

## Nebraska Workforce Development Board

### Draft Meeting Minutes

December 5, 2025

Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Center

1800 North 33<sup>rd</sup> Street, Lincoln, NE 68503

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

#### Agenda item 1. Call to Order

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Acting Chair Bradley Schroeder (Brad) called to order the meeting of the Nebraska Workforce Development Board (hereafter referred to as the Board) on December 5, 2025, at approximately 9:00 a.m. at the Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Center, 1800 North 33<sup>rd</sup> Street, Lincoln, Nebraska 68503.

#### Agenda item 2. Roll Call

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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 (19 of 23 Board Members attending).

##### Board Members *attending*

1. Senator Kathleen Kauth
2. Jim Bulkley
3. Shannon Grotrian for Steve Corsi
4. Gary Dixon, Jr.
5. Joanna Estrada
6. Lindy Foley
7. Michael Geary
8. Jim Hansen
9. Tate Lauer
10. Don Nordell
11. Terri Ridder
12. Sara Riffel
13. Bradley Schroeder, Acting Chair
14. Jennifer Sedlacek
15. Keisha Thomas
16. Katie Thurber
17. Paul Turman
18. Courtney Wittstruck
19. Mark Wright

##### Board Members *not attending*

1. Governor Jim Pillen
2. Steve Corsi
3. Sherla Post
4. Kevin Wetuski
5. Lisa Wilson

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. Peyton McQuay, Administrative Specialist, Office of the General Counsel
6. Joseph Tisko, Program Analyst, Division of Reemployment Services

#### Agenda item 3. Notice of Publication

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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 September 19, 2025 meeting minutes

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Brad called the next order of business, which was the approval of the draft meeting minutes from the September 19, 2025, meeting of the Board. The draft minutes from the September meeting were emailed to Board Members on December 3, 2025. 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.

Paul Turman motioned to approve the September minutes, as provided, and Mark Wright seconded the motion. Members of the Board voted on the motion by acclamation vote. The motion carried unanimously.

#### Agenda item 5. Old Business

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Brad announced that there was no old business for the board to address.

#### Agenda item 6. New Business

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##### a. 2024-2027 Combined State Plan Modification

Brad addressed the Board concerning the submission timeline and meeting schedule for the Program Year 2026 modification of the Combined State Plan, which is due in March 2026. State Plan partners and the modification workgroup will meet several times between now and the March deadline to complete the modification. Board members may submit feedback on the submission timeline and meeting schedule to [ndol.wioa\\_policy@nebraska.gov](mailto:ndol.wioa_policy@nebraska.gov). Board members who would like to attend any of the Modification Workgroup meetings can reach out at the same email address and the Board Support Team will reach out with the time of the meeting and the meeting invite.

##### b. Workforce Development Grant Program Committee Structure

Brad introduced Commissioner of Labor Katie Thurber (Katie). Katie presented to the Board on the proposed Workforce Development Grant Program Committee structure. She stated that NDOL has created a grant application, grant tracking system, and grant webpage to assist the board with soliciting

grant proposals. To streamline the grant review process and assist the full Board in fulfilling the responsibilities as instructed by the Nebraska Legislature, NDOL recommends the Board establish two separate committees that will be tasked with: 1) conducting the initial review of grant proposals, and 2) determining which of those proposals, up to 18 for each committee, will be submitted to the Board for a vote to submit to the Commissioner. It was recommended to establish a Regional Grant Review Committee and an Industry Grant Review Committee with five Board members appointed to each, alongside other individuals appointed from stakeholder partners that can assist the committees in the review of the grant proposals. Only Board members will have voting rights. Grant applications will be assigned to a specific committee based on whether the application is focused on a specific industry or focused on a specific region or have a statewide focus.

Katie said that according to Board Bylaws, grant applications must be submitted by February 1 if they are to be considered for the 2026 calendar year. The committee will have the month of February to meet, review the applications, and choose up to 18 applications per committee to present to the full Board at the March Board meeting. A maximum of 18 applications will be chosen by the Board to move on to consideration by the Labor Commissioner.

Michael Geary asked if there is a scoring sheet available for committee members to use. Katie responded that there is no scoring sheet yet and the board support team welcomes suggestions.

Sara Riffel asked how the board can coordinate available funds across 18 grants. Katie responded that Rea would be presenting on available funds next.

No comments by the public were made in response to the presentation.

Motion on creating a committee structure to consider applications for the Workforce Development Cash Fund was made by Courtney Wittstruck and seconded by Jennifer Sedlacek. The roll call vote was unanimous in favor of the motion. Committees will be appointed by February 2026.

### c. Workforce Development Grant Program Accounting

Brad introduced Chief Financial Officer at the Nebraska Department of Labor Rea Easton (Rea). Rea reported to the Board that \$3.88 million is available for the 2026 Workforce Development Grant Program. She detailed amounts that have been allocated from the fund for current programs and grants, including the Rural Veterinary programs, the 2025 Workforce Development Grant Program, the Manufacturing Modification grant program, and Good Life, Great Careers. There is an anticipated \$2.7 million shortfall for the programs as of December 2025, however \$6.5 million is expected to come in, depending on economic factors, to make up for the shortfall in the future.

After Rea's presentation, Jim Bulkley asked for more information regarding the Elite 11 program. Katie provided a brief description of the program. The Elite 11 is a scholarship program to encourage veterinary students to return to the state and work in production animal veterinary medicine in rural communities for eight years.

Michael Geary asked why funds are being transferred from the workforce development cash fund to the general fund if there is an anticipated shortfall. Rea responded the transfers are legislated in LB246 and LB265.

Joanna Estrada and Brad Schroeder asked clarifying questions on the amount of funds available in the cash fund prior to earmarks and the amount available for awarding workforce development grants.

#### d. Workforce Development Grant Proposal Presentations

Five organizations presented their Workforce Development Grant proposals to the Board.

Brady Rhodes of the United Way of South Central Nebraska said his organization represents 70 organizations from the area and will work for the next five years on a program to address workforce challenges in South Central Nebraska while generating measurable economic returns for the state. The program will focus on three tiers, workforce readiness, employment outcomes, and sustained economic impact. The program will cost \$1.5 million over three years.

Dr. Julie Murray-Nelson of The Foundry Community is asking for funding for a two-year project to connect high-achieving students at the University of Nebraska at Kearney with needed purpose-driven work in businesses, nonprofits, and public sector organizations. The program will serve 20 participants in Kearney per year. Funding is requested to support a program coordinator, a student coordinator, and program costs to support the 20 participants. She is requesting \$64,872 over the next two years.

Kellee Mikuls of Ignite Nebraska is a nonprofit that focuses on workforce development. The program will equip homegrown, non-traditional talent with the skills, coaching, and support to achieve sustainable careers. It provides soft skills training, technical readiness, and six months of post-hire navigation support to ensure participants not only gain employment but keep it. One of the biggest employers who are hiring these participants is the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. The goal is to get participants off of benefit programs within 12 months. She is requesting \$4.1 million over the next four years.

James Krenz and Alan Castorena of the International Council for Refugees and Immigrants said their program helps new Americans, immigrants and refugees navigate the system and help them get off benefits. They help 150 people per year by providing the workforce needs of refugees and immigrants in Eastern Nebraska. They help new Americans find jobs and provide job-specific English classes to help participants thrive in local industries. They are asking for \$350,000.

Tina Murray of Together said their program helps participants receive employment navigation, a food pantry, and a housing program. Through these projects they support more than 44,000 people annually through programs designed to address barriers that impact employment, housing, and economic mobility. The focus of the support request is to fund the Employment Navigation Program. She is asking for \$84,000 for their work.

Brittley Holland of Bee's Reliable Courier LLC was unable to attend due to unforeseen circumstances.

Shannon Grotrian asked the Commissioner about whether these funds could be used to help with the Tyson plant closure in Lexington. Katie replied with a summary of the efforts made so far in Lexington with the Rapid Response Team. NDOL has been assisting people with registering in NEworks so that they are ready to apply for unemployment benefits when the plant shuts down. Multiple agencies, community organizations, and members of the community have worked together to respond to the situation. The community response to this event gives you faith, she said. The school district is providing interpreters to help at rapid response events. There may be dislocated worker funds available to help.

NDOL is also looking at transportation, if there are options for transporting workers from the Lexington area to jobs in North Platte and other communities. They are looking to keep as many workers in Lexington as possible. Katie has been working with Adult Education to discuss options for upskilling individuals. During a shut down for remodeling of the Cargill plant in Columbus, NDOL was able to

partner with Adult Education to assist in upskilling workers after which many obtained raises when they returned to work.

Joanna Estrada asked what resources are available to individuals who want to relocate out of Lexington. Katie said depending on the location and individual needs they may be eligible for WIOA which could assist with some of the costs related to relocating.

#### e. Adult Education Programming at MCC

Tammy Green presented on Title II Adult Education programming at Metropolitan Community College in Omaha.

Tammy said that 8% of adults in the Greater Omaha area have less than a high school diploma, which means 40,000 individuals are lacking the skills for most entry-level jobs for college-level education and job training. She said 71% of the jobs in Nebraska will require post-secondary education or training. She said the program at MCC helps adult learners improve their skills and helps them receive a credential (at minimum a high school diploma). She said 87% of individuals seeking WIOA funds lack the foundational academic skills for college and credentialing readiness. People who start out in poverty are likely to stay in poverty if they do not earn a high school credential and go on to gain skills for workplace. They are missing key skills, and MCC's programs help prepare these students for associate's, bachelor's and master's degrees. She said Adult Education fuels Nebraska's talent pipeline by reducing employer skill gaps, expanding access to training and credential pathways, and supports economic growth through education-to-employment models. MCC also provides an industry-aligned curriculum designed for real-world success, Integrated Education and Training (IET) pathways, strong employer engagement and collaboration, and connections to pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships.

#### f. Workforce Pell Grant

Brad presented a short update on the federal Workforce Pell Grant program. He said the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, passed in July 2025, expands federal Pell Grant eligibility to include short-term job training programs that are fewer than 16 weeks in length as Workforce Development Pell Grants. The Governor, in consultation with the Board, must certify that the Workforce Pell Grant programs meet specified quality standards. The Pell Grants will be awarded beginning July 1, 2026. There will be more information in the future regarding how the Governor chooses to involve the Board in certifying Workforce Pell Grant programs.

#### g. Proposed dates for 2026 Board meetings

Brad presented the proposed dates for the 2026 Board meetings. The Board meetings were slated for March 13, June 12, September 25, and December 4, at the NET Center, 180 North 33<sup>rd</sup> Street, Lincoln, Nebraska, if possible.

A motion to approve the proposed 2026 meeting dates was made by Keisha Thomas and seconded by Tate Lauer. The roll call vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

#### Agenda item 7. Next meeting of the Board

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The next meeting of the Board will take place on Friday, March 13, 2026, from 9 a.m. to noon at the NET Center, 180 North 33<sup>rd</sup> Street, Lincoln, Nebraska.

#### Agenda item 8. Public comment

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Brad opened the floor for public comment. Public comments were not provided.

#### Agenda item 9. Adjournment

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Brad asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting of the Board. Joanna Estrada motioned that the meeting be adjourned. Mark Wright seconded the motion. Members of the Board voted on the motion by acclamation vote. The motion carried unanimously. Brad adjourned the meeting at approximately 11 a.m.

DRAFT