership, and a
near-term action**

5

**Review evidence
and refine the
pathway**

Start where your community is ready. Build the connections over time.

Thank you!

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<https://www.workreadycommunities.org/communities/pathwaystosuccess>



Metropolitan Community College- Pathways to Career Success





A pathway works when the learner can see the next step and the system helps them reach it.

Explore the complete toolkit

www.workreadycommunities.org/pathwaystosuccess

Questions and discussion

