

Board of Directors Minutes

March 21, 2026

Members in Attendance

Nicole Russo, Microboard
Bing Cabone, Modern Plastics
Bradley Hardy, Citizens Bank
Jim Lohr, Carpenters Labor Management Program
Lindy Lee Gold, CT Dept of Economic Development
Mike Proto, Prestige Industrial Finishing
Victor Fuda, CT Dept of Labor
Juvenel Levros, New Haven Job Corp
Thomas Sportini, IBEW Local 488 JATC
George Anderson, Synchrony Bank
Matthew Seebeck, The SoNo Collection
Stephen Moroney, TD Bank

Meghan Hopkins, Operations, Inc.
Cindy Rafael, Bureau of Rehabilitation Services
Fred Gill, Gateway Community College
Dennis Yaremich, Sikorsky Aircraft
Mary Burgard, Dept of Rehabilitation Services
Pablo Colon, Avangrid
John Loeser, Senior Consulting
Julie DeMarco, Bigelow Center for Senior Activities
Jim Oddo, Executive Search Professionals LLC
Brian Truini, UFCW 371
Terrence Floyd, Wells Fargo
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 8:15 a.m., confirming that a quorum was present.

President's Report

President and CEO Joseph Carbone delivered his report, beginning with reflections on the current national workforce and economic landscape. He noted continued uncertainty at the federal level, particularly within the U.S. Department of Labor, and expressed concern about the long-term implications for workforce development funding and program stability. Despite these challenges, Mr. Carbone emphasized that The WorkPlace remains well-positioned to lead through innovation and strategic partnerships.

Mr. Carbone highlighted several key workforce trends shaping the organization's work. He noted a growing issue of long-term unemployment, even as overall unemployment rates remain relatively low. Individuals who have been out of work for extended periods continue to face significant barriers to reentry, particularly older workers. At the same time, employers are increasingly seeking highly specialized candidates, contributing to a widening gap between available jobs and workforce readiness.

He also pointed to broader systemic issues, including housing shortages, economic inequality, and the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence, all of which are expected to influence workforce development priorities and future funding opportunities. Mr. Carbone emphasized that these themes are already emerging in grant opportunities and will require organizations like The WorkPlace to remain adaptive and forward-thinking.

Mr. Carbone provided updates on several key initiatives. He reaffirmed the continued success of the Platform to Employment (P2E) program in addressing long-term unemployment and noted the expansion of P2E Youth programming, which continues to engage young adults across multiple career pathways. He also shared that the organization has recently secured additional funding through federal and state sources, including support for youth and reentry programming.

In closing, Mr. Carbone discussed ongoing efforts to reimagine the American Job Center in Bridgeport, with the goal of creating a modern, innovative workforce hub that integrates technology and enhances the participant experience. He noted that initial planning efforts are underway and that the organization continues to pursue funding to support this transformation.

Board Business

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

Employer Panel Discussion

Board Chair Nicole Russo moderated an employer panel discussion featuring representatives from key industry sectors, including retail (Fashion Institute of Technology), manufacturing (Bigelow), healthcare (Griffin Health), and clean energy (Kinsley Energy).

The discussion provided insight into current workforce trends, hiring challenges, and opportunities for deeper collaboration between employers and workforce development organizations. Panelists shared that, despite continued job openings across sectors, identifying candidates with the necessary combination of technical skills and workplace readiness remains a persistent challenge.

Employers emphasized the growing importance of soft skills, including communication, accountability, and adaptability, noting that these qualities are often just as critical as technical competencies in ensuring long-term success. Several panelists highlighted the need for candidates who are not only trained, but also prepared to navigate workplace expectations and evolving job demands.

The conversation also addressed the increasing impact of technology, particularly artificial intelligence and automation, on workforce needs. Panelists noted that these advancements are reshaping job roles across industries, requiring workers to be more agile and open to continuous learning. At the same time, employers expressed a strong interest in partnering with organizations like The WorkPlace to help build and sustain talent pipelines that are aligned with industry needs.

Panelists spoke positively about existing workforce programs, including Platform to Employment and sector-based training initiatives, noting that participants who complete these programs often demonstrate a higher level of preparedness and commitment. Employers encouraged continued collaboration to ensure that training programs remain responsive to real-time labor market demands.

Board members engaged the panel in discussion, raising questions related to employee retention, credentialing, and opportunities to expand employer engagement across additional sectors.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:34 a.m.