Northeast Minnesota Workforce Development Board

Meeting Minutes
Virtual Meeting via Teams
Wednesday, July 15, 2026
1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.

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AGENDA

I. **Call to Order**
The meeting was called to order by Karen Blackburn at 1:04 p.m.

II. **Roll Call**
Present: Karen Blackburn (Vice Chair), Jordan Bremseth, Tracy Chase, Emily Edison, Tami Jacobs, Breanne Johnson, Terri Nystrom

Staff Present: Marie Domiano, Ashlee LeNoie, Kari Paulsen
Absent: Wade LeBlanc (Chair), Derrick Atkins, Jan Francisco, Jeannie Kermeen, Randa Lundmark,

Roll call conducted. Quorum confirmed.

III. **Approve Agenda (Additions and Changes)**
Motion was made to approve by Breanne Johnson
Seconded by Tami Jacobs
Motion carried.

IV. **Approve April 15, 2026, Minutes**
Motion was made to approve by Breanne Johnson
Seconded by Tracy Chase
Motion carried.

V. Discussion and Action items

a. **Labor Market Update-** Presented by Carson Gorecki – Regional Labor Market Analyst. Carson provided an overview of current labor market conditions in Northeast Minnesota, including labor force trends, unemployment, employment changes, wage trends, and job seeker experiences.

Key highlights:

- The regional labor force has continued to decline, decreasing approximately 2,600 workers compared to the previous year.
- Employment decreased approximately 2.8%, contributing to an increase in unemployment.
- Northeast Minnesota's unemployment rate was 5.2% in May 2026, compared to 4.7% the previous year. The statewide unemployment rate was 4.4%.
- All counties in the region experienced higher unemployment rates and smaller labor forces compared to the previous year.
- Employment declines were primarily seen in mining and educational services, while growth occurred in construction, retail, administrative support, and manufacturing.
- Average wages increased approximately 2.8%, which was similar to inflation and did not represent significant wage growth for workers.
- Career counselors reported that job seekers are experiencing continued barriers including housing, childcare, transportation, and wage expectations.
- Remote work opportunities and healthcare benefits continue to be priorities for job seekers in Northeast Minnesota.

Discussion included the potential impact of Minnesota Paid Leave on workforce data reporting. Carson noted that additional information would need to be gathered as individuals utilizing leave remain classified as employed.

The Board also discussed the impact of artificial intelligence on employment opportunities, particularly within IT and computer-related occupations. Carson noted that entry-level workers may be experiencing increased challenges as AI impacts those fields.

b. **Local Policy Updates –** Presented by Kari Paulsen. Updates to JET's Local Training Services Allowable Activities Policy.

Updates included:

- Clarifying that JET will not fund advanced degree certifications, including master's, doctoral, or professional degrees, as they do not qualify as credentials under WIOA requirements.
- Adding language requiring training providers to be located within the United States.

  The updates align the policy with WIOA requirements and current program practices.

Action:

A motion was made to approve the Local Training Services Allowable Activities Policy updates as presented.

Motion: Terri Nystrom
Second: Breanne Johnson

The motion carried unanimously.

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c. **Local and Regional Plan Update Review and Approval -** Marie Domiano presented updates to the Northeast Workforce Development Area Local and Regional Plan.

Marie explained that workforce development areas are required to update their plans every three years. The current update incorporates changes required by the state plan but is not a full rewrite.

Updates included:

- Revised language to align with updated state guidance.
- Updated references to current programs, partnerships, and initiatives.
- Inclusion of apprenticeship expansion efforts occurring throughout Northeast Minnesota.
- Updates to CareerForce and board membership information.
- Removal of outdated references to regional activities no longer being conducted.
- Updated labor market information will be incorporated from Carson Gorecki prior to submission.

  Marie also discussed upcoming board governance work. This work will focus on clarifying roles and responsibilities between the Workforce

Development Board, Local Elected Official Board, and JET due to the complexity of the current structure.

Action:

A motion was made to approve the Local and Regional Plan update draft as presented, including incorporation of updated labor market information and public comments prior to submission.

Motion: Tracy Chase
Second: Emily Edison

The motion carried unanimously.

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d. **Board Secretary Appointment -** Marie Domiano informed the Board that the Secretary position became vacant following Jon Frimanslund's resignation.

Discussion was held regarding the responsibilities of the Secretary position. Emily Edison expressed interest in serving and shared her background and interest in board governance.

Action:

A motion was made to appoint Emily Edison as Secretary of the Workforce Development Board.

Motion: Tracy Chase
Second: Karen Blackburn

The motion carried unanimously.

VI. Updates

a. Partner Updates

a) JET Updates – Marie Domiano and Kari Paulsen

JET provided updates regarding upcoming staffing needs, grant activities, monitoring, and program operations.

- JET anticipates hiring several positions, including a navigator position connected to the CanTrain grant supporting cannabis-related occupations and additional career counselor positions.

- JET is transitioning to a new fiscal system and implementing a new time and attendance system.
- Recent Adult/DW monitoring was completed with no major concerns identified. Additional monitoring activities are ongoing.
- The Pathways to Prosperity On-Ramp Grant continues recruitment efforts in the Cloquet/Duluth area focused on logistics and warehouse careers.
- Staff continue to enroll participants for fall training opportunities and provide talent development services to employers.

b) **AEOA – Tracy Chase**

Tracy shared that the regional transition plan was accepted and additional work will continue along the North Shore.

Tracy also recognized Randy Back for assisting with GED testing funding support, which will help increase access for individuals needing GED services.

c) **DEED – Marla Beaty**

Marla provided updates regarding staffing changes within DEED following the passing of Division Director Reggie Worlds.

Additional updates included:

- Jason Waddell has assumed additional responsibilities related to employer engagement.
- Marla has assumed responsibilities as Rapid Response Coordinator.
- Recent layoffs in Northeast Minnesota have been limited, including:
    - ISD 709 in Duluth
    - Dust Services in Hibbing
    - Coal Hardware in Grand Rapids (closing)
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d) **Healthcare Initiatives – Terri Nystrom**

Terri shared that healthcare workforce initiatives continue, including development of career pathways and apprenticeship opportunities.

e) **Apprenticeship Update – Jordan Bremseth**

Jordan provided an update from the Finishing Trades Institute.

- A federal grant was approved to support apprenticeship programming.
- Pre-apprenticeship programming will be reintroduced at Moose Lake Prison.
- The program will provide introductory training and pathways into apprenticeship opportunities.
- Grant funding will also support wraparound services, including employment assistance and support services.

VII. Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for October 21, 2026, and will be held virtually.

VIII. Adjournment

Motion was made to adjourn by Karen Blackburn
Seconded by Tracy Chase
Motion carried.