



EAMA RSP Hybrid Meeting Notes February 18, 2026

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

Chris welcomed new EAMA RSP members **Pith Products, Sonalysts, Woodstock Manufacturing** and **MFG Solutions**; each gave a brief presentation about their company.

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

- **Nicole Smittle** announced that **Greene Rubber** purchased three buildings in Plainfield. They are in the process of moving one of their work centers to one of the smaller buildings and hope to have that move completed within the next six weeks. They will operate in both Danielson and Plainfield.
- **Mario Infante** from **Rand-Whitney Containerboard** shared that they are investing \$40 million in the business to rebuild their press frame.
- **Chris Jewell** from **Collins & Jewell** noted that they are expanding and will be adding a 27,000 square foot facility to their footprint with higher 50-foot ceilings to accommodate the production of even larger assemblies than what they are producing now. They hope to break ground in the spring.

Employer Instant Poll – Manufacturing members were asked about their hiring projections for the next six months. The poll also asked why members were increasing or decreasing their hiring in 2026 over 2025.

- Of respondents who plan to hire for **entry level** positions, the top response (45.5%) indicated plans to hire 1-5 employees.
- Of those who plan to hire for **above entry level** positions, the top response (54.5%) indicated plans to hire 1-5 employees.
- For manufacturers who are **INCREASING** their hiring over 2025, the top two reasons given were increased orders/production volume and losing employees to retirement.
- For manufacturers who are **DECREASING** their hiring over 2025, the top two reasons given were low turnover and budgetary constraints.

Employer Spotlight – **Selena Taveras, Nordson EFD**

Nordson EFD is a world-leading designer and manufacturer of fluid dispensing systems and single-use fluid packaging with a facility in Norwich that has 260 employees. Nordson employees receive benefits from their first day of employment. Also, community service is encouraged by the company, and employees receive 16 paid service hours each year that can be used to volunteer with organizations and causes they care about. In addition, Nordson EFD has also made significant contributions to non-profit organizations in Eastern Connecticut. In 2025, the company donated \$225,000, including a \$25,000 grant to Norwich Free Academy to support the Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (YMPI) program at that school.

Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (YMPI) – **David Allard, EWIB**

David shared that the Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS) is developing employer-facing guidance to support businesses in launching or expanding Work-Based Learning partnerships. They are seeking manufacturers that are willing to participate in a brief confidential interview facilitated by OWS to learn about their work-based learning

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strategies. The information gathered will be used to create guidance for other businesses across the state. He encouraged EAMA RSP members to consider being interviewed.

David also informed members that EWIB has partnered with educational technology company, Wisewire, to produce enhanced instructional resources for the YMPI program.

The project will include three components:

- Converting the existing curriculum into a course kit for use in any learning management system using Google Classroom
- Developing lesson plans for each module rolled up into an instructional guide
- Creating skills packs or lab exercises for each module aligned with the competencies required to earn the YMPI credential

Michael Nogelo from EWIB noted that the Wisewire contract is funded by OWS' Good Jobs Challenge grant.

Lastly, David asked members to be on the lookout for information coming soon about the Greater Norwich Area Chamber of Commerce (GNACC) Spring Manufacturing Career Fair and encouraged them to participate.

Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI) – David Allard shared that the MPI is on track for a 91-class program year with 60 classes scheduled to run between January and June 2026. EWIB has been communicating with Electric Boat (EB) and legislative partners to address a potential funding shortfall and program disruption. EB has arranged for Maritime Industrial Base (MIB) funding to carry the program's tuition costs through April and EB is now working to finalize the availability of MIB funding to pay for tuition through May and June. EB does not believe MIB funding can cover other essential MPI costs such as supports and stipends, and without additional funds EWIB expects its funding will be exhausted around the end of April. EWIB will preserve sufficient MPI funding to meet the training needs of other EAMA RSP member companies through the remainder of the program year.

Partner Corner – Kylene Perras – University of CT College of Engineering

Kylene Perras, Assistant Dean for Operations & Strategic Initiatives at the University of Connecticut College of Engineering (COE), outlined ways COE can help EAMA RSP companies strengthen competitiveness through workforce-ready talent and applied problem-solving. In addition to helping build the workforce pipeline, they offer practical engineering help in areas such as automation, data, quality, prototyping, and testing. Meeting participants from Sonalysts, Rand-Whitney Container Board, The Lee Company and Electric Boat gave strong endorsements for the College of Engineering based on past collaborations.

Next Steps: EAMA RSP manufacturers will have an opportunity to visit the UConn College of Engineering Innovation Shop, meet with students, and enjoy networking on **Tuesday, April 28, 3:00 – 5:00 p.m.** Watch for an invitation coming soon.

Working Group Updates

Workforce Working Group Chair Jeff Dickey reported that at the January meeting members were mostly optimistic about the current business climate. The meeting's primary topic was planning for an Employee Worksite Wellness Lunch & Learn event to be held in June at Putnam Plastics. Presenters will include Sara Gustavesen, Wellness Coordinator at Putnam Plastics, who will share details of how the company started a well-regarded employee wellness program. In addition, representatives from local banks will speak about the financial wellness programs they offer, and mental health experts will discuss Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services available to employers.

Next Steps: Save the date for the **Employee Worksite Wellness Lunch & Learn on Friday, June 12, 11:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.** at Putnam Plastics in Dayville. Watch for an invitation coming soon.

Business 2 Business Working Group Chair Dan Chaplin shared that there were still two slots available to attend the Member Meetup event at Acme Wire in Mystic on March 3. The working group is planning other networking opportunities throughout the year.

Youth Outreach Working Group Co-Chair Willie Barber reminded members of the working group about their meeting on Friday, February 20 and encouraged other manufacturers to attend if they were interested. He shared

that the working group is planning another YMPI school visit, following up on their successful visit to Bacon Academy in November 2025.

Next Steps: EAMA RSP manufacturing members are encouraged to join a working group. If you are interested or would like more details about the working groups, contact Tony Benoit at eamarsp@gmail.com.

Director's Report – Tony Benoit

OWS RSP Convening – Tony thanked **Willie Barber, Electric Boat, and Hannah Belmont, Westminster Tool**, for presenting at the OWS statewide Regional Sector Partnership annual convening in January.

Manufacturing Caucus Legislative Hearing Testimony – Tony reminded members that EAMA RSP is a member of the Connecticut Manufacturers' Collaborative (CMC). He reported that there is some good news on one of their legislative priorities: the Governor has come out in favor of extending R&D tax credits to pass through entities, such as LLCs, which would be a boon for small business. Tony spoke recently at a legislative hearing of the Manufacturing Caucus about improving opportunities to hire people right out of high school. High schools are willing to push in that direction within the resources they have, but schools are cautious about directing resources toward immediate employment since they are generally evaluated on how well they prepare graduates for college. Tony also observed that the Caucus seemed interested in assisting defense contractors with achieving the CMMC 2.0 certification and would consider legislative funding.

Next Steps: If you have legislative concerns/issues of interest or would like to attend one of the CMC monthly meetings (usually held on the second Monday at 3:00 p.m. via Teams) please contact Tony at eamarsp@gmail.com.

Discourse Discussion Board – Tony demonstrated how to download the Discourse App to a phone. He will be sending out a link to join the EAMA RSP discussion board to all manufacturing members later in the day.

Next Steps: If have questions about the discussion board, or would like the link sent again, email Tony at eamarsp@gmail.com.

Show Me the Money - Linda Riquier

Linda shared that at each quarterly meeting she will highlight two or three available funding opportunities for manufacturers. At this meeting, she featured:

SeCTer Rise Grants - Southeastern CT Enterprise Region (seCTer) RISE grants are designed to help businesses grow; \$10,000 and \$25,000 grants are available. As noted at previous EAMA RSP meetings, the grants may be used to help offset the costs associated with CMMC 2.0 compliance or for other purposes, including equipment purchases. Learn more [here](#).

SBA MARC Loans - The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is offering a new loan program dedicated to supporting America's small manufacturers: the **7(a) Manufacturer's Access to Revolving Credit (MARC) Loan Program**. Learn more [here](#).

Summer Intern Subsidies - Manufacturers can receive up to \$14,000 in wage subsidies for hiring summer interns. For more information about the funding offered through the Manufacturing Innovation Fund (MIF), administered by CCAT, click [here](#).

Next EAMA RSP Hybrid meeting: Wednesday, May 13, 9:00-10:15 a.m.