

Reimagining Workforce: *Embracing the Future*



**MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION
OF WORKFORCE BOARDS**

MAWB Summer Conference | August 14 - 16, 2024 | Inn on Lake Superior, Duluth



Agenda

All events take place in the [Northern Lights Ballroom](#) unless otherwise noted.

Wednesday, August 14

5:00 - 7:00 p.m.

Welcome Reception

Appetizers provided. Cash bar.

Thursday, August 15

The Inn on Lake Superior provides a complimentary continental breakfast from 6:30 - 10:00 a.m.

9:00 - 9:05 a.m.

Welcome

Commissioner Scott Schulte,
Anoka County | Chair of the
Minnesota Association of Workforce
Boards



9:05 - 10:00 a.m.

Keynote Presentation:

**Connecting the Local to the National:
A Welcome from the NAWB President**

**Brad Turner-Little, President & CEO |
National Association of Workforce Boards**

Join us for an inspiring keynote with Brad Turner-Little, President of the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB). Brad will explore how to enhance the visibility of our workforce development system and emphasize the critical role we play in shaping our communities and economy. Discover effective ways to promote our initiatives and be inspired by success stories and visionary insights.

Brad Turner-Little is a distinguished leader in the field of workforce development and currently serves as the President and CEO of the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB). With a career marked by dedication and innovation, his journey in the nonprofit sector has made a lasting impact on communities and individuals across the U.S. Turner-Little brings a wealth of experience and knowledge about workforce development and national membership networks, as well as a strong desire to advance policy that enables local workforce development boards to serve their communities even more effectively. He joins NAWB from Goodwill Industries International, where he most recently served as Vice President, Strategy and Network Experience. Over the course of his nearly 25-year career with Goodwill at both the local and association levels, he served in a variety of roles, including senior director of transformation and, before that, senior director of change management and innovation.



10:00 - 10:10 a.m.

Break

10:10 – 11:10 a.m.

Panel: How Minnesota is Leading on Investing in America Initiatives

Commissioner Matt Varilek |
MN Department of Employment & Economic Development



Commissioner Nicole Blissenbach |
MN Department of Labor & Industry

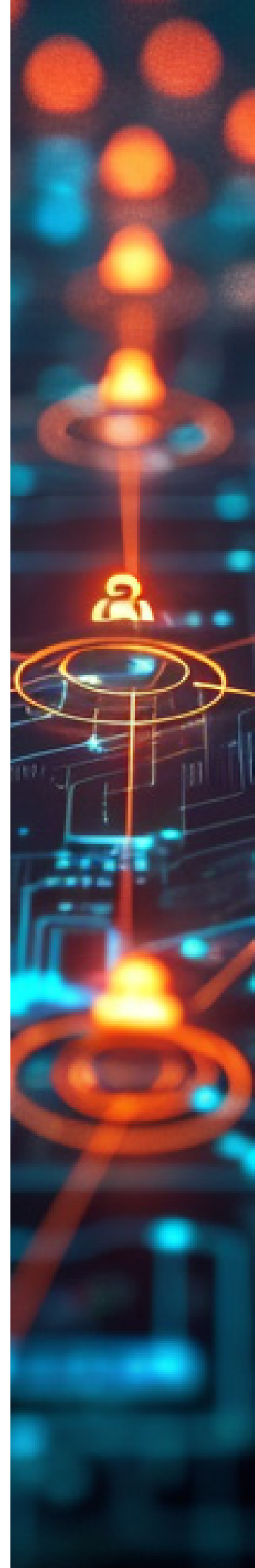
Moderator: Elena Foshay, Director |
Duluth Workforce Development

The federal Investing in America initiatives (Federal Infrastructure Bill, Inflation Reduction Act, and CHIPS Act) will bring unprecedented investments to Minnesota. With these investments come workforce needs, and opportunities to train and employ a generation of workers. This panel will highlight how the State agencies are working together to build a comprehensive workforce strategy that will position us for successful project implementation while connecting workers to high quality jobs in construction, manufacturing, and clean energy.

Commissioner Matt Varilek became the DEED Commissioner on June 20, 2023. Since late 2016, he served as President of the Little Falls-based Initiative Foundation, which supports economic and community development in the 14 counties and two sovereign tribal nations of Central Minnesota. Previously, he was Chief Operating Officer for the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), regional administrator for U.S. SBA Region VIII, and a candidate for Congress in South Dakota. He also served as an Economic Development Director and Speechwriter for the offices of U.S. Senators Tom Daschle and Tim Johnson, and Director of Policy and Research for Natsource LLC, an energy brokerage based in New York. Commissioner Varilek earned a B.A. from Carleton College, a M.Phil. in Economic Development from the University of Glasgow, and a M.Phil. in Environment and Development from the University of Cambridge. He lives in rural Benton County near Rice with his wife and three children.



Commissioner Nicole Blissenbach has served as DLI's commissioner since January 2023 after serving as DLI's temporary commissioner since August 2022. DLI's mission is to ensure Minnesota's work and living environments are equitable, healthy and safe. The department serves employees, employers and the public by regulating buildings and workplaces through education and enforcement. Prior to assuming the role of commissioner, Blissenbach served as DLI's deputy commissioner and directed the work of the Labor Standards, Minnesota OSHA Compliance, Minnesota OSHA Workplace Safety Consultation, the Office of General Counsel, Research and Statistics, and Projects and Planning work units. She began work at DLI in June 2019 as DLI's assistant commissioner for Enforcement and Compliance Strategies and Partnerships. Blissenbach previously worked at Education Minnesota, where she served for nearly 10 years as an attorney in the legal department. Prior to working for Education Minnesota, she worked in a private law firm, where she practiced labor and employment law. Blissenbach is a Minnesota State Bar Association Certified Labor and Employment Law Specialist. She is a graduate of the University of Minnesota, Morris, and earned her law degree from the University of Minnesota. She is married, has two children and lives in Minneapolis.



11:10 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Federal Legislative Updates

Chris Andresen, Senior Vice President | Dutko Government Relations

Hear about progress on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) reauthorization and other pertinent federal legislation that affects workforce development and local boards, including updates on recent policy changes, discussion of potential impacts on our programs, and strategies for adapting to these developments effectively.

Chris Andresen is a Senior Vice President with Dutko GR. He works extensively with clients to identify policy opportunities and threats to create detailed funding, legislative, and executive strategies. His broad experience includes working with companies, universities, non-profits, and trade associations in the following sectors: workforce development, consumer products, manufacturing, retail, renewable energy, criminal justice, mental health, technology, and higher education. He has a bachelor's degree in organizational management and marketing from the University of Minnesota-Duluth.



12:00 – 12:45 p.m. Lunch

12:45 – 1:45 p.m. Breakout Sessions

Breakout 1: Strategies for Increasing Employment Opportunities for People with Diverse Abilities

Eagle Harbor Room

Kristie Buchman, Executive Director | CHOICE, unlimited

Josh Howie, Executive Director | Trillium Works! Inc.

Bruce Bock, Placement Specialist | MN Department of Employment & Economic Development Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Moderator: Elena Foshay, Director | Duluth Workforce Development



People with disabilities are an under-tapped segment of our state's labor market. There are many benefits to hiring people with diverse abilities, and many resources to help employers do so successfully. This panel will review the benefits, and share strategies and resources for employers.

Kristie Buchman is the Executive Director of CHOICE, unlimited. She has worked in the field of Human Services for the past 38 years. The last 28 years she has worked at CHOICE, unlimited helping people reach their vocational and life goals. She has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Vocational Rehabilitation from the University of Wisconsin-Stout. In addition, she completed *Leading and Managing Nonprofit Organizations*, Certificate Program from the University of Wisconsin Superior.



Joshua Howie has a Bachelors of Science from University of Wisconsin-Superior and has worked in Supportive Employment and Vocational Rehabilitation for 18 years. He started his career as a Job Coach, later working as a frontline Supervisor, Program Director and now Executive Director of Trillium Works! Inc. Trained to be a PATH facilitator and graphic recorder in 2007, and has been passionate about Person-Centered Planning and Person-Centered Service Delivery ever since.

Bruce Bock has a long history of working in the field of Health and Human Services and has worked for the State of Minnesota for the past 12 years serving individuals with disabilities. He currently is a Placement Specialist for DEED VRS, he works to connect businesses with what he feels is an untapped pool of great employees.



Breakout 2: Empowering New Arrivals in the Workforce Development System

Northern Lights Ballroom

Rachele King, State Refugee Coordinator | MN Department of Human Services



Michelle Rivero, Director of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs | City of Minneapolis

Lisa Xiong, Program Manager | Office of New Americans

Moderator: Tammy Biery, Executive Director | Career Solutions

This session will explore the unique challenges and opportunities faced by immigrants and refugees as they integrate into the workforce. Our panel of experts will share their experiences, best practices, and innovative strategies for supporting New Americans in achieving career success. Attendees will gain valuable insights into creating inclusive programs, fostering cultural competency, and leveraging the talents of a diverse workforce to strengthen our communities and economy.

Rachele King has more than 25 years of experience working to support successful resettlement and promote welcoming communities in Minnesota. In 2015 she started her current role as State Refugee Coordinator within the Minnesota Department of Human Services Resettlement Programs Office. This Office was established in 1979 to coordinate public and private resources to welcome people granted humanitarian protection through the United States Refugee Admissions Program and has been supporting newcomers to rebuild their lives and contribute the vitality of Minnesota communities.



Michelle Rivero is the Director of the City of Minneapolis Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA) an office dedicated to advancing a robust welcoming infrastructure so that city residents born outside the United States are able to achieve lives of safety, dignity and opportunity in Minneapolis. Prior to working for the City, Michelle had an 18-year career as an immigration attorney. She is the daughter of parents who immigrated to the United States from Colombia and Italy, graduated from Macalester College and DePaul University College of Law, and is committed to the ideal of the United States as a welcoming nation of opportunity.

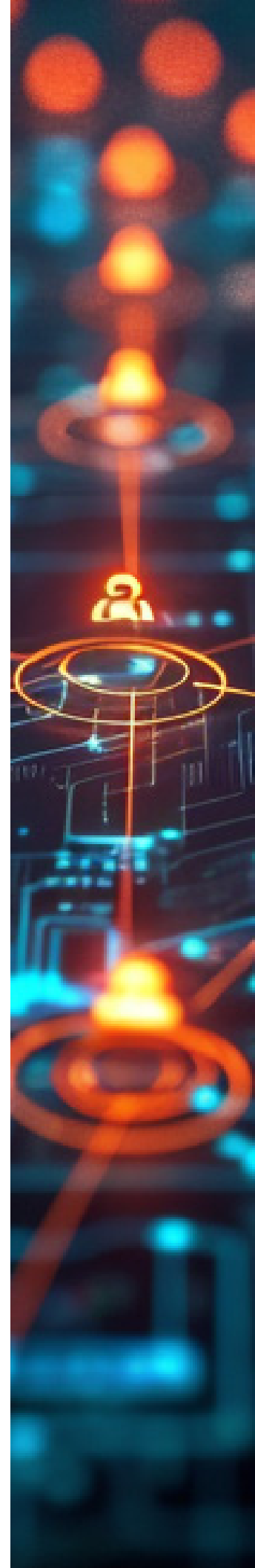


Lisa Xiong (she/her) has a career that expands across workforce & economic development and as a community servant leader. As a refugee growing up in Minnesota and having faced firsthand systematic challenges, she is passionate about dedicating her career and platforms to helping improve lives of marginalized communities. She also has an entrepreneurial spirit - using her experiences as a serial entrepreneur to assist grassroots non-profit organizations as well as helping small business entrepreneurs of color to achieve their business goals. Lisa values and believes in creating collaborative partnerships across sectors to foster a more just and equitable community where everyone can thrive. Lisa received her B.S. in Business Administration from Metropolitan State University - St. Paul and her M.A. in Management and Leadership from Concordia University - St. Paul.



1:45 – 2:00 p.m.

Break



2:00 – 2:45 p.m.

Employer Insights on Job Quality as a Retention Strategy

Kayla Dietzmann, Director of HR & Marketing | SCS Interiors

Paul Johnson, CEO/President | Aggressive Hydraulics, Inc.

Elisa Rasmussen, Senior Manager of Community Relations | Xcel Energy

Jill Magelssen, Franchise Owner | Express Employment Professionals

Moderator: Ling Becker, Executive Director | Workforce Solutions



With a tight labor market, employers continue to engage in strategies to ensure more inclusive hiring practices as well as employing quality job principles to ensure they are recruiting and retaining their talent. Come learn about how employers in Minnesota are investing in good jobs.

Kayla Dietzmann is the Director of Administration for SCS Interiors, a manufacturing company based in Duluth, Chair of the Duluth Workforce Board (DWB), and Chair of the DWB's Equity Committee. Dietzmann is a self-proclaimed workforce development and data nerd; with experience working in both the public and private sectors over the last 10+ years. Completing her MBA in Leadership & Change from The College of St. Scholastica in 2023, she loves to analyze, strategize, and improve systems.



Paul Johnson has an engineering background since he began his career in the hydraulic cylinder industry upon graduating from UW-Stout in 1984, and later transitioned into Manufacturing and General Management. This created the experience for the inception of Aggressive Hydraulics after having served 20 years designing, engineering and manufacturing hydraulic cylinders. Aggressive Hydraulics and its 100+ employees design and manufacture hydraulic cylinder solutions for their customers nationally and have products operating globally. He enjoys belonging to executive peer groups and serves as a director on a number of boards. Paul is currently Chair of the Anoka County Workforce Board.

Elisa Rasmussen is the Senior Manager of Community Relations at Xcel Energy. She is responsible for working with local governments and community leaders. She is committed to enhancing local communities through grant making for the Xcel Energy Foundation in Minnesota and has a passion for serving her community. Her previous roles include Sales Consultant at Dale Carnegie Training where she sold training programs focused on leadership development, sales, process improvement, and organizational effectiveness. Elisa has also worked in higher education and nonprofit management at the Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce Foundation.



Jill Magelssen, SHRM-SCP Staffing Industry Professional, is the franchise owner of Express Employment Professionals in St. Cloud since 2005, providing workforce solutions to local companies while helping good people find good jobs in Central Minnesota. Her office achieved Express Circle of Excellence Awards in 2017 - 2021 and Circle of Excellence Bronze in 2022. Jill is graduate of Express Services Corporate Leadership Academy in Oklahoma with fellow franchisees. She is a graduate of Illinois State University. She has served on countless committees and projects helping to make a difference in her community. As a Senior Certified HR Professional, she provides HR solutions within the community.

2:45 - 3:30 p.m.

Bringing the State Plan to Life

**Sonji Davis, Workforce Policy Coordinator |
MN Workforce Development Board**

**Jeanna Fortney, CareerForce Division Director |
MN Department of Employment & Economic Development**

This session will explore the strategic initiatives outlined in the state plan and provide actionable steps for implementation. The Minnesota Governor's Workforce Development Board staff will share insights into aligning local efforts with state goals, leveraging resources, and fostering collaborations across various stakeholders. Attendees will gain a deeper understanding of how to translate policy into practice, overcome challenges, and drive impactful results in their communities. This is an invaluable opportunity for workforce development professionals to learn how to effectively contribute to the realization of the state's vision for a thriving workforce.

Sonji Davis is an accomplished Programs Coordinator skilled in administration of workforce development system policies, cross-sector partnerships with employers, educational institutions, community-based organizations, and local, state, and federal partners. She comes to the Governor's Workforce Development Board from Workforce Development, Inc. (WDI), serving the Southeast Minnesota Region. Her previous positions include Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Coordinator, Area Manager for Rice and Steele Counties, and Career Planner.



Sonji is affiliated with many business and community organizations and initiatives for youth and families. She contributed to WDI's Employment and Equity Task Force and led several committees/task forces on Employer Engagement, Manufacturing, and Women and Minorities. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

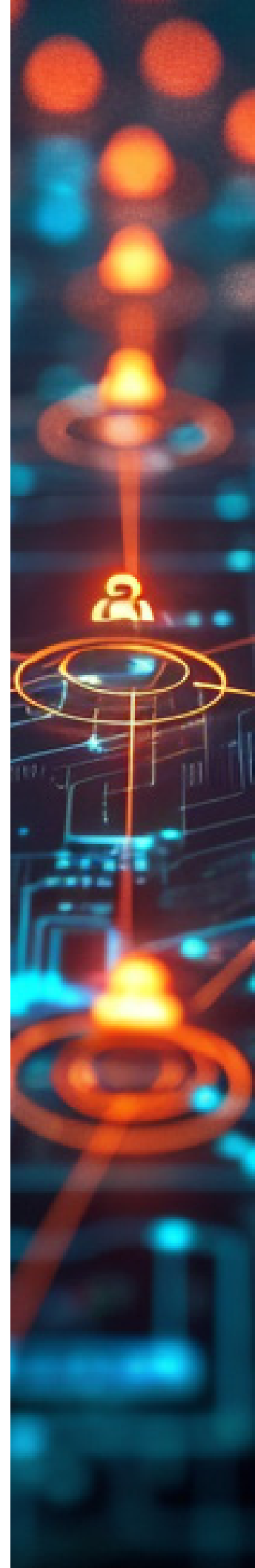
Jeanna Fortney is a key leader in the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development's (DEED) Workforce Development Division, serving as CareerForce Director. Fortney has administrative and operational oversight of more than 50 CareerForce locations across Minnesota and works in partnership with the 16 local workforce development boards. Previously, Fortney was executive director of the Minnesota Association of Workforce Development Boards, where she led the overall strategic and operational work for the association, which represents Minnesota's local workforce development boards.



A Minnesota native, Fortney began her career in the Washington D.C. area, where she worked for 15 years in various workforce roles, including leading career pathways programming for Washington D.C.'s workforce board, directing employment and training programs for youth and adults, and managing an American Job Center in Washington D.C. She holds a bachelor's degree in sociology from American University and a master's degree in social work from George Mason University.

3:30 - 3:45 p.m.

Break



3:45 - 4:30 p.m.

Association Business Meeting | Promising Practices Awards & Presentations

4:30 p.m.

Adjourn

6:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Dinner and Networking Event

Hoops Brewery, 325 S Lake Ave.

Dinner provided. Bar open for individual purchases.

Friday, August 16

The Inn on Lake Superior provides a complimentary continental breakfast from 6:30 to 10:00 a.m.

9:00 – 10:00 a. m.

Harnessing the Power of AI: Practical Insights and Applications

Mike Kutzke, Owner/Presenter | Professional Training Services

Explore the dynamic world of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in this training session. Explore its current real-world applications, learn about the unique capabilities of ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, and experience a glimpse into the cutting-edge text-to-image technology. Gain insights into ethical AI usage and discover practical applications to boost productivity and creativity in your professional role. Join us for an interactive and informative session designed to enhance your AI knowledge and skills.

Mike Kutzke is a speaker, trainer and life-long learner. He is interested in technology, artificial intelligence, social media and how people and groups adapt to change. He has an M.S. Degree in Social Sciences from North Dakota State University and a B.A. Degree in Criminal Justice from Minnesota State University Moorhead. Mike presents on a wide-range of topic areas and takes pride in his ability to blend humor, information, and adult learning principles in his training events.



10:00 – 10:15 a.m.

Break

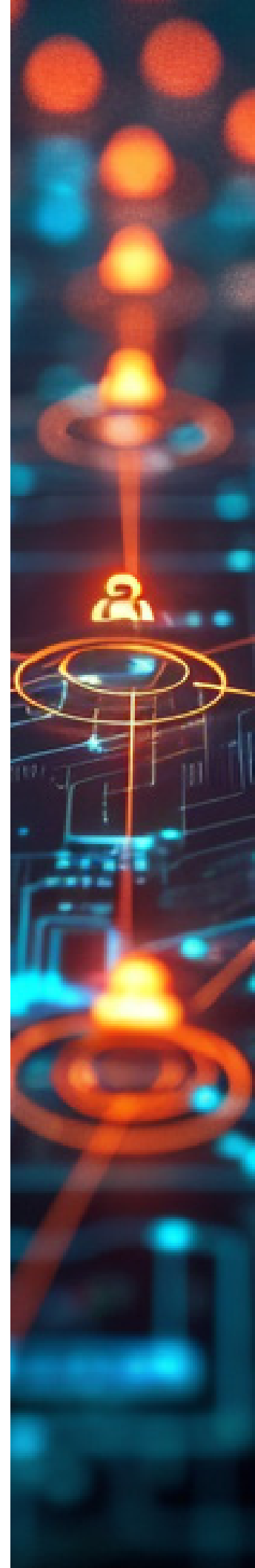
10:15 – 11:15 a.m.

Cracking the Code to Rising Stars: How to Find, Motivate, and Create Engaged Young Leaders

Clare Richards, CEO & Co-Founder | Impacks

A high-priority goal business and nonprofit leaders share is to find young people to be change-makers within their organizations. While a common goal, this can be uncommonly difficult to achieve. As the motivations of younger generations evolve, it becomes increasingly important to bridge the generational gap. Join us to hear from Clare Richards, who shares data-backed insights and strategies to bridge the gap and better connect with the emerging leaders in your life.

Clare Richards is the co-founder and CEO of a startup called Impacks, which supports parents and educators in accessing critical school supplies. Clare is a creative by trade with a strong love for building vibrancy through action and storytelling. She is known for her ability to kickstart initiatives, engage emerging leaders, and lead passionate teams to accomplish ambitious goals. A notable example of this was her part in co-founding and leading a young leaders group called Saint Cloud Rotaract in 2015. Her work as a community volunteer and advocate has gained her recognition as a St. Cloud 5 Under 40 award, a 2022 Top Outstanding Young Minnesotan, and a 2023 JCI Ten Outstanding Young American. Clare volunteers her time on various boards, including Greater St. Cloud Development Center, Central MN Community Foundation, the University of Minnesota Center for Integrative Leadership, and Granite Table. Prior to starting Impacks, Clare spent a decade in the marketing and advertising field. When she isn't volunteering or working, she can be found binging a nerdy podcast or playing her ukulele.



11:15 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. **Advancing Workforce Development Through Skills Based Hiring**

Allen Mavis, Work Workforce Development Training Coordinator | Goodwill-Easter Seals Minnesota

Cheri Gengler, Vice President for Talent and Workforce | Minneapolis Regional Chamber

This session will explore the benefits of prioritizing skills over traditional qualifications and how this approach can enhance talent acquisition and development. Our experts will share insights on implementing skills-based hiring practices, the impact on workforce diversity and inclusion, and success stories from organizations that have embraced this innovative approach. Attendees will gain valuable knowledge on how to identify and assess relevant skills, overcome challenges, and foster a more dynamic and adaptable workforce.

Allen Mavis brings a 16-year history of providing individual and group employment development services to a vast demographic. Educationally, he holds a Master's in Education with a specialty in career and technical curriculum, a Bachelor's in Behavioral Science, and a Human Resources Generalist certification from the University of Minnesota. Allen's current position as a workforce development training specialist has him supporting 140 professional staff in competency onboarding and professional development.



Allen is also actively engaged as a business instructor, teaching skills-based hiring, retention, and employee advancement practices to HR and C suite positions while also acting as a thought partner/consultant. He has developed a nationally recognized skills-based delivery model through Jobs for The Future, The MPLS and St. Paul Chambers of Commerce, and the Twin Cities Metro County Workforce Boards.

Cheri Gengler is the Vice President of Talent and Workforce for the Minneapolis Regional Chamber. She and her team are focused on contributing to a dynamic, inclusive, and connected workforce ecosystem in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul region.



Her responsibilities include programming and initiatives that bring together partners in business, education, community organizations, and government to accelerate the readiness and alignment of the regional workforce. Current projects include advancing www.ElevateFutures.com, a regional workforce platform; facilitating the Hennepin West Consortium Regional Advisory Board, a partnership between schools and businesses; running an annual Educator Externship event; and promoting skills-based hiring to businesses in the MSP region. Prior to joining the Chamber, she held positions with the Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce and Saks Incorporated. Cheri is a graduate of Leadership Twin Cities and is the current chair of the board of directors for the Association of Leadership Programs (ALP). She also serves on the City of Ramsey Planning Commission. Cheri studied Political Science and Latin American studies at the University of Iowa. She lives in Ramsey, MN with her husband and two children.

12:00 p.m.

Thank You & Adjourn

Special Thanks to the MAWB Summer Conference Planning Committee!

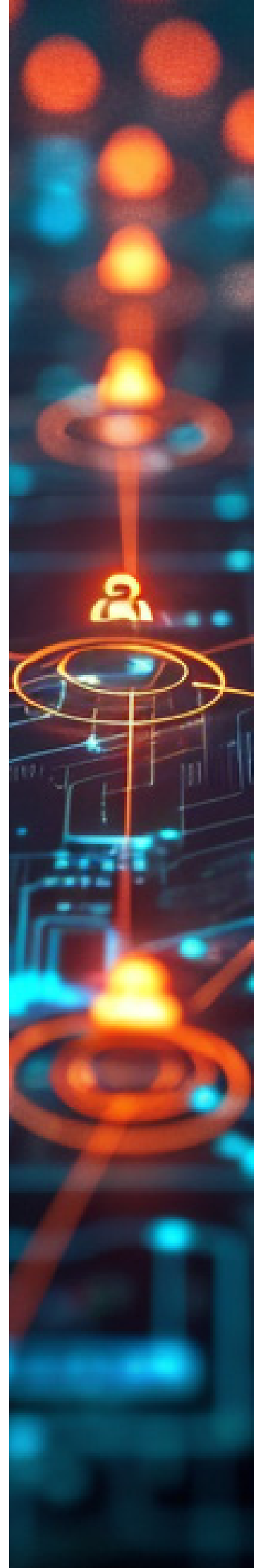
Elena Foshay, Director,
Duluth Workforce Development

Dina Wuornos, Executive Director,
Central Minnesota Jobs and Training

Jinny Rietmann, Executive Director,
Workforce Development Inc.

Ling Becker, Executive Director,
Workforce Solutions

Save the Date!
MAWB/GWDB
Joint Winter Meeting
Thursday, December 12, 2024
10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Location TBD



Local Recommendations

Courtesy of the Duluth Workforce Development Board

Best Overall:

Northern Waters Smokehaus

Beer:

Bent Paddle and Earth Rider

BBQ:

OMC BBQ

Cider:

Wildstate

Pizza:

Ursa Minor & Sammy's

Cocktails:

Jade Fountain

Burgers:

Anchor Bar

Beach:

31st Street Entry on Park Point
(at Lafayette Park)

Patios:

Sir Benedict's and
Lake Superior Brewing

Live Music:

Earth Rider

Chinese:

Golden Inn

Brunch:

At Sara's Table

Japanese:

Zen House

Dinner Restaurant:

Lyric

Vietnamese:

PhoHolic

Hiking Trails:

Lester Park



**MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION
OF WORKFORCE BOARDS**