



WORK-BASED LEARNING AND APPRENTICESHIP (WBLA) COMMITTEE QUARTERLY MEETING

Date: 12/4/2025

Time: 9:30–11:30 AM

Location: Virtual

Zoom Link: [Click Here to Join](#)

Chair: Daniel Serota

Vice-Chair: Stephen Lefaver

Members Present: Daniel Serota, Tony Fuhrmann, Biswa Phuyal, Chris Toppin, Chynna Hampton, Coren Young, Craig Schmidt, Danielle Kuglin-Seago, Freddie Buckingham, Jackie Gallo, Jacob Sitati, Jayne Vellinga, Julio Rodriguez, Justin Arnold, Ken Trzaska (proxy Valorie Harris), Lazaro Lopez, Michael Perry, Nina Tangman (proxy Leslie Daugherty), Rahnee Patrick, Sheryl Morris, Stephen Lefaver, Susan Meehan, Whitney Thompson

Members of the Public: Jason Francis, Hanna Val, Zackary Thurman, Yesenia Gonzalez, Quingyan Li, Anne Brogden, David Jaeger, Deb Lawrence, DeMar Harris, Ivy Hood, John Hall, Kelly Brown, Sangeetha Rayapati, Taylor Black

Support: Antonio Gomez, Jalissa Jones, Jennifer Foil

Quorum: 16

Time	Item	Presenter
	For Apprentice Ambassadors: In-Person Social Media Activity	
9:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Courtesy of S&C Marketing, the 2025 Apprentice Ambassador Cohort will have a Final Social Media Activity to Highlight Their Year as Ambassadors Ambassadors: Bring Your Phones 	2025 Apprentice Ambassador Cohort



Time	Item	Presenter
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workgroup and Committee Members are Welcome to Join, but Not Required 	
9:30	Meeting Called to Order Mr. Daniel Serota opened the Winter WBLA Committee Quarterly Meeting. Today's meeting was hybrid. Mr. Serota transitioned to Mr. Antonio Gomez for Roll Call.	Daniel Serota
9:35	Roll Call of Voting Members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> OMA Update Regarding Roll Call Voting Mr. Antonio Gomez conducted roll call. A quorum was determined to be present.	Antonio Gomez
9:37	Approval of the 2025 WBLA Fall Quarterly Minutes Mr. Serota called for a motion to approve the 2025 WBLA Fall Quarterly Minutes. Ms. Rahnee Patrick started the motion. Ms. Sheryl Morris seconded the motion. The following members voted in the affirmative to approve the previous minutes: Serota, Fuhrmann, Phuyal, Toppin, Hampton, Young, Schmidt, Kuglin-Seago, Buckingham, Gallo, Sitati, Vellinga, Rodriguez, Arnold, Trzaska (proxy Valorie Harris), Lopez, Perry, Tangman (proxy Leslie Daugherty), Patrick, Morris, Lefaver, Meehan, Thompson. The motion carries. The minutes were approved into the public record as presented.	Daniel Serota
9:40	Apprentice Ambassador Workgroup Updates Ms. Morris gave a brief overview of the Apprentice Ambassador program from 2024 through 2025 and recognized key players and success, as well as touched upon future plans to work on things like marketing and mentorship, and companies being able to sponsor more than one ambassador, before moving into the completed Ambassador Cohort for 2025. Mr. Zackary Thurman praised the mentorship aspect of the Ambassador program.	Sheryl Morris



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	Ms. Hanna Val expressed gratitude for networking and speaking skills in the program.	
	Mr. Jason Francis spoke of the benefits of mentorship and gaining confidence from the Ambassador program.	
WBLA Catalysts Initiative Updates		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Announcement:</i> First WBLA Catalyst • <i>Next steps:</i> The Catalyst will be— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlighted on Apprenticeship IL social media • Highlighted in a Featured Article – WBLA and CASE (Communication and Stakeholder Engagement) Committees Will Collaborate • Presenting their Programming at Next WBLA Quarterly Meeting • Receiving an Award on Behalf of WBLA • <i>Call for Submissions:</i> Recommendation Form 	
9:50	<p>Ms. Danielle Kuglin-Seago introduced Elgin Community College as the WBLA Catalyst. She highlighted the example Elgin Community College has set for standard of practice in apprenticeship and informed about plans to promote them and give them a platform to share those practices. Ms. Kuglin-Seago also clarified that WBLA programs and committee members are not eligible for being a Catalyst. She then brought up an item for discussion which was: should the focus of Catalysts be on programs, businesses, or both?</p> <p>Mr. Laz Lopez commented that it was difficult to compare a large program with a small business and suggested one be focused on programs and one on business.</p> <p>Mr. Serota emphasized that the main criteria of the Catalyst was impact.</p> <p>Mr. Justin Arnold commented that they should look at programs/business that are transforming systems through coordinated efforts, suggested more clarity around what best</p>	Danielle Kuglin-Seago



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	practices meant for a Catalyst, and agreed with the split between business and programs.	
	It was agreed to pick a Catalyst twice a year, alternating between a business and a program.	
	Mr. Serota inquired about the promotion plan for Elgin Community College, and Mr. Antonio Gomez stated that the Communication and Stakeholder Engagement (CASE) Committee would be contacted to support promotion.	

WBLA Work Updates

10:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WBLA Will Present its 5-Year Workplan to the IWIB at the IWIB Winter Quarterly Meeting The IWIB Executive Committee has Accepted the Proposed Changes to WBLA Priorities 3 + 4 “Work-Based Learning in Illinois: Insights & Action,” the Final Report from the WBL Workgroup, Is Now Available – the IWIB Will Vote to Accept the Report as an IWIB Product at their Winter Quarterly Meeting 	Daniel Serota
	Mr. Serota stated that he would be presenting the five-year-work plan at the IWIB meeting and noted that the WBL report is available and it is in the process of being sent out. He inquired about ways to make the plan actionable for 2026 and what barriers to participation are, as well as examples of programs that should be looked to as standard of practice, and examples of policies changes that would give opportunities for expansion. He stated his intention of sending out a report in the first part of 2026.	

Whiteboarding: Recommendation 5

10:10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Background:</i> WBLA Had a Whiteboarding Session for Recommendations 1-4 of “Work-Based Learning in Illinois: Insights & Action” at their Fall Quarterly <i>Review:</i> Highlights from Previous Whiteboarding Session <i>Whiteboarding:</i> Based on Recommendation 5, what concrete action items could WBLA take on to push the needle forward for WBL programming in Illinois? 	Daniel Serota
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Time

Item

Presenter

Mr. Justin Arnold noted that while youth and dislocated workers have access to substantial resources, the primary remaining service gap lies in supports for adults.

Ms. Kelly Brown explained that community- and faith-based organizations can partner with the system to provide wraparound services similar to those under WIOA Title I. She emphasized that these partners can help fill gaps in pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programming without needing to meet Registered Apprenticeship requirements.

Ms. Whitney Thompson shared that community colleges already offer many adult-focused wraparound supports, citing the Pipeline for Advancing the Healthcare Workforce (PATH) and Workforce Equity Initiative (WEI) as examples.

Ms. Rahnee Patrick described how work-based learning programs partner with local school districts and special-education cooperatives. She noted that the state is obligated to assist students with disabilities in transitioning to employment. These efforts are supported through DOE school funding and the 15% TIV set-aside. She added that organizations such as Goodwill, originally focused solely on serving people with disabilities, have broadened to serve additional populations, including individuals who were formerly incarcerated.

Mr. Serota asked whether disability-related supports could be tied to incentives, and Ms. Patrick confirmed that they could. He then asked whether policy or regulation was the primary barrier; Ms. Patrick responded that stigma and lack of education remain the greatest challenges. She noted that the work of Mr. Phuyal has been instrumental in addressing employer stigma.



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	Mr. Tony Fuhrmann commented that in Madison County's apprenticeship programs, it quickly becomes apparent which partners are truly engaged with the disability community; early conversations often signal which partners to avoid.	
	Mr. Biswa Phuyal stated that stigma continues to be the biggest barrier in disability hiring and emphasized the need for broader employer-awareness efforts. He noted that "Dignity in Pay" will be discussed at the IWIB as part of destigmatizing disability employment.	
	Mr. Julio Rodriguez addressed barriers more broadly, explaining that the Dept. of Commerce & Economic Opportunity (DCEO) uses discretionary funds such as Jobs Training and Economic Development (JTED) to support retention through childcare, transportation, and similar interventions. He stressed that employers also need to adopt retention strategies, as stabilization can take months. He suggested partnering with CASE to convene employers for further discussion. Mr. Rodriguez also called for a clear inventory of available resources, noting that many supports go unused because they are not widely known or have limiting constraints. He stated that apprenticeships may be a strong starting point for building such an inventory and highlighted ongoing childcare and transportation gaps, with much current support still crisis-oriented.	
	Ms. Jackie Gallo added that JTED's barrier-reduction fund remains their most effective tool because grantees can define what counts as a barrier. She noted that delays in approval can cause missed work and that employers are increasingly reaching out to agencies proactively as they learn what support is available.	
	Mr. Fuhrmann emphasized the importance of coaching new employees not to quit when they encounter initial setbacks—	



Time	Item	Presenter
	such as disrupted transportation—and encouraged workers to contact local agencies for help resolving issues.	
	Ms. Harris commented that WBLA could promote models like Clean Energy Jobs Act (CEJA) and JTED, which incorporate barrier-reduction supports, and noted that the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) programs do the same. She also mentioned ongoing exploration of transportation-related supports, including potential use of a clean-energy bank to help individuals purchase vehicles with low-interest loans or small grants, possibly in partnership with Enterprise.	
	Mr. Arnold raised a question about childcare, suggesting that the group explore collaboration with Head Start. He noted that Illinois receives substantial Head Start funding, yet many sites are closing or reducing hours due to low enrollment, creating an opportunity for workforce-system engagement.	
	Mr. Corey Young explained that institutions are working to reform stipend processes, as financial-aid cost-of-attendance rules have limited the ability to get funds into students' hands. Despite tax and paperwork implications, institutions are developing workarounds and seeking more flexible funding pools.	
	Mr. Rodriguez added that Revolution Workshop's fixed-rate car-loan model could be expanded statewide, particularly for rural communities, and suggested pursuing legislative options or exploring whether state vehicles could be loaned.	
	Ms. Harris elaborated that Revolution Workshop offers a fixed 6% interest rate regardless of credit score, supported by a \$50,000 collateral fund held by a bank. She noted that a larger entity replicating this model statewide would be highly beneficial and mentioned Ameren's potential interest in supporting fleet replacement.	



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	<p>Mr. Serota proposed bringing representatives from Uber, Enterprise, and Pacesetter to the next quarterly meeting to advance the transportation conversation. He asked what steps should follow and how these strategies might be scaled. Ms. Patrick indicated that related discussions are already underway.</p> <p>Mr. Serota also asked whether the Department of Transportation should be involved.</p> <p>Ms. Thompson noted that Hertz already partners with Uber to provide rental vehicles for rideshare work and suggested that a similar model could serve as a transitional tool for apprentices or new workers.</p> <p>Mr. Gomez mentioned other IWIB Committees had discussed partnerships with shuttle services and car rental companies previously.</p> <p>Mr. Serota expanded on that calling for suggestions on how to incentivize rental car companies, to loop in the Department of Transportation, and tabled it for a dialogue in Q1 of 2026.</p>	
10:40	<p>Whiteboarding: WBL Next Steps for Expansion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Background:</i> As a First Step in WBLA's Work to Expand WBL in Illinois, Based on the Findings of the WBL Workgroup's Final Report, the Committee Seeks to Gain a Better Understanding of Policy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What Is the Policy Landscape in Illinois? What Current Policy Could Be Molded/Leveraged to Expand WBL in Illinois? What Is the Process for Molding/Leveraging Said Policy? <i>Whiteboarding:</i> What Are WBLA's Policy Next Steps to Expand WBL in Illinois? <p>Mr. Lopez remarked that while many strong components of the system are already in place, they must be better connected. He noted that DCEO has invested in Talent</p>	Daniel Serota



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	<p>Pipeline Management (TPM) and that the Illinois State Board of Education's (ISBE) K–12 system provides robust supports for in-school youth—supports that could also benefit out-of-school youth. He added that other states have clearly communicated that employers share responsibility for developing young talent. Highlighting employer “Catalysts” and expanding work-based learning opportunities, such as internships and apprenticeships, could reinforce that this is a shared priority of both the state and employers. He suggested that the state may also wish to establish a formal goal or priority supported by elected leadership.</p> <p>Mr. Freddie Buckingham shared that SI Now is producing strong outcomes in the southern region. He explained that the initiative created a website for employers to sign up to host tours and has delivered substantial youth-focused programming. SI Now also holds an annual career fair for Regional Office of Education (ROE) 21 and ROE 30 in partnership with TIII and Man-Tra-Con.</p> <p>Mr. Fuhrmann raised a significant policy concern related to insurance requirements for employers who take on youth under age 18, particularly within manufacturing.</p> <p>Mr. Lopez responded that several states have explored workers' compensation solutions to ease employer concerns and suggested that ROEs could serve as connectors for employers at the regional level. Mr. Serota added that he would look into this further, noting there may be an opportunity to develop a reinsurance model.</p> <p>Mr. Arnold remarked that employers often assume that barriers disappear once an individual begins working, when in fact the benefits cliff typically lasts three to six months. He explained that his Local Workforce Innovation Area (LWIA) had reviewed Michigan's model, in which local board representatives and American Job Center (AJC) career</p>	



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	coaches are embedded onsite with employers, allowing career services to be delivered directly in the workplace. He added that Illinois could benefit from developing more specialized workforce sites—such as in healthcare or manufacturing—rather than relying solely on comprehensive centers.	
	Mr. Buckingham noted that in employer roundtables, benefits cliffs consistently arise as a major concern. Many workers do not earn enough in the early months to fully stabilize, and he emphasized the need for a temporary “step-stone” solution during the three- to six-month gap.	
	Mr. Arnold added that having career coaches onsite increases employer awareness and enables coordination with social workers to resolve issues earlier.	
	Mr. Lefaver observed that a significant age gap exists between youth programs and the minimum age requirements for job entry. Many policies require participants to be 18 before engaging in certain activities. He asked whether the state could lower age requirements within funding opportunities to help bridge youth to age 18, even if they are not yet permitted on worksites.	
	Mr. Young noted that during Bootcamp, a recurring concern was that nonprofits are excluded from tax credits, even though they might benefit from them the most.	
	Ms. Kuglin-Seago stated that some states, such as Kansas and Colorado, have implemented tax incentives specifically for healthcare workforce development. She suggested that exploring similar alternatives in Illinois could be valuable, as such incentives often go underutilized.	



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	<p>Mr. Zackary Thurman reiterated that transportation remains a significant challenge across programs.</p> <p>Ms. Yesenia Gonzalez added that apprentices with children frequently struggle with childcare barriers.</p> <p>Ms. Deb Lawrence emphasized the need to encourage new apprentices not to quit when crises arise. She shared an example of an apprentice who considered leaving the program when a parent was hospitalized because they did not understand their benefits package. She explained that their organization is still relatively new to apprenticeship and that the Ambassador Program can feel like a second full-time job for participants. She stressed the need for best practices to help employers remain engaged in the Ambassador Program.</p>	
Old Business		
11:15	Mr. Serota recognized the hard work and dedication of Mr. Tony Fuhrmann, who then gave some words of thanks and gratitude.	Daniel Serota
New Business		
11:20	<p>Mr. Biswa Phuyal shared an anecdote about a former apprentice that spoke highly of the program and how it shaped his current career, highlighting the efficacy of the program.</p> <p>Ms. Kuglin-Seago ask for clarification about National Apprentice Week dates, and Mr. Serota confirmed changes were happening, but it was not something confirmed yet.</p>	Daniel Serota/ Jennifer Foil
Public Comment		
11:25	There was none.	Daniel Serota



Time	Item	Presenter
	Adjournment	
11:30	Mr. Serota stated goal to have this meeting in person in Q1, then called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Kuglin-Seago started the motion. Mr. Arnold seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned due to a lack of quorum.	Daniel Serota