

B&I Divisional Meeting Minutes

February 5, 2026 | 8:00 AM | Teams

Chair: Sharmila Kakac

Present: Sharmila Kakac, Michelle Brooks, Laurel Taylor, KaRissa Miller, Melanie Wiseman

Absent: Jody White (conflict)

Sharmila Kakac called the meeting to order and confirmed that the Teams invitation included the January 8, 2026 divisional minutes and the draft Business & Industry Mission and Vision statement. Attendees confirmed receipt. Staff were asked to review the January minutes, with particular attention to sections attributed to them, and submit any corrections as needed.

SBDC and Chamber Updates

Michelle Brooks provided updates on SBDC and Chamber activity. She shared that she met with Ariel Delaney regarding a social media workshop that will be co-promoted through the Illinois SBDC and the Chamber and delivered by Chris Ford.

Key upcoming items include:

- **March 19, 2026:** Chamber Roundtable
- **March 25, 2026:** Social Media Workshop, 8:30 a.m., Chamber office (tentative)
- **March 26, 2026:** Manufacturing Roundtable

Michelle reported that the new SBDC grant became effective January 15, 2026, and implementation is underway. A grant strategic planning meeting is scheduled for March 9, 2026, and will include host organization representation and the SBDC director, with Bonnie attending to address finance-related questions. She also noted that Illinois/SBA accreditation will occur this year and will require additional documentation and formalized procedures.

Improved documentation practices are already resulting in a significant increase in recorded advising hours. Michelle highlighted new client activity, including a commercial fisherman pursuing Asian carp control contracts across multiple states and an IT/cybersecurity firm expanding government procurement work into Illinois. She also noted upcoming commitments, including SBDC Day on March 18th, participation on the regional WIOA board, and consideration of Small Business Day in Springfield later in March.

Mining & Industrial Training (MIT) Update

Laurie Taylor reported that MIT remains heavily engaged in annual retrainings, with instructors working extended schedules. Several retrainings were moved from April to

March due to mine scheduling changes, and some sessions were relocated due to facility availability.

A concern remains with an outstanding account that has been challenging to collect. Efforts remain in place to work out a payment plan with the company. IECC has made additional trainings conditional on receiving payments on the outstanding A/R. As a result, the mine sites have canceled retrainings and moved instruction in-house. EMT refresher training continues under state funding

Additional MIT updates included:

- Ongoing instructor shortages due to seasonal travel and medical leave, addressed through internal coverage
- Continued classroom heating issues at JALC, with temporary relocation to a different classroom
- March 4, 2026: Scheduled meeting with IDNR to discuss increased mining grant support
- Two tiers of the aggregate mining certificate approved; third tier pending submission
- Proposal to discuss converting the Emerging Leaders Program into an IECC certificate

Workforce & Employer Engagement

KaRissa Miller shared workforce training updates and employer engagement activity. Upcoming training includes AI class in Fairfield on February 19, Mt. Carmel Stabilization leadership training in Mount Carmel, and IWT safety training in Clay City and Wayne County.

KaRissa also reported continued engagement with Hella, including requests for additional Excel and Microsoft Forms training, as well as discussions around expanding apprenticeships and exploring a potential co-op model that could utilize college Skillforge lab space. Sharmila emphasized the importance of continued regional workshops, building on the success of recent Economic Development Blueprint sessions with strong attendance and resultant follow-up interest from employers.

District Operational Planning Direction

Sharmila closed the meeting by outlining the district’s operational planning direction. She reviewed IECC’s 2023–2026 strategic plan and its four pillars: Transform Lives, Foster Excellence, Steward Resources, and Impact Communities, and explained that the next two years will focus on strengthening operational foundations rather than launching major new initiatives.

Divisions will be asked to respond to district-developed questions tied to key performance indicators for each pillar. Sharmila emphasized that Business and Industry metrics will require a different lens than academic measures, particularly in areas such as persistence and learning outcomes. The intent of this work is to reduce silos, improve consistency, and strengthen institutional reliability.

An in-person divisional working session in Fairfield was proposed to complete this work efficiently. March 5, 2026 was identified as a tentative date, with alternative dates to be considered as needed. Preparatory materials will be shared in advance.

Action Items

- Staff to review and submit corrections to the January 8, 2026 minutes

- Staff to review the mission and vision statements
- Sharmila to circulate potential March meeting dates and distribute KPI materials
- Michelle to finalize March event logistics and coordinate SBDC Day promotion
- Laurie to continue Foresight follow-up, advance certificate submissions, and prepare agenda items
- KaRissa to follow up with Hella on co-op and apprenticeship discussions