



## HCWDB Meeting Minutes

March 18, 2026

CareerForce Bloomington

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**Attendees:** Rebecca Stearns, Nicole Mattson, Elise Durbin, Doug Muller, Sarah Gutzman, Garfield Clark, Kelsey Rogness, Julio Vargas-Essex, Kate Black, Amanda Ruch, Cindy Larson, Jennifer Kielas

**Absent:** Christa Seaberg, Tim Mayer, Kim Schrupp, Emily Watts (online)

**Staff:** Erik Aamo, Nola Slagter-Johnson, Bri Zaiss, Virginia Rose Kane

**Guests:** Debbie Ferry, Jess Niebuhr, Renauta Ojeaga

**Online:** Becca Lopez, Denise Butler, Ema Mailhot, Jen Albrecht, Jason Jones, Malachy Zamacona, Emily Watts, Sarah Garbis, Jared Scharpen, Tanika Reese, Mark Mann

### 1. Approval of Agenda

MOTION: Elise Durbin

SECOND: Sarah Gutzman

MOTION PASSED: 12 Yeas, 0 Nays

### 2. Approval of Meeting Minutes (January 2026)

MOTION: Julio Vargas-Essex

SECOND: Nicole Mattson

MOTION PASSED: 12 Yeas, 0 Nays

### 3. Success Story: Vocational Rehabilitation (attached with board materials)

### 4. Board Business

#### a. Board Action Request - Subsequent Designation (HCWDB Action Request 2026-1)

MOTION: Cindy Larson

SECOND: Doug Muller

MOTION PASSED: 12 Yeas, 0 Nays

#### b. Board Action Request - Adult/Dislocated Worker Program Policies (HCWDB Action Request 2026-2)

MOTION: Julio Vargas-Essex

SECOND: Elise Durbin

MOTION PASSED: 12 Yeas, 0 Nays

### 5. Board Member Introductions & Engagement Exercise

- a. Kate Black, field director AFSCME 65 representing 17K members across MN, ND, and SD. Represent workers in local government, health care (35%), school districts, trades. Works on programmatic aspects including legislative priorities, coalitions with other unions, working toward ballot measures for school lunch initiatives, etc. Trains and supervises field staff working with locals from contract administration and enforcement to improve work life, job security, benefit improvement. Some lobbying through coalitions (We Make MN) to increase revenue to fund public programs; union educator through AFSCME Nationwide to improve training curriculum on variety of topics. MN AFL-CIO board member subcommittee on staffing.

Coordinates arbitration and labor practices across states and trains staff in that process. MN Historical Society volunteer. Member Program Design & Development work group.

- b. Garfield Clark, Garfield Clark Commercial. Credits his mentors for his success. Has been working in large organizations his adult life; served on boards of the Boys & Girls Club and others, member Rotary Club. Organized a group to teach high school economics. Goal is to build relationships to engage youth in mentorships to help them find beneficial alternatives to getting cash in their pockets. Encourages action-oriented, boots on the ground concept for the board collective to mentor youth, develop support plans, show hope, etc. Stressed the need for employer training programs, working with local partners connected with youth. Member Internal Operations and Employer Relations work groups.
- c. Julio Vargas-Essex, VP Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, North Hennepin Community College. Works within intersection of workforce development, education, and community impact. A connector responsible for providing opportunities to pathways. Member of 6 boards including Junior Achievement, Seed Coalition, Hennepin West Consortium (chair), Brooklyn Bridge Youth Alliance. Developing pathways through credentialing, paid internships, and apprenticeships by connecting through relationships and aligning curricula, developing continuing education opportunities for adults. Encouraged board members to get involved in current NHCC mentorships. Member Strategic Talent Pathways work group.
- d. Nicole Mattson, VP for blank for Care Providers of MN. Statewide association of long-term care providers who provide senior care from home care to skilled nursing. Background in long term care HR professional with advocacy and grassroots experience, advocates for senior care workers and the people they serve in a highly regulated industry. Appointed to the board pre-pandemic; lobbyist for Workforce Development initiatives at the Capital. Passionate about pathways progression in the health care workforce, projects, immigrant communities, and strategic initiatives. Appointed to MAWB (MN Association of Workforce Boards) and GWDB (Governor's Workforce Development Board); noted IWA (Interagency Workforce Alignment) taskforce, state agency coalesced around similar projects and grants to lend focus. Member Internal Operations (chair) and Strategic Talent Pathways work groups.
- e. Kelsey Rogness, manufacturing manager Takeda Pharmaceuticals with direct influence on hiring and upskilling. A voice for getting youth interested in manufacturing, career paths to engineering and other roles. Member Employer Relations work group.

## 6. Board Updates

- a) Director's Report (written report included in board materials):
  - a. Erik Aamoht highlighted board member application deadline April 4;
  - b. MOU/IFA completion goal by May meeting;
  - c. Nicole Mattson noted new GWDB task force to generate recommendations on workforce development opportunities for advocacy.
  - d. Erik Aamoht encouraged board members to attend Skills Based Hiring events.
- b) Program Updates:
  - a. One Stop Operator quarterly report to be included in May 19 annual meeting.
  - b. Wagner-Peyser (written updates included in board materials):
    - i. Cindy Larson noted CareerForce offices will be moving to a new location in Bloomington after their lease ends in November 2027.
  - c. Adult/Dislocated Worker: (written updates included in Board Materials)
  - d. Youth: (written updates included in Board Materials)
  - e. VR: (written updates included in Board Materials)
  - f. ABE: (written updates included in Board Materials)

- c) Carver County Updates (written updates included in board materials):
  - a. Jen Kielas noted increased activity at CareerForce Centers and expressed concern about hearing recent applicants are not hearing back from employers.
- d) Hennepin County:
  - a. Nola Slagter-Johnson noted legislative priority for the County is keeping HCMC open; property tax funding in the budget for the first time; hoping funding pause is lifted for Succeeding in Employment and Youth Employment Services programs; noted SNAP E&T and MFIP work requirements resource challenges. MN awarded pledge state status that comes with non-guaranteed funding. Working on Blue Line expansion active workforce development plan and strategies.
- e) Other

## 7. Adjourn

### **Mission Statement**

The Hennepin-Carver Workforce Development Board fosters individual and family economic well-being through the development of meaningful career pathways and employment opportunities, provides a skilled talent pipeline to our employer partners through the strategic investment of workforce development resources and the building of collaborative partnerships, and works alongside community organizations to identify and recruit community members to participate in workforce development services based on the workplace requirements expressed by our employer partners as well as the needs and interests of the community.

### **Vision Statement**

The board works in partnership with all community members and employers to support and enhance an effective, efficient, and inclusive workforce development system which assures alignment between available talent and employer needs resulting in economic prosperity for all.

*The Hennepin-Carver Workforce Development Board is a Proud Partner of the American Job Center Network and Minnesota CareerForce.*

