



## **Meeting Minutes**

### **Reconstructed Minutes – Recording Unavailable**

*Due to a technical issue, the meeting recording was unavailable. These minutes were reconstructed based on attendee notes and materials distributed at the meeting.*

### **Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams**

In-person attendance at Virginia CareerForce  
820 N 9th St. Suite 240, Virginia, MN 55792

**Wednesday, January 21, 2026**

1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

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## **AGENDA**

### **I. Call to Order**

Meeting called to order at 1:00 p.m.

### **II. Roll Call**

Roll call conducted. Quorum confirmed.

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### **III. Approve Agenda (Additions and Changes)**

Motion was made to approve agenda as presented / amended.

Motion was Seconded.

Motion carried.

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### **IV. Approve Minutes**

#### **a. October 15, 2025 Minutes**

Motion was made to approve October 15, 2025 minutes.

Motion was Seconded.

Motion carried.

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## **V. Information and Discussion Items**

### **a. Labor Market Update**

**Presented by Carson Gorecki – Northeast Regional Analyst, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED)**

#### **Executive Summary – January 2026**

The Northeast Minnesota labor market is showing signs of gradual softening, though it remains relatively resilient overall.

#### **Labor Force & Unemployment**

- Regional labor force increased by approximately 1,600 individuals (+1.4%) over the year.
- Employment declined by approximately 1,200 jobs (-1.1%).
- Number of unemployed individuals increased by approximately 2,800 (+75%).
- Current regional unemployment rate: 5.1% (compared to 4.5% pre-pandemic, November 2019).
- Unemployment is lowest in Carlton, Lake, and Duluth; highest in Aitkin, Cook, and Itasca counties.
- Region has not fully returned to pre-pandemic labor force levels.

#### **Unemployment Insurance Activity**

- Initial claims down; regular continued claims slightly down.
- Increases in claims most notable in:
  - Mining
  - Management
  - Educational Services
  - Information
- Higher increases observed among:
  - Workers with bachelor's degrees or higher

- Black workers
- Individuals age 60+

### **Hiring & Labor Market Tightness**

- Fewer than one jobseeker per vacancy – labor market remains relatively tight.
- Signs of loosening:
  - Job openings declining from peak levels
  - Hiring has slowed
  - Fewer voluntary quits

### **Employment Trends**

- Employment growth continued into Q2 2025 at slower pace.
- Approximately 100 jobs added over the year.
- Roughly 5,800 jobs added since 2021.
- Duluth experienced decline of approximately 930 jobs over the year.

### **Strongest growth sectors:**

- Real Estate
- Arts, Entertainment & Recreation
- Information
- Manufacturing
- Healthcare & Social Assistance

### **Largest relative declines:**

- Management of Companies
- Professional, Scientific & Technical Services
- Finance & Insurance
- Mining

Mining layoffs continue to significantly impact regional wage and employment patterns.

### **Wage Trends**

- Average wages up approximately 2.6% year-over-year into Q2 2024.
- Inflation approximately 2.7% year-over-year into November 2025.
- Limited real wage growth.

### **Largest wage gains (>10%):**

- Real Estate
- Management of Companies
- Finance & Insurance

### **Declines or minimal gains:**

- Wholesale Trade (-10%)
- Mining (-4%)
- Professional, Scientific & Technical Services (+0.2%)
- Utilities (+2.5%)

### **Overall Outlook**

While unemployment has risen and hiring has slowed, unemployment insurance claims remain relatively stable. Key sectors continue to demonstrate strength. The regional labor market remains resilient despite economic uncertainty and sector-specific challenges, particularly in Mining. Continued monitoring will be essential.

### **b. LWDA #3 Initiatives**

**Presented by Randy Back – JET Senior Grants & Policy Specialist**

#### **218Workplace (218WP) & New Website**

- 218WP is being used as a coordinated regional strategy focused on six key employment sectors:
  - Manufacturing
  - Construction / 218Trades

- Health Care
- Education
- Logistics & Transportation
- Hospitality & Tourism
- 218WP is incorporated into multiple grant proposals and RFP strategies including:
  - DLI Registered Apprenticeship RFP
  - Logistics & Transportation Pathways to Prosperity (P2P)
  - Youth at Work
  - Pending Can-Train (Manufacturing proposal)
- Goal under DLI grant: Create at least six new Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) – one in each targeted sector.

### **Website Update**

- Initial development underway for new 218WP website.
- First sector page (218Trades) migrated and under construction.
- Sector tiles will include:
  - Labor Market Information & Demand data
  - General occupational group overview video
  - Employer landing page
- Currently in mock-up phase (Share version).
- IRRRB grant timeline extended to December 31, 2026.
- Extension due to:
  - 43-day government shutdown
  - Slower than anticipated website conversion
- Original 218Trades site (created by Art Unlimited) will be retired.
- Anticipated 218WP Committee meeting in February following additional webpage edits.

## **Registered Apprenticeship Work with MN DLI, DWD & MAWB Community of Practice**

- JET awarded DLI grant to serve as a Registered Apprenticeship HUB.
- Official grant paperwork approved in January; implementation beginning.

### **RAP Progress:**

- Three new Registered Apprenticeship Programs initiated:
    - One successfully launched with a healthcare provider in Carlton County.
    - One pending with an ambulance service in Lake County (EMT/Paramedic).
    - One pending with a meat processor in northern St. Louis County.
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## **VI. Action Items**

### **a. Conflict of Interest Forms**

Updated conflict of interest forms emailed out to WDB members to sign and return.

### **b. Election of Officers**

Nominations received: Wade LeBlanc (Chair)

Motioned

Seconded

Motion carried.

Nominations received: Karen Blackburn (Vice Chair)

Motioned

Seconded

Motion carried.

Nominations received: Jon Frimanslund (Secretary)

Motioned

Seconded

Motion carried.

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## **VIII. Adjourn**

Motion to adjourn

Motion seconded

Motion carried.

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## **Next Board Meeting:**

April 15, 2026