

**Minutes of the
Q1 Workforce Development Council
1600 E Century Avenue
Workforce Safety Insurance
WSI Boardroom
February 5, 2026**

Members present: Al Dohrmann, Senator Michelle Axtman, Tara Berger, Pat Bertagnolli, Josh Blackaby, DJ Campbell, Kellie Carlson, Becca Cruger, Ashley Gaschk, Darrel Hannum, Patrick Haug, Katie Ralston Howe, Michael Keller, Howard Klug, Matt Marshall, Sara Mitzel proxy for Stan Schauer, Raquel Nachatilo, Brady Pelton, Wayde Sick, Jim Upgren, Scott Wirth, Carrie Zubke.

Guests present: Leigh Otey, Alec Travers (Deloitte)

Staff present: Phil Davis, Janna Pastir, Sherri Frieze

CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME

Chairman DJ Campbell called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m., welcoming WDC members and guests via online and in the room.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Approval of Minutes

MOTION: It was moved by Pat Bertagnolli, seconded by Senator Michelle Axtman, to approve Q4 December 11, 2025, minutes. No discussion, all in favor. Motion carried.

GOVERNOR'S UPDATE

Katie Ralston Howe

Buildout of state agency budgets, along with the Governor's workforce package is taking shape. A comprehensive strategy is planned for workforce, along with the Workforce Development Council and the Workforce Cabinet. The timeline and process will be discussed over the next few months during the rollout of the council's recommendations.

WIOA UNIFIED STATE PLAN

Katie Ralston Howe, Phil Davis, Sara Mitzel, Robyn Throlson

WIOA Core Partners; Job Service, Adult Ed, and Voc. Rehab. presented information on an updated WIOA State Plan. The plan is updated every 2 years. Once the plan is completed, a public comment period is conducted and from there it is submitted electronically to a federal portal.

MOTION: It was moved by Jim Upgren, seconded by Senator Michelle Axtman to approve the WIOA State Plan. No discussion, all in favor. Motion carried.

ND RURAL HEALTH TRANSFORMATIONAL PROGRAM (RHTP) AWARD

Emily O'Brien

- ND was awarded \$198.9 million on December 29, 2025
- ND received the highest dollar per capita
- Focus will be around rural hospitals and rural health clinics
- Dedicated full-time employees and temporary staff are needed to ensure timely delivery, accountability, and completeness
- The Department of Health and Human Services will communicate subaward opportunities through RHTP Webpage, email groups, committees, councils, listening sessions, legislative committees

LMI UPDATES AND WIOA ANNUAL REPORT

Phil Davis

Phil talked about the Labor Market Report for January 2026

- ND unemployment rate = 2.5% vs. 4.1% nationwide
- ND Labor Force Participation Rate = 68.7% vs. 62.1% nationwide
- The top 5 occupational groups with open jobs for January:
 - Healthcare, Farming, Fishing & Forestry, Management, Transportation, Healthcare, and Office & Admin.
- Open jobs in ND = 13,908

Upcoming Spring Job Fairs:

- February 10 = Bismarck
- March 17 = Dickinson
- March 19 = Williston
- April 9 = Grand Forks
- April 28 = Minot
- May 6 = Devils Lake

Upcoming Webinar:

- February 19 Compliance Essentials / Office of Refugee Resettlement Initiative

BUILDING UNIFIED RECOMMENDATIONS

Katie Ralston Howe

Workforce Programs and Services Definition

- Envisioning a successful workforce ecosystem that drives continuous upskilling and re-skilling.
- Remove barriers to participation
- Meets job seekers, students, and workers at any point in their career journey
- Supports thriving, healthy and open communities where people choose to build lives
- Anticipate the needs of the future
- Attracts new employers and industries to create a resilient economy
- Values diverse work contributions

Our Goal

Activate our Workforce Development Council and Workforce Cabinet to create a unified workforce plan for the 2027-2029 budget, that drives the advancement of North Dakota's collective workforce development ambitions

- Engage Industry
- Align Unified Budget
- Document and Communicate

Workshops with the council

- February – March
 - A series of three-hour virtual workshops will be conducted with subcommittees to begin digging deeper into the creation of relevant recommendations

Agency Data Call

- March – April
 - The Governor's Workforce Cabinet will coordinate with each state agency to discuss how WDC recommendations align with their budget priorities

WDC Quarterly

- June
 - WDC Quarterly meeting will review the finalized list of recommendations and share progress towards the unified plan and budget development.

UNIFIED RECOMMENDATIONS

Members were put into three breakout groups that were facilitated by Deloitte.

- Bridge Technical Skills Gap, Remove Employment Barriers
- Enhance Career Exploration, Strengthen Workforce Recruitment & Retention
- Workforce Development Ecosystem, Bridge Technical Skills Gap

NEXT STEPS

Katie Ralston Howe

- A subcommittee survey will be sent to members for signing up for February or March workshops
- Cast your vote for a Workforce Ecosystem Name
 - A stand-alone website under the Nd.gov umbrella.
 - Top three names will be provided to the Governor's office for their choosing
- Submit Statement of Interest Form through the Secretary of State website
 - An annual electronic form that needs to be submitted by January 31st of each year. A fee will be assessed if not submitted by the due date
- June Q2 meeting date will be added to member calendars this month

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned unanimously at 12:00 p.m.