



EAMA RSP Hybrid Meeting Notes

June 18, 2025

Welcome – EAMA RSP Chair Chris Jewell started the meeting at 9:02 a.m.

Chris welcomed new EAMA RSP members **Sheffield Pharmaceuticals** and **Brookwood Laminating**.

Chris opened the floor for employers to share their recent accomplishments.

- Hannah Belmont shared that Westminster Tool has purchased Winthrop Tackle in Essex.
- David Young from APCM Manufacturing thanked EAMA RSP for letting him know about the recent Supplier Connection Matchmaker event. He had very successful meetings with Lockheed Martin (Sikorsky) and General Dynamics (Electric Boat).

Employer Instant Poll – Manufacturing members were asked to comment about how their company was being impacted by economic uncertainty. (See results at right.)

Director Tony Benoit asked the members to comment on the Wild Card question: **If you are facing uncertainty, what are you doing about it?**

Sarah Adams shared that for **Foster Corp.** it's been a roller coaster ride going back to Covid, which resulted in about \$20 million in increased medical device sales. Foster experienced a bit of a "Covid hangover" of lower demand post-Covid but has been bouncing back this year. Tariffs are creating angst with their pricing. They are trying to adjust and hoping it's temporary.

Jessica van der Swaagh from **SPIROL** commented that they are in a vulnerable position with tariffs and have had to shift their production work from their Killingly location to their sister company in the UK to avoid tariffs. She felt that tariffs are forcing US manufacturers to shift work out of the US so we can maintain profitability and keep our employees gainfully employed. On a positive note, SPIROL has been able to shift some production work into Connecticut as well. SPIROL is a company with talent from all over the world, and they encourage their employees to move around globally, so US immigration restrictions affect their operations as well.

Chris Jewell shared that for **Collins & Jewell** labor cost pressures are threatening their profitability. There are three large OEMs in the state, each with strong unions, and CT manufacturers are all drawing from the same labor pool. They are seeing the cost of labor go up dramatically making it more challenging to compete.

David Schill from **Mohawk Northeast** commented that a new state law will require contractors to pay prevailing wages for offsite custom fabrication of mechanical system components on Connecticut public works projects. Onsite fabrication has required those wages for some time. Along with some other members, David fears that

Instant Poll Results

15 manufacturers replied

To what extent is your business being challenged by economic uncertainty?

- | | |
|---|----|
| • Some | 10 |
| • A great deal | 4 |
| • We see opportunity (reshoring has generated new business) | 1 |
| • Not at all | 0 |

What is the nature of the uncertainty your company is facing? (Check all that apply.)

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| • Pricing | 9 |
| • General state of the economy | 8 |
| • Supply chain | 6 |
| • Market for your products | 4 |
| • Personnel | 3 |

Eastern Advanced Manufacturing Alliance – A Connecticut Regional Sector Partnership

higher wages paid by Connecticut-based companies may make them less competitive. Stock materials made off-site are not covered under the new law. (Note: This law was proposed as SB-1370, one that EAMA RSP tracked this session. That bill failed to pass on its own, but its language was incorporated into the bond implementation bill.) Todd Birch of the CT Department of Labor (DOL) offered to have a representative of DOL attend a future RSP meeting to explain this and other wage requirements.

Employer Spotlight – Scott Phelps, Birk Manufacturing

Birk Manufacturing in East Lyme has been making flexible heaters and sensors for more than 35 years. They recently added a second shift and are up to 175 employees. Because of their family-centric business model, employee turnover is low. Sales last year were \$25 million, and they anticipate sales of \$28 million this year. Birk has over 300 customers and serves a wide range of industries including medical devices (which represent 60% of their business), aerospace, defense, transportation, and space, which is a rapidly growing segment of their business. Scott said they are getting two contacts a week from space start-ups. Their core competencies include lamination, masking, exposing, developing, etching, and assembly manufacturing. They started in a small garage in Stonington making wire wound components primarily for HVAC customers. Recently they acquired a lot across the street from their existing location and are looking to build an additional 20,000 square foot building adding to their existing 45,000 square feet of space.

Partner Corner – Eileen Candels, CCAT, MIF Apprenticeship Program

The Apprentice Funding Program (AFP) provides a wage reimbursement for manufacturers with less than 300 employees. To qualify: employers should first become a registered employer sponsor through DOL and register the apprentice(s) with DOL including creating the training/compensation plan. Once an apprentice/pre-apprentice has been employed for at least six months, manufacturers can apply for reimbursement for up to 2 years or \$15,000 per apprentice/pre-apprentice. Eligible companies can participate with up to 4 apprentices and 3 pre-apprentices at a time. The AFP is supported by the Manufacturing Innovation Fund (MIF) and administered by CCAT.

Next Steps: For more information about the MIF AFP click [here](#).

Workforce & Outreach Working Group – Tony Benoit - In Jeff Dickey's absence, Tony reported that at the group's meeting on May 14, the seven members in attendance reported that business was fairly good, hiring was steady, but retention remains a challenge. "Attendance infrequencies" are also a challenge. The group shared their practices on cross training and upskilling and continued their conversation about safety.

Burt Elliott shared that **US Button** and **Linemaster Switch** completed a pilot of EAMA RSP's Safety Swap initiative. The swap went well although the companies have very different product lines. The two first shared their company's safety lists in preparation for a 1.5 hour walk through with an eye towards looking for anything that OSHA might identify as a problem. The participants were happy to report that they didn't find any glaring issues. Following the site visits, the companies shared potential concerns with each other and described injuries their workers had experienced. Burt had several recommendations for future Safety Swaps including pairing companies with similar operations and in close proximity to each other and convening a small group of interested employers to create a standardized safety list for use by all companies who conduct a Safety Swap going forward.

Next Steps: If your company is interested in participating in a Safety Swap please contact Tony Benoit at eamarsp@gmail.com.

Sarah Adams, Foster Corp., commented that safety is a concern for every company. Foster Corp. recently had CONN-OSHA come in to conduct a free on-site consultation as a preventative measure. Based on that experience, the working group will be holding a CONN-OSHA Lunch & Learn event on Wednesday, August 13 at Foster Corp. Anne Bracker, MPH, CIH Occupational Safety and Health Program Manager, CONN-OSHA will be the guest speaker, and Foster's safety team will be sharing their experiences as well.

Next Steps: Manufacturing members can register for the August 13 CONN-OSHA Lunch & Learn [here](#).

Youth Pipeline Working Group – Jessica van der Swaagh, SPIROL – Jessica provided a recap of the May 9 GNACC Manufacturing Career Fair at which 14 of 16 participating employers were EAMA RSP members. She felt that the students were engaged and asked good questions.

A fundamental question regularly discussed in the working group has been how employers can create long-term engagement to foster curiosity about manufacturing careers in young people. With many companies reducing or pausing hiring, the group brainstormed ways that they can inspire young people, even if they are not actively recruiting. They identified three tactics that can be deployed even by companies without significant resources to devote to the problem: employee ambassador programs, student internships, and teacher externships. To help companies try these, the group is sponsoring in partnership with Electric Boat, SPIROL and other employers an event: **The Long Game: Inspiring the Next Generation of Manufacturing Talent** to be held on Friday, July 25 10:30-1:00 at SPIROL.

Jessica also reminded the group that the GNACC Manufacturing Expo will be held on September 25 at Dodd Stadium and encouraged the members to save the date.

Next Steps: Manufacturing members can click [here](#) to register for The Long Game seminar on July 25.

YMPI Student Evaluations/Outcomes – David Allard, EWIB – David shared the results of the Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (YMPI) year-end evaluations. A few more students (32) passed the final assessment and earned the YMPI credential than in past years, with more students (84) attempting the evaluation. On the downside, the big increase in participation was accompanied by only a small increase in success, lowering the pass rate of the final evaluation. EWIB will be diving into the data to evaluate and improve the program. Over the summer, students who did not pass the final evaluation will be invited to participate in a one-week remediation bootcamp focused on metrology and assembly skills to help get them across the finish line. Those who scored poorly will be steered towards the adult manufacturing pipeline (MPI) to improve their skills before starting a manufacturing job.

MPI Update – Carol LaBelle, EWIB – Carol shared that for the program year ending June 30, 2025, the Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI) completed a total of 38 classes with 425 participants. For July through December 2025, there are 28 classes scheduled.

Business 2 Business Working Group – Dan Chaplin, Forge 41 – Dan reported that the group held a Member Meetup networking event at his facility which was very successful. He strongly recommended that members attend these events and/or consider hosting an event at their company.

Next Steps: If you are interested in hosting a networking event at your facility, please contact Dan Chaplin at forge41@outlook.com.

Plastics Working Group – Hannah Belmont, Westminster Tool – Hannah shared that some members of the working group recently held a small meeting to revisit their goals and objectives. The group is developing a guide of educational resources for plastics-related training that includes online and in-person, as well as free and paid options. Hannah will be sending a draft of the guide out to members of the working group for review.

Director's Report – Tony Benoit

EAMA RSP Employer Survey – Tony shared that he is very grateful for the enthusiasm he is seeing among EAMA RSP members. He reminded the group that EAMA RSP is your partnership and that we count on member feedback and guidance to steer its strategy. We created a member survey to inform continuous improvement and to identify members' current priorities, and we believe it is essential to get feedback from every member.

Next Steps: Manufacturing members are urged to take the Employer survey [here](#).

EAMA RSP Annual Meeting/Networking Event – Chris reminded members to save the date for the Annual Meeting/Networking event on **Wednesday, October 22**, from 4:30-7:30 p.m. at the Holiday Inn in Norwich. This will feature keynote speaker Sean Scanlon – CT's Comptroller, an abbreviated business meeting, networking opportunities, and an Expo featuring our Support Partners. Members are encouraged to invite their manufacturing colleagues who are not yet EAMA RSP members.

Next EAMA RSP Hybrid meeting: Wednesday, September 10, 2025, 9:00-10:15 a.m.