

## Governor's Workforce Development Board Chair & Vice Chair Quarterly Report

### 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter, January – March 2025

#### GWDB Chair & Vice Chair Activities

- **GWDB Chair:** Surya Iyer, GWDB Chair, provided steady leadership throughout the quarter, helping to elevate Minnesota's workforce priorities at both the state and national levels. He represented the Board at the National Governors Association (NGA) Winter Policy Institute in Washington, D.C., where he participated in strategic discussions around sector partnerships, equitable workforce development, and the evolving role of state workforce boards. Surya also led the GWDB Executive Committee meeting on April 25, 2025, guiding the finalization of the Board's new mission and vision statements, reviewing open appointments, and helping shape the agenda for the upcoming Q2 full board meeting. His leadership continues to ensure alignment across board activities and advance a coordinated, forward-looking workforce agenda.
- **GWDB Vice Chair:** DeLinda Washington, GWDB Vice Chair, played an integral role in both statewide planning and committee development this quarter. Alongside the Chair and Executive Director, she attended the NGA Winter Policy Institute in Washington, D.C., where she contributed to high-level policy conversations on inclusive talent strategies and best practices in workforce system delivery. DeLinda also co-led the GWDB Executive Committee meeting in April, where she helped define strategic priorities and ensured that committee workstreams were clearly aligned with Board goals. In addition, DeLinda serves as Co-Chair of the newly launched Caring Professions Committee. She led its first full meeting on March 22, 2025, helping to establish the committee's structure and facilitate an open discussion with members on retention, workforce equity, and the future direction of the caregiving sector in Minnesota.

#### GWDB Staff Activities

- **Staffing Updates:**
  - Sonji Davis has transitioned out of the GWDB Policy Coordinator role and is now serving as the Project Manager for the Office of New Americans, where she is continuing the important work of the New American Talent Initiative (NATI) Pilot started by the GWDB. We thank her for her contributions and wish her well in her next chapter.
  - Sarah Arentson joined the GWDB on May 7, serving as the new GWDB Policy Coordinator. **Sarah** has spent over a decade working at the intersection of

workforce development, employer engagement, and disability inclusion across Minnesota's public, nonprofit, and higher education sectors. Most recently, she served as the Manager of Business Engagement within DEED's Vocational Rehabilitation Services, where she led statewide efforts to build strategic employer partnerships and align policy with inclusive workforce goals. Her previous roles include Associate Director of Employer Engagement at the University of St. Thomas, where she oversaw the development of strategic partnerships between employers, faculty, and students to support career outcomes, and Director of Careers Programs at Minnesota Independence College and Community, where she focused on expanding equitable access to employment for individuals with disabilities. She holds a Master's in Rehabilitation Counseling and a certificate in Nonprofit Leadership from Minnesota State University, Mankato.

- **Kevion Ellis** will be joining the GWDB on May 21, serving as the new GWDB Partnership Coordinator. Kevion brings a strong background in workforce development, clean energy, and public policy. He previously managed programs for Grid Catalyst, a clean energy startup accelerator supporting emerging technologies and entrepreneurs through demonstration, mentorship, and investment. His prior roles include serving as Vice President of Business and Talent Development at the St. Paul Area Chamber, and working at the Minnesota Legislature on education, labor, and environmental policy with Education Minnesota and Goff Public.
- **The Power and Climate Careers (PCIC):** This initiative continues to make meaningful progress this quarter in aligning Minnesota's infrastructure and clean energy workforce strategy with state and federal priorities. The PCIC team finalized and shared its stakeholder engagement framework, which outlines the ecosystem of industry, training, and government partners driving workforce development in energy, construction, and infrastructure. This framework will serve as a foundation for deeper collaboration and alignment moving forward. The PCIC work is also closely tied to Minnesota's broader Drive for 5 strategy and has been informed by federal guidance related to workforce alignment under the IIJA, IRA, and CHIPS Act. As this work moves forward, the initiative will continue to focus on streamlining efforts across agencies and ensuring that talent development efforts directly reflect labor market demand and climate transition goals.
- **American Achieves:** The GWDB participated in monthly peer learning calls with Greater MSP and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities as part of America Achieves Peer Learning cohort. America Achieves is leading this work in partnership with Brookings Institution to help regions answer structural questions of their industry partnerships. Nearly a dozen regions (e.g. Philly, New Orleans, Milwaukee/Madison, Miami, etc.) with

some kind of major federal designations or awards among Build Back Better, Tech Hubs, NSF Engines, and CHIPS are participating in the Peer Learning Cohort. Learnings from this work will be applied to the state's emerging sector partnership strategy, including in the upcoming GWDB Quarterly Meeting.

- **Service to Career Pathways:** On March 25, NGA held a Peer Learning webinar on opportunities to integrate apprenticeship into service programs, including considerations for program designing, partner engagement, and braiding funding streams. Attendees heard from John Kelly, Executive Director at Serve Colorado, who discussed Colorado's work to embed apprenticeship into AmeriCorps programs in key sectors, including public health, agriculture, and energy. The GWDB is also organizing monthly team calls to help advance Governor Walz's priorities in this space.
- **Clean Energy Workforce Table:**
- **NGA Winter Policy Institute Update:** The GWDB Chair, Vice Chair, and Executive Director attended the National Governors Association (NGA) Winter Policy Institute in Washington, D.C. The convening brought together workforce and economic development leaders nationwide to discuss pressing challenges and innovative approaches in workforce strategy. Key takeaways included advancing sector strategies, increasing access to quality jobs, and elevating the role of state workforce boards in policy implementation.