



TITLE: Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship (WBLA) Committee 2026 Spring Quarterly Meeting

DATE: 3/11/2026

TIME: 12:30-2:30 pm

LOCATION: [Zoom](#)

GUESTS: Jarrod Gayheart, Taylor Black, Jalissa Jones, Antonio Gomez, Jennifer Foil, Christian Rodriguez, Elissa Kojzarek, Jan Keresztes, John Hall, Ayman Faruqi, Claudia Uribe, Anne Brogden, Gavin Carman, Elena Siampos, Peter Tobin, Beril Mese, Kenya Ortiz, Jessica Hayes, Sania Kamani, Karen Guadarrama, Qingyan Li

RECORDED BY: Jalissa Jones

MEMBERS: Daniel Serota (Chair), Stephen Lefaver (Vice-Chair), Cassie Blickem, Chris Toppin, Chynna Hampton, Corey Young, Craig Schmidt, Danielle Kuglin-Seago, Deb Lawrence, Erica Thieman, Freddie Buckingham, Jackie Gallo, Jayne Vellinga, Julio Rodriguez, Justin Arnold (proxy Taylor Black), Ken Trzaska, Kraig Kistingner, Larry Fitzpatrick, Lazaro Lopez, Leslie Daugherty, Michael Perry, Rahnee Patrick (proxy Andy Losasso), Sangeetha Rayapati, Sarah Hartwick, Sheree Speakman, Sheryl Morris, Susan Meehan, Terry Stroh, Whitney Thompson, Bruce Hallam (Ex-Officio)

MEETING AGENDA ITEMS

TIME	TOPIC / AGENDA ITEM	PRESENTER
12:30	Meeting Called to Order/Welcome Mr. Daniel Seorta called the meeting to order and welcomed the group.	Daniel Serota
12:35	Roll Call of Members and Approval of Previous Minutes Mr. Antonio Gomez conducted a roll call. Arnold, Serota, Buckingham, Blickem, Lefaver, Schmidt, Fitzpatrick, Lawrence, Hartwick, Stroh, Thompson, Kuglin-Seago, Meehan, Young, Patrick, Toppin, Daugherty, and Speakman were present, constituting a full quorum. Mr. Gomez conducted a vote to approve the Winter quarterly minutes. Serota, Phuyal, Blickem, Schmidt, Kuglin-Seago, Lawrence, Buckingham, Gallo, Black, Fitzpatrick, Daugherty, Losasso, Speakman, Lefaver, Meehan, Stroh, Thompson voted to approve the minutes. The minutes were approved.	Antonio Gomez
12:40	Apprentice Ambassador Program Mr. Craig Schmidt gave updates regarding the Apprentice Ambassador program. Updates were: <ul style="list-style-type: none">The Apprentice Ambassador applications are now open year round	Sheryl Morris/ Craig Schmidt



- The new podcast “The Apprentice Perceptive” which showcases the talent in apprenticeship has been launched
- Social media tool kit is available to promote the podcast
- One of the current members of the Cohort (Christina Harms) is going to be interviewed by WGLT

Mr. Serota reiterated the need to promote this to personal networks and contacts as well as well as upcoming National Apprenticeship Week content.

Mr. Schmidt shared the outreach plan for the podcast centered around key industry dates and called for suggestions of anything to be added.

Ms. Cassie Blickem mentioned that November is National Accounting Month, and that Waubensee has an insurance apprenticeship with The Hartford if highlights in the insurance space is needed. Mr. Gavin Carman noted that National Insurance Awareness Day is June 28th.

There was a round robin of Introductions of 2026 Apprentice Ambassador cohort: Gavin Carman, Peter Tobin, Ayman Faruqi, Kenya Ortiz, Beril Mese, Claudia Uribe, Jerrod Gayheart, Christian Rodriguez, and Sania Kamani.

12:50

Catalyst Initiative

Ms. Danielle Kuglin-Seago introduced Elgin Community College (ECC) as the inaugural Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship (WBLA) Catalyst Initiative. A social media toolkit will be made available to promote the first catalyst.

She explained that the Catalyst Initiative is about recognizing good work in work-based learning and apprenticeship that could be replicated or modified to scale. The Committee will award one program in winter and one employer in summer and called for nominations to be submitted.

Ms. Kuglin-Seago then introduced Elissa Kojzarek, Director of Strategic Partnerships and Dr. Gina De rosier-Cook, the Dean of Workforce from ECC (Dr. De rosier-Cook was not present for the meeting), Elgin innovative pre apprenticeship model to explore during short term apprenticeships

Ms. Elissa Kojzarek introduced the ECC work-based learning and apprenticeship model. She explained they work closely with the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) team, on-campus partners, Education for Employment (EFE) and various other stakeholders on developing programs.

She explained that employers don’t care what it’s called, just want humans to be trained and employed. The program puts a person on the job even for a day so they can figure out what they want and what they don’t want. Their guiding principle is “intrusive coordination” which means they ask a lot of questions, help career seekers figure out what they want to do, explore their options. They are expanding the definitions of what they can do means.

She detailed that their “concierge model” approaches business and asks: what do you need? what can we do to help? They start with a “triage” meeting, where they ask what employers are looking for, their goals, and if they are willing to invest in those

Danielle Kuglin Seago/
Gina De Rosier Cook/
Elissa Kojzarek



goals. Dr. De rosier-Cook has been instrumental in turning work-based learning into a central tenant at ECC. They have the time to check in with students, employers and faculty to see how things are going and are their advocates and connect them to resources when needed. They maintain that their apprenticeship coordinator is their best friend, working to break down barriers with first time workers, make sure there is pathways to for them and to support them.

Ms. Kojzarek continued that not everyone wants apprenticeship, sometimes they need other facets of work-based learning like a job shadow, an internship or WIAO funds.

She included that ECC's goal is to make it as easy as possible for employers—to give them the base facts and guide through the whole process. They sometimes build a new apprenticeship and then present that to the employer utilize employers for the competencies. It's very collaborative. They are not waiting around for apprenticeships to come, they are building, and with that they trying to focus not just on results but stories.

- *Exemplar Employer Catalyst*: Call for submissions using [Recommendation Form](#)

1:05	<p>Ms. Jennifer Foil explained that the Apprenticeship Specialist use US Department of Labor State Apprenticeship Expansion Formula (SAEF) Grant, and the purpose is for the specialists to be embedded in business services and local workforce areas. They work with employers to set up or find free-of-charge training programs and being a connector to create apprenticeship programs.</p> <p>She explained that they are currently on year three of a five-year grant, and normal year four funding would have been released, however they have yet to release the funding, but it is in the budget so she believes it will be released soon and then she can decimate information about how that funding is being used.</p> <p>She concluded that in the interim, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) did release new information pertaining to apprentice requirements, so that is something to be looked at. For more information on the guidance, join Employment Training Administration for a public webinar on March 27 at 1pm ET. Register for the webinar on WorkforceGPS.</p>	Jennifer Foil
1:15	<p>Next Steps for WBL Expansion</p> <p>Mr. Serota introduced topics for next steps for WBL expansion which were: AI (paused), Policy, and Transportation. He said it was still being decided if these avenues would become Workgroups.</p>	Daniel Serota
1:25	<p>Policy</p> <p>Mr. Gomez explained that with the rollout of Illinois Workforce Development Systems (IWDS) 2.0 Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) is looking at policy to align with the new standards and WBLA is one of those policies being looked at.</p> <p>Youth Apprenticeship:</p>	Daniel Serota/ Jennifer Foil/ Antonio Gomez



Ms. Blickem said that a problem they experience is “Summer melt”—students indicate plans and then don’t appear after summer, which is exacerbated when they turn 18.

Mr. Hallam said 17-year-olds who graduate early have no flexibility when entering a minimum 18 y.o. job, despite being eager.

Ms. Jessica Hayes said when trying to build out senior-level experiences they need a clear definition between youth apprenticeship and youth internship. As internships only require 60 credit hours and youth apprenticeships don’t and aren’t registered, where is the benefit? A clear path for senior year and materials that clearly spell out the value of internship vs. apprenticeship is needed.

Mr. Corey Young stated that junior year is for exploration and senior year is for apprenticeships. There has been success with healthcare and it didn’t have a conversion requirement. There is a mismatch between apprenticeships and the high school space.

Mr. Terry Stroh noted that with youth apprenticeships, people have to be given an idea of occupations before 18 and that lowering insurance liability to 16 in occupations would get things moving faster. Mr. Serota if wondered is liability the only concern stopping under 18 apprenticeships, to which Mr. Stroh confirmed it was the biggest concern, and Mr. Fitzpatrick agreed citing workers comp concerns. Mr. Stroh mentioned that being given a stipend was a possible workaround.

Ms. Blickem said that an insurance representative on a panel stated explicitly that workers’ comp is based on the role, not the age of the employee and there are a lot of myths about law and insurance. She and a team of others would try to come up with a list of employers doing WBL for 16- and 17-year-olds, have them name their insurance companies, and invite those companies to tell us the facts.

Ms. Susan Meehan mention that the pushback is less about insurance and more about data privacy and supervision.

Ms. Sarah Hartwick said it would be interesting to see what requirements other states have removed, though the political path for removing “protections” from youth would be tricky. A helpful long-term goal would be identifying: what is the data, and what are the barriers EFEs are hearing/manufacturers are reporting? Then shift to: what can the state do to improve communication? In manufacturing, we will face a significant gap circa 2030—this may be the right time to gather that information.

Ms. Speakman relayed a question from an employer Loyola University Medical Center is prohibited from hiring under 18 but has indicated a willingness to work with a community partner who would place youth ages 16–18 on payroll during a WBL experience (20–60 hours). Once they turn 18, they would be hired. Goodwill of Northern IL uses a Work Experience (WEX) grant but cannot find a community partner to step into that role.

Hayes referenced manufacturing again stating that there is work as Scaling



Transformative Advanced Manufacturing Pathways (STAMP) communities (people working in manufacturing) that documents what youth can and can't do. Employers will work within those requirements. WEX grants also have specific eligibility requirements. One thing clearly identified at the high school level is job shadowing. There's a lot of the work is figuring out what is required to have students on-site.

Ms. Meehan concluded that many entry-level and apprenticeship roles are being replaced by automation. There is a need to find roles where automation hasn't replaced the need.

Tax Credit

Ms. Foil began with mentioning an education apprenticeship tax credit for employers who include an education component—\$5K per year per apprentice. The issue is that \$5M was set aside, but the most used in a year has been \$200K. It's an education tax credit, so hospitals are not eligible, and cities/counties are not eligible. Anyone trying to zero out taxes is also not eligible. Some states use reimbursement models instead.

Ms. Hartwick said that IMA works to extend it, but it's frequently underutilized. It becomes harder to argue for extension—maybe if it were a reimbursement, it would be used more.

Mr. Stroh asked what are the benefits of pre-apprenticeships? Building workforce pipelines. And why not receive a tax credit?

Ms. Kuglin-Seago said it's worth exploring what other states are doing. It's one more administrative task for employers. Pay-per-apprenticeship models may add even more paperwork. How can we offer this differently?

Ms. Blickem said it might be worth it to bring in companies that are not taking the credit and ask why.

Hayes asked if these are these tax credits only for registered apprenticeship (RAP) at the college level? And Ms. Foil replied yes, but the training provider doesn't have to be a community college—any provider of Related Technical Instruction (RTI) qualifies.

Ms. Harwick said this is about marketing and consolidating all the benefits in one place for employers and suggested a state-funded marketing campaign, podcast or something to pitch to a future Chief Warrant Officer. Showcase small- to mid-size employers.

Mr. Stroh asked if that would be through DCEO or chambers to which Hartwick concluded DCEO, if it was feasible.

Other Policy

Ms. Whitney Thompson said Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDFPR) should be represented in WBLA. In working with community colleges to expand access, some barriers are related to licensing. Nursing is one area where the hurdle was overcome. General Assembly bills are currently moving through—one relates to barbering/cosmetology. In discussions about challenges with



the bill, there is a significant misunderstanding of what apprenticeship is.

Resources Mentioned:

[Recent DOL Guidelines](#)

[STAMP Legalites and Logistics](#)

[STAMP Website](#)

1:50

Transportation

Daniel Serota/
Antonio Gomez

Mr. Gomez opened discussion about the current transportation brief and asked what is missing. What could a transportation convening look like? What is the outcome?

Ms. Foil said Revolution Workshop's low-interest car loans are important for others to hear about firsthand.

Ms. Blickem said transportation is an issue for high school students—urban, suburban, and rural. A future goal would be to create a concentration of employers within an industrial park who commit to hosting multiple interns and providing a school bus.

Ms. Deb Lawrence mentioned that a challenge in suburban areas is that public transportation is limited and doesn't align with employer needs. For example, manufacturers may run shifts from 6:00 AM to 2:00 PM.

Mr. Schmidt said regarding Pace Bus—there is a train station-to-university line that has two VanGo vehicles. Individuals can rent them to travel to their destination.

Ms. Sania Kamani mentioned that Harper College offers Lyft Pass benefits—up to 8 discounted rides, with up to \$10 off per eligible ride. Benefits are automatically reloaded in the Lyft app each month. Also, with Pace, there can be difficulty accessing bus stops—for example, needing a 15-minute car ride just to reach a Pace bus.

Ms. Lawrence wondered if that was limited to community college students.

Ms. Hartwick confirmed this is a major issue in rural communities where Uber/Lyft are not available. As we think about conversations with MPOs and other organizations, one example: an employer in Central Illinois partnered with a local car dealer to donate a large van, add company branding, and use it for transportation. There are educational limitations that would need to be explored.

Mr. Young said students receiving WIOA supports seem to have access to some relatively easy transportation resources when needed (e.g., Uber). CTA also offers student discounts.

Mr. Lefaver concluded that they should consider convening employers, the state, and companies like CarMax to explore how to quickly provide individuals with access to vehicles. Wraparound services often end when training programs end, but transportation barriers remain. Some sort of agreement between these parties could help address that gap.

2:20

Old/New Business

Daniel Serota

Mr. Gomez called for new/old business — there was none.



2:25	Public Comment Mr. Gomez called for public comment. Ms. Cassie Blickem mentioned the apprenticeship expo.	Daniel Serota
2:30	Adjournment Mr. Gomez called for a motion to adjourn. Ms. Sharee Speakman started the motion, Mr. Schmidt seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned due to lack of quorum.	Daniel Serota

Quorum: 16

Majority of Quorum: 9