

MINUTES

NORTHWEST WISCONSIN WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD, INC. MEETING June 26, 2026



Attendees:

☒ Judy Aspling	☐ Michelle Johnson (excused)	☒ PC Rasmussen
☒ Andrea Chartier	☒ Dale Kelm	☒ Crystal Rohde
☒ Skyler Dural-Eder	☐ Mary McPhetridge	☐ Cindy Rouzer
☒ Tami Follet	(excused)	☐ Jennifer Shearer
☐ Brad Gast (excused)	☒ Ashley Moore	☒ (MJ) Sills
☒ Edward Gruhl	☒ Jenice Meyer	☒ Carl Svendsen
☒ Brent Harju	☐ Elaine Ogilvie	☒ Gene Stanchfield
	☒ Brian Pelon	☐ Kerri Trubachik (excused)
	☒ Steve Bitzer	☒ Katey Perkkio

Staff & Guests Present: Mari Kay-Nabozny, Melissa Rabska, Bella Potack-Rettler, Kazdion Mount

☒ Thomas Michels ☒ Charlie Glazman ☒ Lauren E Shrubbe

Call to Order - Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 AM. Bella Potack-Rettler conducted the roll call.

Report of Public Meeting Notice

Bella Potack-Rettler reported that the public meeting notice was published on the NWWIB social media, website, and distributed to the regional library systems and Class A newspapers within the WDA.

Pledge of Allegiance

Judy Aspling led the NWWIB Board into the Pledge of Allegiance.

Welcome/Introduction of Guests

Approval of the 3/26/2026 Meeting Minutes

Motion by Gene Stanchfield to approve the March 26, 2026 meeting minutes.

Second by Carl Svendsen. Motion carried unanimously.

1. Consent Agenda (NWWIB, Inc. Sub-Committee Reports)

a) NWWIB Executive Committee Report – *Judy Aspling, Chair*

Judy Aspling shared the Executive Committee report. The Form 990 was submitted on time and everything looked good. The budget will be influenced by pending grant decisions, many of which are addressed later the agenda.

- b) Future Talent and Strategy Committee – *Thomas Michels, Chair*
The committee met on May 20. Northwest CEP was awarded the Youth RFP, and the youth program has been rebranded through Northwest CEP.
- c) OSO Committee Report – *Brad Gast, Chair*
Mari Kay-Nabozny reported in Brad Gast's absence. OSO operations have been seamless, with no significant updates to report. MOU has made its way to approval.

Motion to approve the Consent Agenda.

Motion by Dale Kelm.

Second by Skyler Dural-Eder. Motion carried unanimously.

2. Organizational Updates and Compliance (10:15 AM) - Mari Kay-Nabozny

a. Monitoring

i. PY26 Monitoring Schedule

DWD monitoring is scheduled for September 14–23, 2026, with one week conducted virtually and one week on site. Equal Opportunity (EO) monitoring will be conducted virtually.

b. Grant Opportunities & Updates

Grant updates included:

i. RESTART (awaiting news)

RESTART – Working with Justice-Involved Youth: No award notification has been received. A decision is anticipated in mid-July. If awarded, NWWIB's portion would exceed \$400,000.

ii. HRSA

After discussions with the technical colleges, NWWIB determined the opportunity was not a good fit and will not pursue it.

iii. Spectrum

Spectrum: NWWIB requested \$50,000 and was awarded \$20,000. The award was announced through a press release and email. The funding will help retain the Digital Navigators through the end of the calendar year. Bayfield County has committed to continuing Eric's position.

Mari shared that NWWIB submitted an article highlighting Eric's work, including a success story about an individual who lost 90% of their vision. The success story is also included in the meeting packet.

Judy noted that the CLICK program was mentioned at a Douglas County Board meeting. Although one individual mistakenly identified it as a federal program, the discussion demonstrated that information about CLICK is being shared in the community.

Mari reported that the Fulcrum Foundation approved funding for Beau Stahnke, a new NWWIB hire, to provide digital navigation with a health-focused approach.

iv. Rural Health Transformation

Wisconsin received significant funding for Rural Health Transformation initiatives. Grant opportunities are beginning to emerge, primarily focused on healthcare, and NWWIB intends to pursue appropriate opportunities. NWWIB has upcoming meetings with health systems to further discuss potential opportunities.

Additional:

WWDA submitted a grant through the Minneapolis Foundation to support Building Science Principles (BSP) training delivered by Slipstream, with the potential to expand from the initial training. The application was submitted in April 2025, and an update was recently received that the award will likely be forthcoming.

The WisDOT HCST (Highway Construction Skills Training) grant is moving forward after significant delays. The application was originally submitted in 2024.

NWWIB is also working with the Duluth Workforce Board on a grant opportunity with applications due July 9, including Third Sector to BlackRock.

The projected budget deficit has decreased as additional grant funding opportunities have developed.

3. Regional Data Review (10:30 AM)

a. WIOA Dashboard

i. Program Year 2025 YTD WIOA Performance – *Melissa Rabska*

Melissa reviewed the WIOA performance dashboard and accompanied Excel spreadsheet. WDA 7 data reflects the most recently closed quarter through the end of March. Overall performance is strong, although Measurable Skill Gains (MSG) remain a challenge statewide. DWD has provided technical assistance, and there continues to be ambiguity regarding what qualifies as an MSG. Results may improve at the end of June as graduations are documented.

Ed Gruhl discussed DWD's Method 4 guidance and suggested exploring additional ways for training providers to document participant progress, including brief assessments that demonstrate skill gains. Ed noted that training providers should be able to identify and document participant progress through appropriate assessment methods.

Crystal asked whether DWD may change or further clarify the definition given the statewide ambiguity. Melissa noted that MSG is still a relatively new performance measure.

Carl suggested asking training providers what measures they already use to assess progress and documenting those measures.

Skyler noted that MSGs are easier to capture for students in structured programs and more difficult for participants experiencing waiting periods or other delays.

ii. Current WIOA Enrollment – *Melissa Rabska*

Melissa reviewed WIOA enrollment demographics and PY25 enrollment compared with contracted goals. Enrollment is somewhat below target, including summer youth participation.

Reported enrollment included:

OSY: 29; ISY: 28

Dislocated Worker: 15 new enrollments

Judy asked whether the programs are expected to come close to or meet their goals. Melissa responded that they are.

b. WDA 7 Regional Employment Data - *Thomas Michels*

Thomas reviewed May regional employment data. Compared with the prior year, employment was down in most counties, with Douglas and Sawyer counties as exceptions. Statewide unemployment remained comparatively low, with Wisconsin tied for the 10th-lowest rate.

Burnett County's labor force has increased by approximately 10% over the past seven years.

QCEW data comparing 2025 annual rates with 2024 showed jobs located in Northwest Wisconsin decreased by 0.1%, while wages grew 4.5%, slightly higher than the statewide rate.

4. Financials Review (10:50AM) – Mari Kay-Nabozny

a. Action Item: Review and approval PY26 Budget & Related Changes

Mari explained that the 911 category/column does not represent wages for program staff; it reflects wages for staff working across multiple funding streams. The budget is a snapshot in time and reflects a best-case organizational budget of approximately \$1.7 million.

The worst-case scenario reflected a projected deficit of approximately \$280,000.

Mari reviewed expense reductions already incorporated to reduce the projected deficit. NWWIB proposes eliminating the employee health wallet in the next plan year. The organization originally worked with Vendeur, which was acquired by Thatch. Because Thatch does not administer health wallets, those funds were returned to NWWIB while another subcontractor was explored. NWWIB staff did not receive wage increases this year in the budget.

The \$25 per month employee cell phone allowance will be discontinued. *Fiscal policy change

NWWIB will continue offering health insurance thru the ICHRA. *Personnel policy change

Mari and Melissa have discussed a worst-case contingency of reducing certain staff schedules to four days per week if sufficient revenue is not secured.

Phase 2 would move five full-time staff to four days per week if additional funding does not materialize.

The Board will revisit this at the December Board meeting. Mari does not anticipate needing to implement this phase but recommended having a contingency plan in place.

The budget presented is consistent with the materials included in the Board packet.

Sara Wieland's employment with NWWIB will end July 17, 2026, as WAI 2.0 concludes and there is not another available funding stream for her position.

The budget also assumes two Digital Navigator positions could end by October 2026. Without significant additional funding, those positions could be eliminated by December 2026.

Mari emphasized that NWWIB has been transparent with staff regarding these budget considerations.

Ed clarified that the applicable effective date of policy changes should be October 2026, not 2027.

Motion by Ed Gruhl to approve the PY26 Budget, with the date corrected to October 2026 with all related necessary changes to be made to the fiscal procedures manual and personnel manual as discussed.

Second by Gene Stanchfield. Motion carried unanimously.

c. Action Item: Review and Approve Budget Summary Phase 1 Actions

Motion by Ed Gruhl to approve the Budget Summary Phase 1 Actions.

Second by Crystal Rohde. Motion carried unanimously.

5. Initiatives & Project Review (11:30 AM)

a. NWWIB By the Numbers - *Mari Kay-Nabozny*

Mari reviewed the NWWIB By the Numbers report.

Sara Wieland noted that WAI 2.0 numbers do not yet reflect spring technical college graduates because transcripts and certificates were not received until mid-June. Final numbers will be presented at the next Board meeting.

Mari reviewed CLICK data and noted that demand is currently greater for navigation services than for digital devices. NWWIB is aware that some reported numbers remain low.

Mari noted that Wisconsin Fast Forward grants require a 50% match. For the dental project, clinical experiences count toward the match.

Dale asked whether the CLICK device-loan metric represented the number of devices available or individual loan incidents.

Melissa clarified that the metric is per loan incident.

Mari noted that CLICK laptops may also be loaned for trainings and other large-group events.

b. NWWIB Social Media Report – *Bella Potack-Rettler*

Carl Svendsen noted that an AI text file can be added to the website to direct users to a specific file.

c. Public Relations Report – *Melissa Rabska*

d. Success Stories – *Melissa Rabska*

Mari asked Carl for an update on how Wisconsin Fast Forward is going at Halvor Lines.

Carl reported that one individual had completed the school and that Halvor Lines had hired approximately two of the three participants progressing through the program. He also announced a \$3 million investment program and complimented Ryce's work referring candidates.

6. Action Item: Approve WIOA Policy Updates (11:40 AM)

The proposed policy updates are intended to align NWWIB policy with state policy.

a. WIOA #11 Individual Employment Plan (IEP)

Language was updated to require review every 180 days for compliance.

b. WIOA #12 Individual Service Strategy (ISS)

c. WIOA #19 Contact

d. WIOA #20 Follow Up

DWD provided clarification regarding follow-up requirements.

The motion applied to all listed policy updates.

Motion by Ed Gruhl to approve WIOA Policies #11, #12, #19, and #20 as presented.

Second by Dale Kelm. Motion carried unanimously.

7. Action Item: PY25 Internal Monitoring Report for WIOA

Melissa reviewed the PY25 internal monitoring memo summarizing programmatic reviews and WIOA fiscal components. She highlighted best practices and findings, noting that most findings were minor programmatic or human-error issues. Examples included updating files during the monitoring period and incomplete documentation of Selective Service information, including a missing self-attestation.

Motion by Carl Svendsen to approve the PY25 Internal Monitoring Report for WIOA.

Second by Gene Stanchfield. Motion carried unanimously.

8. Action Item: PY26 One Stop Operator MOU

The PY26 One-Stop Operator MOU was included in the packet for review and will proceed through the required routing process. The budget modification is \$0.

Motion by Dale Kelm to approve the PY26 One-Stop Operator MOU.

Second by Andrea Chartier. Motion carried unanimously.

9. Action Item: Approve PY26 Youth RFP Recommendation from RFP committee

Mari reviewed the Youth RFP recommendation and approval process and noted that Board approval of the recommendation was required.

Skyler shared that the youth program was rebranded to make it more approachable for participants. Schools have expressed interest in running student cohorts, and early feedback has been positive.

Motion by Crystal Rohde to approve the PY26 Youth RFP recommendation from the RFP Committee.

Second by Brent Harju. Motion carried unanimously among members voting.

Skyler Dural-Eder recused themselves from the vote.

10. 2026 Conflict of Interest Forms (11:50 AM)

The forms were included in the packet, and Mari will distribute them through DocuSign.

11. Board Discussion (11:50 AM)

Discussion topic: How is AI changing, or not changing, the landscape of your workplace and/or industry?

Skyler discussed concerns being raised about the negative effects of AI in schools, including parents who do not want AI incorporated into learning. CEP has considered digital responsibility education and discussed how to balance that with parent concerns and student access.

Carl described AI as transformative technology that can improve business when used appropriately. He noted that his organization is using AI to collect, synthesize, and analyze data and is exploring its use for routine, task-oriented work. He also emphasized the importance of helping people better understand the technology.

Thomas described AI as a useful research assistant and emphasized the importance of effective prompting. He noted that youth still need foundational subject knowledge while learning how to use AI tools responsibly.

Carl compared AI to other workplace tools, noting that people often leave college with foundational knowledge and continue learning on the job. He suggested a similar approach may be appropriate for students learning to use AI.

Andrea noted that interns may use AI but do not always verify the accuracy or professionalism of AI-generated work before submitting it in the workplace.

Carl emphasized the importance of digital literacy, safety, and fact-checking in schools.

Skyler agreed that digital literacy could be an effective way to approach AI education while recognizing parent concerns.

Ed noted that one challenge with AI is that incorrect information can be difficult to identify and correct.

12. Comments & Announcements

Mari introduced Kazdion Mount and invited him to update the Board on employer outreach. Kazdion reported visiting 236 employers in Ashland, Douglas, and Sawyer counties. He noted that face-to-face outreach has been particularly effective with rural employers and that many employers he has met were previously unfamiliar with NWWIB. Mari added that outreach in more urban areas, such as Superior, can sometimes be met with skepticism because employers may initially feel they are being sold a service.

Mari shared that the next outreach focus will include additional healthcare providers, with an emphasis on bringing more partners to the table and strengthening ROBUST handoffs.

Andrea noted that identifying the right contacts within organizations is key to successful outreach.

Andrea introduced Dave Cook, who came from JET workforce development. Dave will take over high school and youth programming while Andrea transitions to college pathways.

Dave Cook shared that he previously worked in construction and is now shifting his focus to healthcare. He discussed serving individuals interested in healthcare careers across Northwest Wisconsin, Bemidji, and International Falls in partnership with Essentia Health.

Judy noted that the acoustics at the Development Association location made it somewhat difficult to hear.

13. Next Meeting Date & Location – September 24, 2026, or at the call of the Chair.

14. Adjournment (12:13 PM)

Motion by Gene Stanchfield to adjourn.

Second by Skyler Dural-Eder. Motion carried unanimously.