

**WESTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGE AREA
BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

**INFORMAL MEETING
MINUTES**

Wednesday, November 19, 2025

The Western Community College Area Board of Governors held an Informal Board meeting at 10:30 a.m. on Wednesday, November 19, 2025, at Western Nebraska Community College Scottsbluff Campus, 1601 East 27th Street, in the City of Scottsbluff, in the County of Scotts Bluff, in the State of Nebraska, as per the publicized notice in the Star-Herald on Tuesday, November 6, 2025.

A current agenda was available in the Board Secretary's office on the Scottsbluff Campus at the time of the publicized notice.

ROLL CALL

Linda A. Guzman-Gonzales	Absent
Joshua R. Hanson	Absent
Mark A. Kaufman.....	Present
Allan D. Kreman.....	Present
Starr Lehl, Vice Chairperson.....	Present
Lori J. Liggett	Absent
William M. Packard.....	Present
Coral E. Richards.....	Present
R. J. Savely, Jr.....	Present
Marjorie A. Schmidt	Present
John P. Stinner, Chairperson	Present

Ms. Guzman-Gonzales, Mr. Josh Hanson, and Ms. Lori Liggett informed the Board secretary that they would be unable to attend the meeting due to personal business commitments.

QUORUM

Chair Stinner declared a quorum was present for the transaction of business.

COMMUNITY COMMENTS

Chair Stinner asked for comments from the community. Pursuant to Board Policy BP-106, community members who wish to make comments will be limited to a five-minute presentation. There were no comments.

BOARD CHAIR COMMENTS

Chair Stinner announced for public information there was a copy of the Nebraska Open Meetings Act available on the table at the back of the room.

Board Training – Program Review

President Dart noted his intention to take a broader view of program review. Although the topic had been addressed briefly during the previous training session, he emphasized its continued importance. To illustrate his point, he offered a timely example from Lincoln: faculty at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln had recently voted overwhelmingly to express no confidence in Chancellor Bennett.

Like many institutions, UNL is facing significant budget challenges. One of the key issues driving the vote was a proposal involving program closures. This situation underscores how politically and emotionally charged these decisions can be.

Board Training – Program Review (cont.)

When discussing program realignments, modifications, or closures, UNL faculty emphasized the need for a transparent, reliable process that the entire community could support.

Regarding the vote of no confidence, faculty described it as a shared-governance mechanism for conveying concerns to the university president and the Board of Regents. While it signals doubts about the chancellor's continued leadership, it remains advisory, any action rests solely with the board.

The broader discussion underscored the complexity of institutional financial decisions and the political pressures that often accompany them. Participants stressed that decisions affecting academic programs must be approached thoughtfully, particularly as potential changes are considered in the months ahead. Maintaining a process that is consistent, transparent, and widely supported remains essential.

Chair Stinner noted that recent budget challenges have been addressed, and that the institution now operates on a sustainable footing. Audit findings, however, show that while revenues remain flat, expenses continue to rise—a concern that will persist without population or enrollment growth. This trend reinforces the importance of the past year's budget corrections and the need for continued vigilance.

Leadership emphasized the importance of clearly communicating priorities to faculty and staff and noted extensive work over the past year to explain budget and program decisions, including the commitment to avoid using one-time funds for ongoing expenses. Meeting that goal required roughly one million dollars in cuts and adjustments. Any future program changes are intended to position the institution for emerging workforce demands, not simply to reduce costs.

A working group reviewed strategies for strengthening industry engagement and anticipating workforce needs five to ten years ahead. Partners such as Western Sugar reported clear short-term staffing expectations but less certainty long-term due to efficiency initiatives. Existing models—such as the collaboration between Scottsbluff Schools and Aulick Industries offering training in diesel mechanics, electrical work, plumbing, and HVAC—demonstrate effective multi-partner approaches. Although WNCC's role has been limited in the past, discussions about future collaboration have begun, and Western Sugar has offered space for training programs beginning this fall. These models succeed because participation from multiple industry partners creates the critical mass needed to sustain programs in smaller regions.

Participants acknowledged that some WNCC programs no longer align with current industry needs, either because industries have changed, or programs have not evolved accordingly. As a community college, WNCC must ensure that its offerings remain relevant to the region it serves.

The Powerline program was cited as a model of strong industry alignment. Partners consistently travel long distances for advisory meetings, provide feedback on graduates, share field updates, and discuss facility and equipment needs. Their engagement ensures the program remains current—even more so than at its inception.

The group concluded that program relevance naturally shifts over time. This evolution is not a sign of failure but an indication that programs may have run their course or require adaptation, underscoring the need for continuous review.

Board Training – Program Review (cont.)

President Dart reported from the National Governors Association Data Summit that leaders from major public and private institutions currently hold community colleges in high regard. Many view them as essential to meeting future workforce demands, placing institutions like WNCC in a strong strategic position.

He noted that the situation at UNL underscores the need for thoughtful, transparent, and deliberate program review. Decisions about curriculum and program offerings carry meaningful consequences for institutions, faculty, and students, and cannot be taken lightly.

While budget pressures can initiate program reviews, he emphasized that financial considerations are only one of many factors that drive realignment or closure. WNCC successfully addressed last year's budget challenges without closing programs, but he cautioned that budget issues are far from the only reason institutions consider program changes.

President Dart acknowledged that financial decisions are often difficult and politically charged for boards, presidents, and administrations. He stressed that any future recommendations regarding program realignment, modification, or closure must follow a process that leadership can stand behind with confidence.

Chair Stinner added that the College addressed its financial imbalance and now operates with a sustainable budget. However, audit findings show that while revenues remain flat, expenses continue to rise—a trend likely to persist without population or enrollment growth. He emphasized the importance of maintaining budget discipline to avoid repeating past imbalances.

Discussion also addressed ongoing efforts to evaluate and adapt academic programs to better serve regional needs. Participants noted that colleges nationwide are working to align programs with local demands, while institutions that fail to adapt often face program cuts. Publicly available lists of colleges that have closed in recent years highlight the consequences of not maintaining balance between offerings and demand.

Leadership underscored the importance of providing faculty and staff with clear institutional priorities. Over the past year, extensive discussions have clarified the rationale behind budget and program decisions, which differ from those presented to the Board a year earlier. Leaders reaffirmed their commitment to adopting budgets that avoid using one-time dollars for recurring expenses—a commitment that required cutting roughly one million dollars and adjusting to additional fiscal impacts as they emerged. Program closure or realignment should be viewed as tools to position the institution for the future rather than solely as mechanisms for reducing costs.

The conversation also highlighted efforts to engage local industry in projecting workforce needs over the next five to ten years. For example, discussions with Western Sugar focused on current and anticipated employment and training requirements. Industry representatives expressed confidence in short-term staffing projections but acknowledged significant uncertainty long-term due to ongoing process improvements and efficiency initiatives.

Participants of a recent meeting reviewed existing partnerships, such as those between Scottsbluff School District and Aulick Industries, which provide students with training in diesel mechanics, electrical work, plumbing, and HVAC.

The institution participates in these programs to a limited extent, primarily due to past constraints that hindered rapid response to industry demand when the programs were established eight years ago. Discussions are currently underway regarding the next iteration of these programs.

Board Training – Program Review (cont.)

Western Sugar has offered the use of a building to run training programs starting in the fall for its own workforce as well as other industry partners. The model exemplified by Aulick Industries was noted as highly effective, producing graduates who are directly employed by partner organizations and sustaining the program through multiple industry collaborators. The importance of critical mass was emphasized, particularly in smaller or more remote service regions, where launching programs for only a few students or a single industry partner is not feasible. Strategies to combine resources across regions are essential to ensure the sustainability of training programs over time. It has been acknowledged that program decisions must be forward-looking, responsive to industry needs, and designed to maintain long-term viability. Collaboration with local industries and strategic program realignment were identified as essential components of institutional planning.

WNCC has programs that are not as closely aligned with industry as they should be, or the industry itself has shifted. As a result, the needs of employers no longer match what we are offering programmatically. As a community college, one of our essential roles is to ensure that our programs meet the needs of the service region.

The WNCC Powerline program is a shining example of this done well. At its advisory board meetings, partners travel significant distances to participate. They discuss the graduates they are hiring, the changes they are seeing in the industry, facility and equipment needs, and how those needs will be met. Their input actively shapes the direction of the program. Because of this engagement, the Powerline program remains highly relevant to industry—even more so than when it was first established.

The group discussed the relevance of existing programs to current industry needs. It was noted that not every program remains as aligned with industry as it was when it first began, but this does not indicate failure. A program may simply have run its course, or the industry itself may have changed significantly. This ongoing review process is important for understanding how programs should evolve.

Recently, President Dart and Dr. Blair were in Kearney to attend a meeting about registered apprenticeships and the work underway at both the state and federal levels. We now have workforce tools and opportunities that did not exist before—programs that prepare people for jobs while they are already working.

A major concern we are facing involves facilities, especially career and technical education space. Across our region, our CTE facilities are outdated or insufficient. For example, we launched a diesel program by carving out space from Auto Tech, and a construction trades program by leasing space in multiple communities.

With the new master facilities plan, expanding CTE space is a priority, but it comes with anxiety. How do we ensure any new facility is designed for the programs and skills of the future, not just what we offer today? Industry is changing. When we spoke with Western Sugar and other partners recently, we asked not "What program do you need?" but "What skills do you need?" Industrial maintenance, engineering technology, mechatronics—different labels for similar skill sets. Many plants have similar needs, though some are now transitioning toward robotics. It may not be today's reality, but it will be within five years, and we must be prepared.

Board Training – Program Review (cont.)

The College has begun preliminary discussions on establishing regional training hubs—potentially in Alliance or the northern tier, a different model in the southern tier, and a larger facility locally—developed in full alignment with industry. In early December, a broad coalition of partners will be convened to help define regional training needs. Serving a 70,000-square-mile area remains one of the institution's greatest long-term challenges.

Progress has been made since the community listening tours conducted several years ago. While movement is evident, the institution remains short of its goals. The next step is identifying not only community needs, but specific industry demands and where those sectors are heading in the next five to ten years. Predictive workforce scanning remains an unsolved challenge, but one the college must continue pursuing.

Population decline poses a significant concern, visible in the vacant buildings in towns such as Kimball, Gordon, and Lisco. The region also competes with community colleges in Torrington and Sterling and lacks the population density of larger areas. However, recent surveys show promise: 49% of local high school students wish to remain in their hometowns, with even higher percentages in smaller communities. Meeting that aspiration requires bringing training to students or ensuring it is accessible where they live. High-wage, high-demand trades such as welding, plumbing, and electrical work must be promoted as strong career paths, along with the College's role in preparing students for them.

AI is another emerging area. While many colleges are launching AI programs, industry is still determining how AI will be used effectively. President Dart noted guidance from industry consultants who emphasize automating tasks to free employee time, not reduce staff. As with the internet, AI will eliminate some tasks but create more jobs overall. The College is exploring how AI can support advising and student pathways. A full AI program is not imminent, though a certificate or associate degree—within IT or possibly health sciences—is expected once industry expectations stabilize.

Before launching any AI program, the College aims to build the right program—not a reactionary or trendy one. No Nebraska community college currently offers a true AI program, and industry has yet to define the required skillsets. Most existing credentials focus on consumer tools rather than applied, industry-level AI.

All these efforts connect to the institution's program-alignment process. Programs are evaluated through a two-phase review: quantitative indicators such as enrollment and FTE, followed by qualitative factors including past reviews, faculty FTE, dual-credit impact, workforce alignment, accreditation, and cost. Based on these analyses, programs may be maintained, modified, realigned, expanded, or considered for closure. The intent is not forced outcomes but responsible resource allocation. With flat revenue, efficiencies within existing programs are the only way to fund new initiatives.

Demand for new programs is clear. Welding expansions in Sidney, Alliance, and other locations could fill immediately. Realignment offers additional opportunities; at a previous institution, for example, an oil and gas program were redesigned into stackable micro-credentials to accommodate students hired after only eight weeks of training. Short-term credentials will grow in importance with the arrival of Workforce Pell Grants in Fall 2026, which will make eight-to-fifteen-week programs Pell-eligible. Many details will be finalized during federal rulemaking this winter. Programs must exist for one year to qualify, though it is unclear whether redesigned programs will count as "existing."

Board Training – Program Review (cont.)

This uncertainty affects programs like CDL, which meet clock-hour requirements but fall short of the eight-week minimum. If community colleges are not prepared, proprietary schools will move quickly to fill the gap.

Program-closure timelines remain governed by state statute, including the sixty- and ninety-day notice requirements for faculty contract non-renewal. This structure dictates the January timeline: any closure recommendations will be presented then, followed by proper notifications and opportunities for hearings before the February board meeting. Recommendations are made only after thorough analysis, faculty input, and multiple layers of review.

These decisions are difficult, as they affect dedicated employees, yet community colleges must remain nimble to meet changing regional needs. As WNCC approaches its 100-year anniversary, the institution must position itself for the next century by serving current needs, anticipating future ones, and aligning programs to regional realities. Board feedback from last year has informed refinements to ensure the process is clear, data-driven, and fair. The aim is transparency—no surprises—and a focus not on budget cuts but on preparing for the future.

Board Member Comments

There were no comments.

Next Regular Meeting: Wednesday, November 19, 2025, 1:00 p.m., Coral E. Richards Boardroom, Scottsbluff Campus, 1601 East 27th Street, Scottsbluff, NE.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned by unanimous consent at 11:54 a.m.

John P. Stinner, Chairperson

Susan L. Verbeck, Secretary