

Board of Directors Minutes

December 19, 2025

Members in Attendance

Nicole Russo, Microboard	
Bradley Hardy, Citizens Bank	Cindy Rafael, Bureau of Rehabilitation Services
Jim Lohr, Carpenters Labor Management Program	Dennis Yaremich, Sikorsky Aircraft
LindyLee Gold, CT Dept of Economic Development	Mary Burgard, Dept of Rehabilitation Services
Mike Proto, Prestige Industrial Finishing	Pablo Colon, Avangrid
Victor Fuda, CT Dept of Labor	William McBride, WC McBride Electrical Contractors
Juvenel Levros, New Haven Job Corp	Julie DeMarco, Bigelow Center for Senior Activities
Frank Alvarado, Consultant	Jim Oddo, Executive Search Professionals LLC
Bruce Silverstone, Silverstone Consulting	Brian Truini, UFCW 371
Matthew Seebeck, The SoNo Collection	Stephen Moroney, TD Bank
Monette Ferguson, Alliance for Community Empowerment	

Staff in Attendance

Joe Carbone, Adrienne Parkmond, Fran Romano, and Tom Long.

Board Chair Nicole Russo called the meeting to order at 8:18 a.m., confirming that a quorum was present. She welcomed members and thanked the Board for their participation during the busy holiday season. Chair Russo also expressed appreciation for the dedication of the Executive Committee, noting that the group meets regularly throughout the year to review initiatives, support the work of the organization, and explore future opportunities. She highlighted several topics currently being explored by the Executive Committee, including the implications of artificial intelligence for workforce development, strengthening connections with community partners providing wraparound services such as mental health and childcare support, and initiatives designed to support individuals who may be affected by potential changes to SNAP benefits.

President's Report

President and CEO Joe Carbone began his report by reflecting on the pace of change affecting the workforce and the broader economy. He observed that technological transformation, particularly the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence, is reshaping industries and altering the way organizations make decisions. While acknowledging that these developments can create uncertainty, he emphasized that innovation is an inevitable economic force and that workforce organizations must embrace change and prepare individuals to succeed in a rapidly evolving labor market.

Mr. Carbone then recognized several individuals whose contributions have had a meaningful impact on workforce development and the broader community. He congratulated David Morgan, President and CEO of TEAM, Inc., on his recent appointment as Deputy Commissioner of the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood. Mr. Carbone praised Mr. Morgan's leadership and his extraordinary response to community needs following recent flooding in the Valley region, noting his tireless efforts to raise funds and support residents affected by the disaster.

Mr. Carbone also paid tribute to Jim Lischer, a longtime supporter of workforce initiatives who recently passed away. Mr. Lischer was described as a passionate advocate for job seekers and a founding leader of the STRIVE employment initiative. Mr. Carbone recalled how Mr. Lischer organized weekly gatherings in New Canaan to support unemployed professionals, offering mentorship, encouragement, and practical guidance to individuals seeking to rebuild their careers.

Turning to state leadership, Mr. Carbone reported that Governor Ned Lamont recently held a workforce-focused event at the Bridgeport Amphitheater to highlight the importance of workforce development in Connecticut's economic future. During the event, the Governor publicly recognized the work of The WorkPlace and reaffirmed the state's commitment to strengthening workforce partnerships. Mr. Carbone expressed appreciation for the Governor's continued support and noted that the organization looks forward to collaborating on initiatives that expand employment opportunities for Connecticut residents.

Mr. Carbone then reviewed current labor market conditions. While federal economic data releases have been delayed due to a recent government shutdown, available indicators suggest that the economy remains strong overall. However, he highlighted concerns about employment opportunities for younger workers. Recent data indicates that the unemployment rate for individuals aged 16 to 24 remains significantly higher than the national average, suggesting that entry-level job opportunities may be shrinking. Mr. Carbone noted that internships and early-career positions, traditionally important stepping stones into the workforce, are increasingly affected by technological changes and automation.

Despite these challenges, the labor market in southwestern Connecticut remains extremely tight. Employers across the region continue to report difficulty finding workers, and the shortage of available labor is expected to persist for many years. Businesses are responding by expanding recruitment efforts, offering flexible work arrangements, and investing more heavily in technology and automation.

Mr. Carbone emphasized that these trends reinforce the importance of The WorkPlace's programs that connect individuals to employment opportunities and help them build the skills needed for the modern economy. He noted that companies across the country are investing billions of dollars in artificial intelligence and advanced technologies. While this investment can increase productivity, it also raises concerns about the displacement of workers. To address these issues, The WorkPlace is actively engaging with employers and national partners to promote workforce strategies that emphasize training, lifelong learning, and career advancement.

Mr. Carbone also discussed the growing importance of affordable housing as a workforce issue. He explained that employers in Connecticut often struggle to recruit workers because of the high cost of housing in the region. He commended Governor Lamont and the Connecticut General Assembly for taking steps to encourage housing development through legislative changes designed to make it easier for developers to build new apartments and address environmental cleanup challenges. While acknowledging that these measures will take time to produce results, he noted that expanding the availability of affordable housing will be essential for maintaining a strong workforce.

Mr. Carbone then reviewed several major initiatives currently underway at The WorkPlace. He highlighted the continued success of Platform to Employment (P2E), a program originally created during the Great Recession to help long-term unemployed individuals return to work. Since its launch, the program has helped more than 5,000 Connecticut residents secure private-sector employment, with nearly 88 percent of participants entering work experience placements and more than 92 percent subsequently hired by their employer. Mr. Carbone noted that the program's success has attracted national attention and that similar models are now being implemented in other states.

Building on that success, The WorkPlace has expanded the P2E model to serve individuals returning from incarceration through Platform to Employment Reentry, which has achieved strong employment outcomes and helped reduce recidivism. Mr. Carbone also acknowledged the partnership with the Quinnipiac University School of Law, which assists participants in addressing legal barriers to employment through expungements and pardons.

Mr. Carbone then described the development of Platform to Employment Youth, an initiative designed to reconnect young adults who have graduated from high school but are not currently engaged in employment or post-secondary education. Supported by funding from the Frederick A. DeLuca Foundation and the Connecticut General Assembly, the program focuses on individuals ages 17 to 24 who face barriers to employment but represent an important potential workforce for the state. With approximately 50,000 young people in Connecticut falling into this category,

Mr. Carbone emphasized that engaging this population will be essential to addressing the state's worker shortage. He noted that the program combines intensive classroom instruction with direct engagement from employers and professionals who help participants understand career opportunities in fields such as transportation, construction, and skilled trades.

Mr. Carbone also shared plans for a significant transformation of the American Job Center in Bridgeport. The vision is to redesign the facility into a modern workforce hub that integrates emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and advanced training tools. The goal is to create an environment where individuals can explore career opportunities, upgrade their skills, and remain connected to workforce resources throughout their careers, not only during periods of unemployment. The initiative is being developed in collaboration with the Connecticut Department of Labor, private-sector partners, and philanthropic supporters.

Finally, Mr. Carbone reviewed the organization's continued financial growth and entrepreneurial success. Although federal workforce funding has remained largely unchanged for more than two decades, The WorkPlace has expanded its programs by pursuing competitive grants, philanthropic partnerships, and innovative initiatives. Over the past year alone, the organization secured approximately \$25 million in additional resources, bringing the total amount raised through entrepreneurial efforts since its founding to more than \$421 million. These resources support nearly 40 different workforce programs, enabling the organization to provide a wide range of services to job seekers and employers.

Mr. Carbone concluded his report by expressing gratitude to the Board of Directors, the Executive Committee, elected officials, labor leaders, business partners, and The WorkPlace staff for their continued support and commitment. He stated that despite the rapid pace of change in the economy, he remains confident that the organization is well-positioned to lead workforce innovation in the years ahead.

Board Business

I. Approval of Minutes

- a. A motion was made and seconded to approve the September 19, 2025 Board of Directors Meeting Minutes. The motion carried unanimously, with no abstentions or objections.

Program Presentations

Chair Russo then invited Tom Long, Senior Vice President of Communications, and Adrienne Parkmond, Chief Operating Officer, to present program highlights.

Mr. Long introduced a video presentation highlighting The WorkPlace's efforts to modernize workforce training through technology and innovative learning tools. The video illustrated how emerging technologies, including virtual reality training and artificial intelligence-based interview preparation, are helping participants gain skills and confidence in preparation for employment.

Drone Academy

Cathy Robinson-Patton, Vice President of Youth Services, presented an overview of the organization's Drone Academy, an innovative program designed to engage young people in technology-focused career pathways. The program was developed in partnership with Career Resources and Southern Connecticut State University and provides participants with hands-on training while exposing them to a college campus environment. Participants earn the FAA TRUST Certificate, which teaches safe drone operation and provides the foundation for the FAA Part 107 certification, a nationally recognized credential required for commercial drone operations. The first cohort of the program graduated six participants, all of whom are preparing to sit for the Part 107 exam and pursue careers in industries such as construction, utilities, inspection services, and public safety.

Virtual Reality Workforce Training

Michael Hayden, Senior Vice President of Workforce Development, provided an update on The WorkPlace's expanding use of virtual reality (VR) as a workforce training tool. Over the past year, more than 800 participants have used VR technology to explore careers and practice technical skills in industries such as construction, manufacturing, healthcare, and energy. The WorkPlace is now transitioning to advanced training platforms including VictoryXR, Interplay Learning, and TAP3D, which provide immersive, job-specific simulations aligned with industry standards. Mr. Hayden explained that VR training allows participants to safely practice complex tasks, improves knowledge retention, and helps individuals explore career paths without the barriers associated with traditional training programs. The organization also plans to expand VR training across additional programs in the coming year.

Tech Ready Career Training Program

Mark Lazarus, Program Manager for Information Technology, presented the Tech Ready Career Training Program, which prepares participants for careers in the information technology sector through stackable industry certifications. Participants can earn credentials in areas such as CompTIA A+, cybersecurity, cloud computing, project management, Python programming, and

database management. The program combines technical training with micro-internships, allowing participants to complete short-term project-based assignments with employers and gain real-world experience.

Since its launch, the program has enrolled 444 participants, with 222 completing training and 178 securing employment in roles such as IT technician, cybersecurity analyst, and cloud specialist. Graduates have secured positions with employers including Southern Connecticut State University, Yale New Haven Health, Turner Construction, and several financial and technology companies. Mr. Lazarus noted that average starting salaries are approximately \$60,000, with some graduates earning significantly higher wages.

The program also incorporates several AI-driven tools designed to improve employment outcomes, including a resume optimization system and an AI-powered interview simulator that provides personalized feedback to help participants strengthen their interviewing skills.

Closing Remarks

Chair Russo thanked the presenters and staff for their innovative work and highlighted the organization's continued leadership in workforce development. She congratulated the team on another successful year and expressed optimism about the organization's future as it continues to integrate technology, partnerships, and human-centered workforce strategies.

Chair Russo wished all attendees a happy holiday season and expressed appreciation for the Board's continued commitment to The WorkPlace and its mission.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:32 a.m.