North Central PA Program Years 2025 – 2028 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: North Central – Workforce Solutions for North Central PA
Effective Date: July 1, 2025

LOCAL AREA PLAN INTRODUCTION:

Introduction to the North Central Workforce Development Area Local Plan

The North Central Workforce Development Board (NCWDB), operating as Workforce Solutions for North Central PA, proudly serves the six-county region of Cameron, Clearfield, Elk, Jefferson, McKean, and Potter in Pennsylvania. This local plan is designed to address the unique workforce challenges and opportunities of the region while fostering economic growth and community development. It outlines a roadmap for equipping businesses with the skilled workforce they need and empowering residents with the tools for sustainable employment.

The plan is a product of a comprehensive strategic planning process initiated in July 2024. This effort incorporated input from a wide range of partners and stakeholders, including employers, industry groups, educational institutions, economic and community development organizations, and PA CareerLink® centers. By engaging deeply with these partners, the NCWDB has created a plan tailored to address local needs while aligning with state and federal workforce priorities.

The Strategic Planning Process

In July 2024, the NCWDB launched an inclusive planning effort, anchored in conversations with employers from key industries through Industry Partnerships in Manufacturing, Healthcare and Social Assistance, and Forest and Wood Products. Additional insights were drawn from engagement with other industries involved in the board's strategic initiatives. Collaboration was central, with participation from:

- Regional economic and community development agencies through the Community and Economic Development Strategy.
- Local Advisory Committees of Career and Technical Centers (CTEs) and other schools.
- Postsecondary training providers.
- Chief Elected Officials and partners under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Stakeholders convened for multiple strategic planning sessions, identifying critical regional challenges and actionable strategies. The discussions highlighted the need to address pressing workforce issues, including:

- Population decline.
- Expanding the labor pool by engaging untapped populations.
- Enhancing collaboration between employers, educational institutions, and job seekers.

Surveys were conducted to gather insights from job seekers, employers, and school districts, including CTEs, further refining the plan's priorities.

Vision for Regional Workforce Success

This local plan positions the NCWDB to meet its mission of ensuring employers have access to a skilled workforce while residents gain opportunities to thrive in meaningful careers. It emphasizes collaborative solutions with a strong focus on regional partnerships that drive economic success. By addressing identified challenges and leveraging the strengths of local stakeholders, this plan serves as a guiding framework for creating a resilient and prosperous workforce ecosystem across the six-county region throughout the plan period of July 1, 2025 through June of 2028.

STRATEGIC PLANNING:

1. Local Area Workforce and Economic Analysis

1.1 Workforce Analysis - *Provide an analysis of the regional workforce, including the composition of the local area's population and current labor force employment data.*

This section provides a comprehensive analysis of the North Central Workforce Development Area, encompassing Cameron, Clearfield, Elk, Jefferson, McKean, and Potter counties. The analysis examines key demographic and workforce characteristics, including population data, age distribution, educational attainment levels, workforce skillsets, commuting patterns, labor market trends, and data on populations facing barriers to employment. This comprehensive review forms the basis of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Local Plan for Workforce Solutions for North Central PA (North Central Workforce Development Board), outlining workforce strategies for the region from July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2028.

POPULATION

The North Central Pennsylvania region, encompassing Cameron, Clearfield, Jefferson, Elk, McKean, and Potter counties, is facing significant demographic challenges that are shaping both its population and workforce with an estimated population of 216,304 according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

The region's demographic trends are further complicated by a declining population. Between 2010 and 2020, the region's counties experienced notable population losses, with Cameron County losing 14.2% of its population—the highest rate in the region. These declines have been driven primarily by natural decreases, where deaths outpace births, and by continued outmigration. While Pennsylvania's overall population grew modestly from 12.7 million in 2010 to 13 million in 2020, this growth has been concentrated in the southeastern part of the state. Rural regions like North Central Pennsylvania have experienced stagnation, with projections indicating that population growth will level off by 2030.

The aging population further exacerbates these challenges. The median age in North Central Pennsylvania is higher than the statewide average, ranging from 42 to 46 years compared to 41 years for Pennsylvania as a whole. Approximately 19.4% of the population in the region is under 18, while around 21.6% is aged 65 or older. By contrast, Pennsylvania's statewide figures show 21% of the population is under 18, and 16% is 65 or older. The number of older adults is growing rapidly in the region, mirroring a statewide trend where the population aged 65 and older is projected to surpass those under 20 by 2050. Meanwhile, the region's youth population continues to shrink, compounding the challenges of workforce sustainability and community development.

The gender distribution in North Central Pennsylvania is nearly balanced, with males comprising about 51.6% of the population and females making up around 48.4%. However, the region's overall demographic shifts—marked by population decline and aging pose significant hurdles for maintaining the region's workforce, economic vitality, and long-term sustainability.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The North Central regions' capacity to provide an educated workforce is evidenced by a variety of post-secondary education and training providers that includes three major university branch campuses, three career and technology centers, one community college "presence" as well as two privately owned schools (business school and technical training provider). There are also two Community Education Centers whose mission is to bring post-secondary training to our region. Most recently the Northern Pennsylvania Regional College was approved by the PA Department of Education that will provide low-cost instruction for nine northwestern Pennsylvania counties lacking a community college.

The educational attainment rates in the north central region are lower when comparing to the state. In our 6 county region when looking at those Age 25 and older 8.4% have less than a high school diploma or equivalency, 49.1% have obtained this credential. Regarding post-secondary attainment, 25.5% have some college or associate's degree and 16.95% have a bachelor's degree or higher. The chart below provides details by county for education attainment rates in the North Central Region.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF WORKING AGE POPULATION (25 & OLDER BY COUNTY (volume and percentage))

County	Less than High School Graduate	High School Graduate (includes equivalency)	Some College or Associate's Degree	Bachelor's degree or higher	Total
Cameron	257 / 7.4%	1,804 / 51.9%	1,037 / 29.8%	378 / 10.9%	3,476
Clearfield	6,030 / 10.0%	27,923 / 46.9%	14,155 / 23.8%	11,377 / 19.1%	59,485
Elk	1,558 / 6.9%	11,415 / 50.2%	5,548 / 24.4%	4,200 / 18.5%	22,721
Jefferson	2,779 / 8.8%	16,198 / 51.3%	7,233 / 22.9%	5,364 / 17%	31,574
McKean	2,072 / 7.2%	13,613 / 47.2%	7,522 / 26.1%	5,619 / 19.5%	28,826
Potter	1,182 / 9.9%	5,647 / 47.3%	3,126 / 26.2%	1,992 / 16.7%	11,947
Totals	13,878 /8.4%	76,600 / 49.1%	38,621 / 25.5	28,930 / 16.95%	

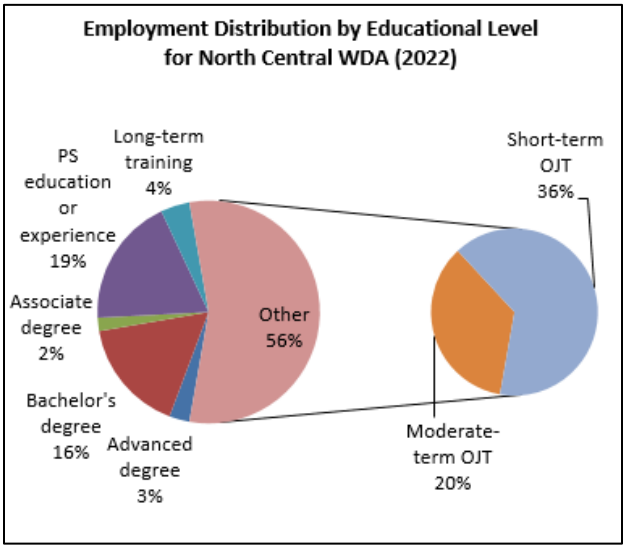
Source: American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates; 2018-2022

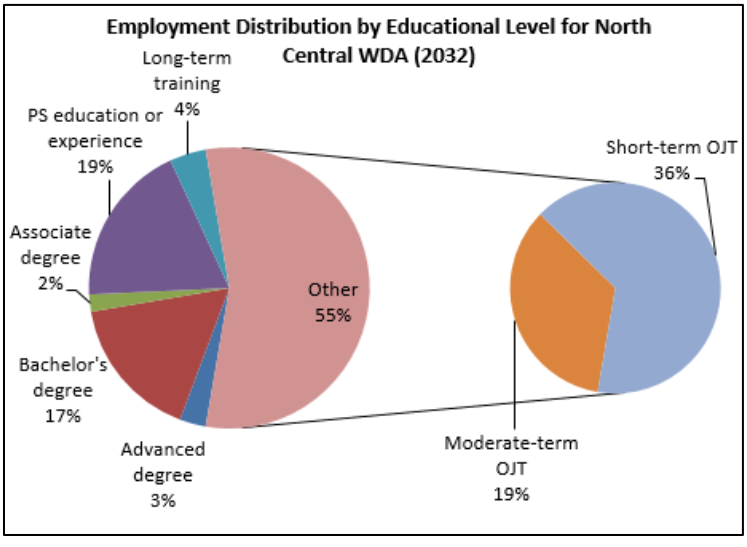
It is also important to look at the Educational Distribution by Educational Attainment Level in the region current and projected. There are seven (7) educational groupings: Advanced degree, Bachelor's degree, Associate degree, Post-secondary education or experience, long term training, moderate-term on the job training and short term on the job training. Based on these projections the greatest need will be a need for more people with advanced degrees. The following chart provides a detailed look at the Education Distribution by Educational Attainment Level in the region.

Educational Distribution by Educational Attainment Level for North Central WDA

Educational Grouping	Employment (2022)	Projected Employment (2032)	Percentage of Change (2022-2032)
Advanced degree	2,520	2,610	4%
Bachelor's degree	14,150	14,260	1%
Associate degree	1,660	1,710	3%
PS education or experience	16,100	16,220	1%
Long-Term Training	3,610	3,610	0%
Moderate-term OJT	16,800	16,520	-2%
Short-term OJT	30,800	31,200	1%

Source: Long-Term Occupational Employment Projections (2022-32)

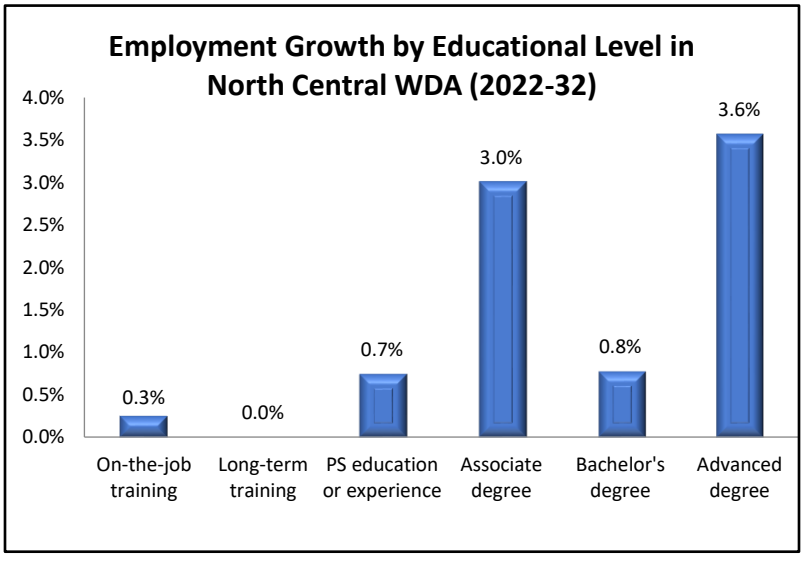




Employment Growth Rates by Educational Attainment Level for North Central WDA

Educational Grouping	Employment (2022)	Projected Employment (2032)	Percentage of Change (2022-2032)
On-the-job training	47,600	47,720	0.3%
Long-term training	3,610	3,610	0.0%
PS education or experience	16,100	16,220	0.7%
Associates degree	1,660	1,710	3.0%
Bachelor's degree	14,150	14,260	0.8%
Advanced degree	2,520	2,610	3.6%

Source: Long-Term Occupational Employment Projections (2022-32)



LABOR FORCE AND EMPLOYMENT

In 2023 the annual average labor force was 94,700 (in 2021 it was 96,000) with an average unemployment rate of 4.0 (in 2021 it was 6.9%. Of the total number, 90,900 (in 2021 - 89,400) were employed and 3,800 (in 2021- 6,600) were unemployed. Our unemployment rate has significantly lowered in 2023 to 5.4% in August of 2022 (seasonally adjusted).

Annual Average Labor Force Data (2023)

- **Labor Force**: 94,700
- **Employed**: 90,900
- **Unemployed**: 3,800
- **Unemployment Rate**: 4.0%

The annual average data for 2023 indicates that the North Central Workforce Development Area (WDA) had a total labor force of 94,700 individuals. Out of these, 90,900 were employed, and 3,800 individuals were unemployed, resulting in an unemployment rate of 4.0%. This reflects a stable employment situation, with relatively low unemployment for the year.

Seasonally Adjusted Labor Force Data (2024)

The seasonally adjusted labor force data for January through August 2024 highlights typical seasonal fluctuations influenced by industries like agriculture, retail, and construction. The labor force started the year strong at 93,500 in January, with an unemployment rate of 3.0%, reflecting robust employment. February and March saw increases in the labor force to 94,400 and 95,000, respectively, with slight variations in unemployment rates, peaking at 3.6% in February before improving to 3.4% in March. April remained stable with a labor force of 95,400 and an unemployment rate of 3.5%. However, May through August saw a gradual decline in the labor force, ending at 92,400 in August, with unemployment rates rising to 4.0% in both May and August. These trends reflect the ebb and flow of seasonal employment demands, highlighting the region's reliance on seasonal industries.

Trends and Observations

- **Unemployment Rate Fluctuations**: The North Central WDA experienced seasonal fluctuations in the unemployment rate, with a low of **3.0%** in January and a high of **4.0%** in May and August. These changes are expected, as certain sectors experience varying hiring patterns throughout the year.
- **Stable Labor Force**: Overall, the labor force showed slight increases in the early months of 2024, peaking at 95,400 in April. After this point, the labor force decreased, which could be tied to seasonal employment shifts or workers leaving the labor force during slower periods.
- **Employment Growth**: There was a slight increase in the employed population during the early months of 2024, with the highest number of employed individuals recorded in April (92,100). However, as the year progressed, employment levels dipped slightly, which corresponds to the seasonal nature of certain industries.

The data reflects a relatively stable labor market in the North Central WDA in 2023 and 2024, with typical seasonal fluctuations that align with industries' cyclical employment patterns. The lower unemployment rate observed in the early months of 2024 (3.0%-3.4%) suggests that economic conditions were favorable, while the rise to 4.0% in mid-year may reflect normal seasonal slowdowns. The overall employment trends point to a moderately healthy labor market, but ongoing monitoring and direct interventions may be necessary to address seasonal employment gaps and help individuals transition to longer-term, stable positions.

Annual Average Labor Force Statistics, North Central WDA, 2023

Annual Average	Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Unemployment Rate
2023	94,700	90,900	3,800	4.0

Seasonally Adjusted Labor Force Statistics, North Central WDA, 2024

Month	Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Unemployment Rate
January	93,500	90,600	2,800	3.0
February	94,400	91,000	3,400	3.6
March	95,000	91,800	3,200	3.4
April	95,400	92,100	3,300	3.5
May	95,000	91,200	3,800	4.0
June	93,100	89,500	3,600	3.9
July	93,700	90,200	3,500	3.8
August	92,400	88,700	3,700	4.0

Preliminary Data

Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS)

COMMUTING INFLOW AND OUTFLOW PATTERNS

The Inflow/Outflow Report for the North Central Workforce Development Area (WDA) in 2021 provides insights into the commuting patterns of workers in the region.

A total of 62,628 individuals were employed within the WDA, representing the entirety of its workforce (100%). Of this group:

- 45,703 workers (73.0%) both lived and worked within the WDA.
- 16,925 workers (27.0%) commuted into the WDA for employment but resided outside its boundaries.

Conversely, 69,981 individuals lived in the WDA, encompassing its total residential workforce. Among these residents:

- 45,703 individuals (65.3%) lived and worked within the WDA,
- 24,278 individuals (34.7%) commuted out of the WDA to work elsewhere.

The net commuting balance reveals a negative figure of -7,353, indicating that more individuals commute out of the WDA for work than commute into it. Specifically, 24,278 residents leave the WDA for employment, compared to the 16,925 individuals commuting in.

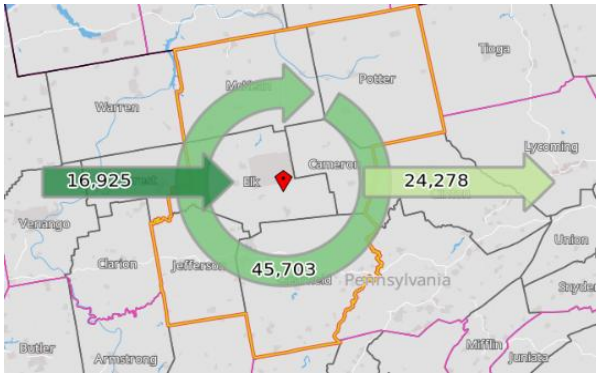
These findings highlight that the North Central WDA experiences a net loss of workers to outside regions, reflecting a potential area for regional workforce and economic development strategies.

Inflow/Outflow Report, North Central WDA, 2021

	Count	Share
Employed in the WDA	62,628	100.0%
Employed and Living in the WDA	45,703	73.0%
Employed in the WDA but Living Outside	16,925	27.0%
Living in the WDA	69,981	100.0%
Living and Employed in the WDA	45,703	65.3%
Living in the WDA but Employed Outside	24,278	34.7%

Net Commuting In/Out*	-7,353

*A positive number indicates the number of individuals working in the WDA but living outside is higher than the number of individuals living in the WDA but employed outside. A negative number indicates the opposite.



INCOME AND COST OF LIVING

The median household income in the North Central Workforce Development Area is $57,475, significantly lower than Pennsylvania's state average of $73,170, according to JobsEQ (2022 Q3). As of 2023 Q3, the average worker in the North Central region earned $48,501, reflecting a 2.6% increase over the previous year. In comparison, the statewide average wage was $69,154, with a 1.5% increase. Wages in the region are projected to remain elevated into 2025, despite a slower hiring pace and slight increases in unemployment, as reported by The Conference Board US Salary Increase Budget Survey (2024–2025).

A notable advantage of the North Central region is its lower cost of living. It is one of only four workforce development areas in Pennsylvania with a self-sufficiency wage below the state average. For 2024, the self-sufficiency wage in the North Central WDA is $38,872, compared to the state's $42,404. This measure, determined by the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (CWIA), is based on 200% of the federal poverty level for one adult and one child.

Additionally, the region benefits from an 11.1% lower cost of living compared to the national average, according to the Cost of Living Index. This index measures relative price levels for consumer goods and services, providing insight into the region's enhanced purchasing power when wages are considered (JobsEQ).

UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION

The unemployment claims data for the North Central Workforce Development Area reveals distinct industry trends when compared to the state of Pennsylvania as a whole.

- **Natural Resources and Mining**: North Central experiences significantly higher unemployment claims in this sector (2.3%) compared to the state (0.7%). This suggests that industries such as timber, mining, and other extraction-related work are more prevalent in the region, which may also indicate greater exposure to market volatility and seasonal fluctuations.
- **Construction**: The region also sees a higher percentage of unemployment claims in construction (7.7%) than the state average (6.0%). This could reflect regional trends such as seasonal construction work or the impact of large, fluctuating projects that influence the workforce.
- **Manufacturing**: North Central has a notably higher percentage of unemployment claims in manufacturing (17.3%) compared to the state (10.0%). This likely reflects the region's reliance on industries like paper,

plastics, and metal manufacturing, which are vulnerable to shifts in demand, outsourcing, and automation.

- **Trade, Transportation, and Utilities**: This sector has a disproportionately high share of claims in North Central (27.4%) compared to Pennsylvania (16.0%). The region's role as a logistics and transportation hub, along with changes in consumer behavior and e-commerce trends, could explain the elevated claims in this sector.
- **Information**: Both North Central and Pennsylvania have the same unemployment claim percentage in this sector (1.6%), suggesting that the region's trends in telecommunications, publishing, and data services are in line with the state as a whole.
- **Financial Activities**: Unemployment claims in the financial services sector are lower in North Central (0.8%) compared to Pennsylvania (1.6%). This is likely due to the region's smaller concentration of finance-related employment compared to urban areas in the state, which typically house more financial services firms.
- **Professional and Business Services**: The share of unemployment claims in North Central for this sector is lower (4.3%) than the state average (8.9%). This suggests that there are fewer jobs in fields like management, consulting, or administrative services, which tend to be concentrated in larger urban areas.
- **Education and Health Services**: North Central shows slightly fewer unemployment claims in this sector (16.9%) compared to Pennsylvania (18.2%). This could reflect a smaller share of healthcare and educational services employment in the region, which is more robust in urban areas.
- **Leisure and Hospitality**: The region has fewer unemployment claims in leisure and hospitality (8.0%) compared to the state (11.0%), likely due to a smaller tourism sector or fewer seasonal job opportunities in North Central.
- **Other Services**: North Central has a higher share of unemployment claims in this sector (3.7%) compared to Pennsylvania (2.3%). This category includes personal services, repairs, and religious organizations, and the higher claims could be linked to the region's smaller population and the specialized nature of local services.
- **Government**: Unemployment claims in government positions are slightly higher in North Central (1.3%) than in the state (0.9%). This could be due to layoffs or furloughs in local government services, particularly in rural areas.
- **Industry Not Available**: Both North Central and Pennsylvania show the same percentage of unemployment claims in this category (1.4%), indicating that claims in this group are similarly unclassified in both areas.

In conclusion, the data shows that North Central Pennsylvania has a higher reliance on manufacturing, trade/transportation/utilities, and construction sectors, which may be influenced by the region's more rural nature and the prominence of industries like extraction, manufacturing, and logistics. Conversely, there are fewer claims in sectors like professional services, leisure and hospitality, and financial activities, which tend to be more concentrated in urban areas. Workforce development strategies in the region may benefit from focusing on transitioning and upskilling workers in these key industries to better align with the evolving labor market.

PA Regular UC Benefits, Continued Claims by Industry, August 2024

Workforce Development Area County	Natural Resources and Mining	Construction	Manufacturing	Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	Information	Financial Activities	Professional and Business Services	Education and Health Services	Leisure and Hospitality	Other Services	Government	Industry Not Available
PENNSYLVANIA	**0.7%**	**6.0%**	**10.0%**	**27.4%**	**1.6%**	**4.3%**	**16.9%**	**17.5%**	**11.0%**	**2.3%**	**0.9%**	**1.4%**
NORTH CENTRAL	**2.3%**	**7.7%**	**17.3%**	**30.5%**	**0.8%**	**0.9%**	**7.8%**	**18.2%**	**8.0%**	**3.7%**	**1.3%**	**1.4%**
CAMERON	2.1%	1.0%	40.9%	21.2%	2.6%	0.5%	6.7%	15.5%	7.3%	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%
CLEARFIELD	2.8%	12.0%	9.3%	32.6%	0.7%	1.2%	6.4%	21.3%	5.8%	5.5%	1.5%	1.0%
ELK	1.0%	2.6%	34.4%	25.0%	0.3%	0.3%	10.6%	14.4%	7.3%	2.6%	1.1%	0.3%
JEFFERSON	2.1%	10.0%	15.0%	38.2%	0.8%	0.0%	5.7%	15.6%	6.4%	3.3%	1.4%	1.5%
MCKEAN	3.5%	3.5%	15.6%	21.3%	0.8%	1.7%	9.9%	19.6%	16.5%	2.9%	1.1%	3.6%
POTTER	1.5%	3.5%	12.5%	37.6%	1.7%	2.6%	10.5%	19.8%	6.4%	0.6%	2.3%	0.9%

HOUSING

The North Central region has approximately 113,001 housing units, the majority of which are owner-occupied with a median home value of $116,044. According to JobsEQ and the American Community Survey (2018–2022), the region includes 19,961 renter-occupied units and 802 rental vacancies.

Transportation remains a critical issue tied to housing, as 7.4% (6,507) of occupied housing units in the region lack access to a vehicle. This creates a significant barrier to employment, especially in rural areas where public transportation options are limited or nonexistent. The distance between housing and job centers in rural communities often forces individuals to rely on private transportation, compounding the challenges for those without reliable vehicle access.

Housing availability has been a growing concern, particularly in light of projected job growth over the next two decades. As part of a Regional Action Plan, the need for additional middle-income housing units has been identified. Each county in the region is actively exploring ways to improve housing options, but challenges unique to rural areas—such as limited infrastructure, higher costs of construction, and difficulties attracting developers—complicate efforts to expand housing stock.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also influenced housing trends, with many individuals seeking to move from urban to rural areas. The North Central region offers appealing qualities, including more space, outdoor recreation opportunities, and safe communities. However, these qualities alone are not sufficient without improved infrastructure, such as broadband access, expanded housing options, and reliable transportation.

For individuals without vehicles, the challenge of commuting to job opportunities creates additional barriers for job seekers. Lack of accessible, affordable housing near employment centers further isolates these individuals, creating a cycle of unemployment and underemployment. Addressing this requires coordinated efforts among housing developers, local governments, and transportation agencies to improve connectivity and reduce barriers to workforce participation.

Moving forward, the North Central Workforce Development Board plans to collaborate with local realtors, chambers of commerce, and other stakeholders to address housing and transportation challenges. These efforts will focus on strategies to expand housing opportunities, enhance public transit options, and create a more integrated approach to housing and employment accessibility in the region.

POPULATIONS WITH BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT

POVERTY

The chart below examines poverty and labor force status for individuals aged 16 and older across six counties in the North Central Workforce Development Area (WDA). Here are key observations:

1. **Poverty Rates**: Poverty rates vary across counties, ranging from a low of 8.3% in Elk County to a high of 14.1% in Cameron County. The overall regional poverty rate is 11.6%, slightly higher than Pennsylvania's rate of 10.7%.
2. **Labor Force Participation**: Labor force participation rates are relatively low across the region, with Elk County at the highest (41.2%) and Potter County at the lowest (28.1%). The regional average is significantly below Pennsylvania's average of 36.9%.
3. **Unemployment Rates**: Unemployment is notably high among individuals below the poverty level, with rates peaking at 34.1% in Cameron County. The regional average is 23.2%, which aligns closely with the state average of 23.8%.
4. **Population Not in Labor Force**: A significant proportion of individuals below the poverty level are not participating in the labor force, accounting for a majority in all counties. This highlights barriers to workforce engagement, such as limited access to education, transportation, or childcare.

This data underscores the need for enhanced workforce strategies to improve labor force participation and reduce unemployment, particularly among populations in poverty. Addressing these barriers can foster greater economic stability across the region.

Poverty and Labor Force Status (Ages 16 and Older) by County

				Individuals Below the Poverty Level Age 16 and Older				
County	**Total Population Age 16 and Older**	**Total Individuals**	**Poverty Rate**	**Employed**	**Unemployed**	**Not in Labor Force**	**Unemployment Rate**	**Labor Force Participation Rate**
Cameron	3,786	533	14.1%	141	73	319	34.1%	40.2%
Clearfield	62,235	7,615	12.2%	1,811	616	5,188	25.4%	31.9%
Elk	25,402	2,110	8.3%	652	218	1,240	25.1%	41.2%
Jefferson	35,450	4,227	11.9%	1,178	235	2,814	16.6%	33.4%
McKean	30,992	3,981	12.8%	965	268	2,748	21.7%	31.0%
Potter	13,258	1,390	10.5%	322	68	1,000	17.4%	28.1%
North Central Total	171,123	19,856	69.9%	5,069	1,478	13,309	140.4%	205.7%
PA Total	**10,263,481**	**1,101,511**	**10.7%**	**310,199**	**96,715**	**694,597**	**23.8%**	**36.9%**

Source: American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates; 2018-2022

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The chart below examines the labor force status of working-age individuals (18-64) with and without disabilities across the North Central Workforce Development Area (WDA). Key insights include:

1. **Disability Prevalence**: The percentage of the population with disabilities ranges from 12.4% in Jefferson County to 18.0% in Cameron County, with a regional average of 15.8%, higher than Pennsylvania's 11.4%.
2. **Labor Force Participation**: Individuals with disabilities have significantly lower labor force participation rates, averaging 40.4% regionally compared to 81.8% for those without disabilities. The highest participation rate for individuals with disabilities is in Elk County (49.4%), while the lowest is in Potter County (30.9%).
3. **Unemployment Rates**: Unemployment among individuals with disabilities is substantially higher than those without disabilities. The regional unemployment rate for individuals with disabilities is 17.0%, compared to 4.9% for those without disabilities, exceeding Pennsylvania's average of 12.6% for individuals with disabilities.

This data highlights significant disparities in workforce engagement and unemployment for individuals with disabilities, underscoring the importance strategies to improve accessibility, job opportunities, and support services for this population. OVR is a critical partner in the PA CareerLink® system to ensure individuals with disabilities are served and provided opportunities.

Disability and Labor Force Status of Working Age Population (Ages 18-64) by County

				Unemployment Rate		Labor Force Participation Rate	
County	**Total Population**	**Number of Individuals with a Disability**	**Percentage of Population with a Disability**	**No Disability**	**Disability**	**No Disability**	**Disability**
Cameron	2,472	445	18.0%	6.4%	22.4%	80.0%	36.2%
Clearfield	44,525	7,202	16.2%	5.0%	14.4%	82.4%	44.0%
Elk	17,818	2,632	14.8%	4.5%	26.2%	86.7%	49.4%
Jefferson	25,289	3,144	12.4%	4.5%	13.4%	81.8%	41.0%
McKean	23,204	4,054	17.5%	4.9%	11.7%	80.5%	41.2%
Potter	8,920	1,406	15.8%	4.1%	14.5%	79.6%	30.9%
Region Total	122,228	18,883	15.8%	4.9%	17.0%	81.8%	40.4%
PA Total	**7,788,267**	**889,606**	**11.4%**	**4.8%**	**12.6%**	**82.9%**	**45.0%**

Source: American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates; 2018-2022

FAMILY HOUSEHOLD TYPES

The char below outlines family household types by county within the North Central Workforce Development Area (NCWDA) and provides state-level totals for Pennsylvania (PA) based on 2018–2022 data from the American Community Survey.

Key Observations:

1. **Regional Trends**:
    - Married-couple families with children form the majority in most counties, except in Cameron County, where single-parent families are more prevalent (267 compared to 169).

- Clearfield County has the highest number of total family households with children (7,318), reflecting its larger population size relative to other counties in the region.

2. **County Comparisons**:
   - The ratio of single-parent households to total family households varies across counties. For instance:
     - Jefferson and McKean counties have similar distributions, with around one-third of family households being single-parent families.
     - In Elk County, married-couple families (1,355) are significantly more common than single-parent families (1,006).
   - Data for Potter County is incomplete, with no total family household figure listed.
3. **Statewide Context**:
   - NCWDA counties combined represent a small fraction of Pennsylvania's family households. At the state level, married-couple families account for approximately 67% of family households with children, with single-parent families comprising the remaining 33%. The regional data broadly mirrors these proportions, albeit with county-specific variances.

The chart emphasizes the data related to household composition across NCWDA counties, with Clearfield County standing out due to its population size and Cameron County due to its higher proportion of single-parent families.

Family Household Type by County

County	Total Family Households with Child/Children	Married-Couple Family with Child/Children	Single Parent with Child/Children
Cameron	436	169	267
Clearfield	7,318	4,721	2,597
Elk	2,361	1,355	1,006
Jefferson	3,896	2,673	1,223
McKean	3,603	2,400	1,203
Potter	1,433	1,029	404
Region Total	**19,047**	**12,347**	**6,700**
PA Total	**1,285,333**	**863,638**	**421,695**

Source: American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates; 2018-2022

JUSTICE INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS

Workforce Solutions has partnered with reentry programs, particularly for individuals with substance use disorders, which often intersect with the justice system. These efforts involve collaborations with county jails, state prisons, and juvenile and adult probation departments to inform formerly incarcerated individuals about available employment-related services. While the number of inmates in county jails has decreased, these facilities remain the primary housing for local offenders, with fewer residents in state prisons.

According to the Urban Institute, many individuals released from prison had prior employment and seek stable, legal jobs upon reentry. Employment, especially at higher wages, has been linked to reduced recidivism. However, formerly incarcerated individuals may face numerous challenges, including diminished work skills, limited job training opportunities during incarceration, low educational attainment, health issues, and insufficient work experience. These barriers complicate their reintegration into the workforce.

In the North Central region, in 2022 there were 436 individuals released from state prison according to the PA Department of Corrections. The largest number of releases in our region were in Clearfield County (173) and Jefferson County (134). Four of our counties are ranked in the top ten counties with the highest state

incarceration rate for 2022 and 2023, Cameron ranked #1, Jefferson #3, Potter #6, and Clearfield #10. (PA Department of Corrections, Annual Statistical Report).

In 2023, the North Central region of Pennsylvania recorded 417 written allegations of juvenile delinquency, reflecting a recovery towards pre-pandemic levels after a decline in 2020 due to COVID-19's impact. These allegations, representing individual cases as defined in Pennsylvania's Juvenile Case Management System, varied across counties. McKean County had the highest number of allegations (132), followed by Jefferson (80), Clearfield (89), Elk (77), Potter (24), and Cameron (15). This distribution highlights significant variation in juvenile delinquency allegations across the region.

The workforce system in North Central PA works closely with agencies working with this population– including the Criminal Justice Advisory Board, probation agencies and parole agencies. We are currently implementing a Youth Reentry Grant awarded to us by the PA Department of Labor and Industry which has increased and solidified the collaboration between the agencies involved.

Addressing these challenges requires support, including job training and rehabilitation programs, to enhance employability and reduce recidivism.

FOSTER CARE YOUTH

According to the Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association (psrfa.org) approximately 13,000-15,000 Pennsylvania children are currently in foster care and part of the child welfare system. Sadly, on average, 1,100 PA youth “age out” of foster care or leave the system at 18 or older. Far too many youths never end up with a stable, permanent family situation. Often they are left on their own; with few or no financial resources, limited education, training and employment; homeless, and with little or no support from family, friends. One in four PA youth who “age out” of the system, experience homelessness, struggle with mental health challenges such as depression, substance abuse and anxiety disorders, with nearly 1 in 4 youth having been arrested since leaving care. Young PA women in foster care are two and a half times more likely to become pregnant by 19, than young women who were not in foster care. Nearly half of PA foster care youth haven’t found a job four years after leaving the system and struggle to pay bills. Nearly half who “age out” will not complete high school.

PA Partnerships for Children (papartnerships.org) analyzes child welfare data including foster care and child neglect activity. According to the State of Child Welfare Report 2023, our region shows the number of children in Foster Care in 2022 includes Clearfield (81), Elk (23), Jefferson (60), McKean (80), and Cameron and Potter Counties’ data is suppressed (less than 11 persons). While percentage change from 2018-2022 for our region show decreases for Clearfield (-36.7%), Jefferson (-4.8%), and McKean (-40.3); and increases for Elk (64.3%); again Cameron and Potter Counties’ data is suppressed.

PA Partnerships for Children child neglect data for our region shows a look at the number of child abuse and neglect reports as well as county % change from 2018 to 2022. Looking at the number of child abuse and neglect reports for 2022, Cameron is the lowest at 15, followed by Potter (82), Elk (143), Jefferson (172), McKean (238) and Clearfield (309). The percent change 2018 to 2022 varies by county with Cameron 11.8% decrease in the number of reports and 0% change in substantiations; Clearfield 23.1% decrease in the number of reports and a 36.7% decrease in substantiations; Elk 9.2% increase in the number of reports and a 25% increase in substantiations; Jefferson 0.6% increase in the number of reports and a 21.7% decrease in substantiations; McKean 19.3% decrease in the number of reports and a 7% decrease in substantiations and Potter 11.7% increase in the number of reports and a 54.5% decrease in substantiations.

HOMELESSNESS

According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, meaningful and sustainable employment is the key to creating and maintaining housing stability. Unemployment, underemployment, and low wages relative to rent are frequent causes of homelessness and burden millions of families with the risk of becoming homeless. At the same time, individuals experiencing homelessness face obstacles to finding and maintaining employment.

The Point-in-Time (PIT) count is a count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons on a single night in January. HUD requires that Continuums of Care conduct an annual count of homeless persons who are sheltered in emergency shelter, transitional housing, and Safe Havens on a single night. Continuums of Care also must conduct a count of unsheltered homeless persons every other year (odd numbered years). The total number of homeless persons counted during the 2023 Annual Point in Time Count in the Western PA Continuum of Care was 730. Of this count, there were 84 homeless individuals counted within the region. There were no homeless individuals counted in Cameron County and the highest number was counted in McKean County (39).

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act defines youth homelessness as:

- Children sharing housing due to economic hardship or loss of housing;
- Children living in "motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camp grounds due to lack of alternative accommodations”
- Children living in "emergency or transitional shelters “
- Children whose primary nighttime residence is not ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation (e.g. park benches, etc.)
- Children living in "cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations”.

For the 2022-2023 program year, education and community agencies identified 46,714 children and youth experiencing homelessness (Pennsylvania’s Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) Program unique/unduplicated count). The population includes children under the age of five and youth enrolled in prekindergarten through grade 12. According to this report, 733 unique individuals were identified as experiencing homelessness within the North Central PA region. Clearfield County leads our region at 248 individuals followed by McKean County at 196 individuals. This population is challenging to serve as they tend to have difficulty completing high school and often have other challenges and barriers.

The requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to ensure that workforce boards serve eligible participants with barriers to employment guarantee that our system will work with all eligible populations described in the previous pages of this plan to address these challenges. Workforce Solutions recognizes that there are additional populations facing barriers to employment and continues to build relationships and partnerships with social service agencies, community-based organizations, and faith-based organizations to leverage resources and ensure that those with barriers to employment are served effectively and can secure employment that provides family-sustaining wages.

1.2 Economic Analysis - *Describe strategic planning elements including a regional analysis of economic conditions.*

When analyzing employment needs in the region, industry clusters can take on strategic importance because activities that benefit one group member will generally have positive effects on other members of th cluster. An industry cluster consists of a group of industries that are closely linked by common product markets, labor pools, similar technologies, supplier chains, and/or other economic ties.

They are used to:
• Create a consistent definition that allows for workforce comparison across regions;
• Identify major employers for building Industry Partnerships;
• Provide a basis for occupational and skills analysis of shared workforce needs; and/or
• Direct training dollars for jobs in demand that will offer career pathways leading to family sustaining wages.

Currently, Pennsylvania concentrates workforce strategies around 12 industry clusters and Workforce Solutions aligns with these clusters.

The clusters are:
Advanced Manufacturing
Agriculture and Food Production
Bio-Medical
Building and Construction
Business Services
Education
Energy
Health Care
Hospitality, Leisure and Entertainment
Logistics and Transportation
Real Estate, Finance and Insurance
Wood, Wood Products and Publishing

The Manufacturing sector remains the largest industry in the North Central Workforce Development Area, based on 2023 employment data, with an average employment of 16,202 and an average annual wage of approximately $63,024. This is followed by Health Care and Social Assistance, which employs 13,388 workers and offers average earnings of $55,952 annually. The Educational Services sector ranks third in size, with employment at 5,585 and average annual earnings of approximately $48,880.

In evaluating the strength of an industry cluster, factors such as employment trends, average wages, and location quotient (LQ) are critical. A location quotient greater than one indicates a competitive advantage, as it reflects a higher concentration of employment in a specific industry compared to the national average. Within the North Central region, key industries demonstrate high LQs, reflecting their strong regional competitiveness. Advanced Manufacturing has an LQ of 2.19, highlighting its significant role in the region. Wood, Wood Products, and Publishing is another dominant cluster, with an LQ of 3.12, along with the Energy sector, which boasts an LQ of 2.39. These industries underscore the area's specialized economic strengths.

Each county within the region also contributes uniquely to the economic landscape. Information Technology is emerging as a significant sector in Potter County. In Elk and Cameron Counties, there is a remarkable concentration of Powder Metallurgy Part Manufacturing, with an extraordinary LQ of 927.27, and Carbon and Graphite Product Manufacturing, with an LQ of 190.23. Additionally, Tourism plays a vital role across all six counties, supported by their inclusion within the Pennsylvania Wilds designation. This highlights the region’s diverse economic portfolio, balancing industrial specialization with robust service and tourism sectors.

Between the fourth quarters of 2022 and 2023, the North Central Workforce Development Area experienced modest economic growth, as reflected in its employment and wage data. Across all industries, average employment grew slightly by 85 jobs (+0.1%), reaching a total of 78,034 jobs. Total wages increased by $33.4 million (+3.5%), while the average weekly wage rose from $954 to $986 (+3.4%), signaling a positive trend in earnings for the region's workforce.

Several industries contributed significantly to this growth. Health Care and Social Assistance saw the largest employment increase, adding 150 jobs (+1.1%). Total wages in this sector rose by $7.9 million (+4.4%), with weekly wages improving by 3.3%. Administrative and Support Services experienced the highest percentage growth in employment, adding 99 jobs (+4.4%), alongside a $4.6 million (+19.5%) boost in total wages and a 14.5% increase in weekly pay. Similarly, Construction added 64 jobs (+2.4%) and saw substantial wage growth, with total wages increasing by $6.1 million (+16.1%) and weekly wages rising by 13.4%. The Public Administration sector also performed well, adding 130 jobs (+3.2%) and increasing total wages by $1.67 million (+3.0%). In the service-based Accommodation and Food Services industry, employment grew by 72 jobs (+1.3%), with total wages rising by 6.3% and weekly wages increasing by 5.1%.

However, some sectors faced challenges. Manufacturing, a key industry for the region, saw a decline of 406 jobs (-2.4%). Despite this, total wages in the sector increased slightly (+0.5%), and weekly wages rose by 3.0%, suggesting that remaining jobs were higher-paying. Transportation and Warehousing saw a decline of 142 establishments (-2.6%), though data on employment and wages remains unavailable. Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services experienced a loss of 31 jobs (-1.8%), but total wages in the sector grew by $1.1 million (+4.6%), with weekly pay improving by 6.5%. Similarly, Management of Companies and Enterprises shed 19 jobs (-1.4%) while still seeing wage growth, with total wages increasing by $0.88 million (+3.1%) and weekly wages rising by 4.5%.

Other industries experienced moderate changes. Retail Trade added 91 jobs (+1.0%), but both total wages and weekly wages declined slightly. Information showed slight employment growth (+6 jobs, +0.7%) alongside a modest increase in weekly wages (+4%). Educational Services demonstrated stability, with a small rise in employment and a $3.08 million (+4.7%) increase in total wages.

Overall, the North Central WDA demonstrated economic resilience, with most industries experiencing wage growth despite mixed employment trends. The strong performance of health care, administrative services, and construction highlights areas of ongoing demand, while declines in manufacturing and transportation underscore persistent challenges. These patterns suggest a balanced regional economy with opportunities for strategic workforce development to address sector-specific needs.

The following chart depicts a breakdown of all PA Industry Clusters in the region:

		4Q 2023			
NAICS Title	**NAICS**	**Establishments**	**Average Employment**	**Total Wage**	**Average Weekly Wage**
Total, All Industries	10	5,908	78,037	$999,860,253	$986
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	11	112	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	21	91	N/A	N/A	N/A
Utilities	22	71	568	$10,374,582	$1,405
Construction	23	406	2,759	$44,321,060	$1,236
Manufacturing	31-33	451	16,202	$255,378,086	$1,212
Wholesale Trade	42	180	1,709	$28,747,746	$1,294
Retail Trade	44-45	767	9,590	$75,219,973	$603
Transportation and Warehousing	48-49	437	N/A	N/A	N/A
Information	51	89	816	$10,679,982	$1,007
Finance and Insurance	52	209	1,404	$21,245,067	$1,164
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	53	86	N/A	N/A	N/A
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	54	304	1,732	$24,628,799	$1,094
Management of Companies and Enterprises	55	59	1,370	$29,639,140	$1,665
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	56	185	2,359	$28,150,169	$918
Educational Services	61	148	5,585	$68,270,005	$940
Health Care and Social Assistance	62	995	13,388	$187,341,977	$1,076
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	71	68	317	$1,872,793	$454
Accommodation and Food Services	72	488	5,534	$23,856,669	$332
Other Services (except Public Administration)	81	545	3,126	$21,888,481	$539
Public Administration	92	257	4,164	$58,118,610	$1,074

Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages

In addition, to the clusters listed above, when necessary Workforce Solutions will analyze the 16 clusters recognized by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the National Association of State Directors of Career and Technical Education Consortium utilizing JobsEQ a product of Chmura Analytics.

Industry clusters have also served as the basis for the creation of Industry or Sector Partnerships (IPs) – employer/worker consortiums that bring together companies with similar products, markets, and human resource, and workforce development needs. The intent of IPs, through prudent investments, is for Pennsylvania to address the workforce and economic needs of employers, thereby helping these industries grow while creating career opportunities for its workforce and increasing productivity. Pennsylvania was among the first states to extend training and career-building efforts beyond individual companies to networks of companies in specific industries. IPs foster industry collaboration on incumbent worker training, school-to-career and other workforce pipeline initiatives, career pathways, recruitment and retention, and other human resource challenges. These types of collaboration can help strengthen skill alignment, increase entry-level employment opportunities, enhance recruitment and retention of talent, and lead to the creation of more high-paying jobs.

Despite slight declines in the numbers of people employed in recent years, the North Central region depends heavily on Manufacturing. The industry cluster retains a substantial regional competitive advantage, although it is susceptible to economic restructuring due to consolidation and internationalization. This has been proven to some degree by the selling of family-owned metals enterprises in the past few years to large, international firms.
The previous labor force data is used to determine our priorities for training for our job seekers as well as training for our incumbent workers as we work with employers in our region. It is evident that our emphasis is to increase the number of participants in a variety of Career and Technical Education programs as well as some associate and bachelor degree programs utilizing our workforce funding. These are the education programs that will lead to the skills needed by many of our employer, particularly in the manufacturing industry as well as the healthcare and other industries. Some examples are Nurse Aides, Registered Nurse (Associates' Degree), Truck Driver, Machinists, etc.

Long-Term Industry Projections for North Central WDA (2022-32)

			Employment Change (2022-32)	
Industry	**Employment (2022)**	**Projected Employment (2032)**	**Volume**	**Percent**
Total Jobs	85,650	86,130	480	0.6%
Goods Producing Industries	21,540	21,080	-460	-2.1%
Agriculture, Mining & Logging	2,580	2,670	90	3.5%
Construction	2,360	2,390	30	1.3%
Manufacturing	16,590	16,020	-570	-3.4%
Services-Providing	58,440	59,440	1,000	1.7%
Trade, Transportation & Utilities	16,300	16,390	90	0.6%
Information	800	820	20	2.5%
Financial Activities	1,770	1,830	60	3.4%
Professional & Business Services	4,870	5,230	360	7.4%
Education & Health Services	18,230	18,540	310	1.7%
Leisure & Hospitality	5,920	6,120	200	3.4%
Other Services, Except Public Admin.	4,410	4,400	-10	-0.2%
Federal, State & Local Government	6,150	6,120	-30	-0.5%
Self-Employed Workers	5,670	5,610	-60	-1.1%

Source: Long-Term Industry Employment Projections (2022-32)
*Data may not add due confidentiality

Fastest Growing Industries in North Central WDA (2022-32)

By Volume Change:

Industry Title	Employment Change (Volume)
Offices of Other Health Practitioners	150
Crop Production	120
Management of Companies and Enterprises	120
Home Health Care Services	90
Gasoline Stations	80
Restaurants and Other Eating Places	60
Traveler Accommodation	60
Waste Collection	50
Building Material and Supplies Dealers	50
Management, Scientific, and Technical Consulting Services	40
Child Day Care Services	40
Drinking Places (Alcoholic Beverages)	40
Automotive Repair and Maintenance	40
Employment Services	40
Other Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	30
Commercial and Industrial Machinery and Equipment (except Automotive and Electronic) Repair and Maintenance	30
Building Equipment Contractors	30
Federal Government, Excluding Post Office	30
Individual and Family Services	20
Other Ambulatory Health Care Services	20

By Percent Change: (min. employment of 250)

Industry Title	Employment Change (Percent)
Offices of Other Health Practitioners	28.3%
Crop Production	14.8%
Home Health Care Services	13.2%
Drinking Places (Alcoholic Beverages)	12.5%
Traveler Accommodation	10.3%
Other Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	9.7%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	8.6%
Automotive Repair and Maintenance	7.3%
Child Day Care Services	6.7%
Federal Government, Excluding Post Office	6.5%
Building Material and Supplies Dealers	6.4%
Gasoline Stations	6.0%
Other Ambulatory Health Care Services	5.7%
Employment Services	5.0%
Building Equipment Contractors	4.4%
Other Amusement and Recreation Industries	2.8%
Offices of Dentists	2.7%
Animal Production	2.7%
Telecommunications	2.2%
Restaurants and Other Eating Places	1.4%

Source: Long-Term Industry Employment Projections (2022-32)

Long-Term Occupational Projections for North Central WDA (2022-32)

Occupational Title	Employment (2022)	Projected Employment (2032)	Employment Change (2022-32) Volume	Employment Change (2022-32) Percent	Annual Demand
Total, All Occupations	85,650	86,130	480	0.6%	9,631
Management, Business & Finance	7,160	7,300	140	2.0%	585
Computer, Engineering & Science	2,490	2,510	20	0.8%	174
Education, Legal, Social Service, Arts & Media	7,470	7,480	10	0.1%	636
Healthcare Practitioners, Technicians & Support	8,950	9,170	220	2.5%	886
Protective, Food, Building & Personal Service	12,840	12,960	120	0.9%	2,092
Sales & Related	6,870	6,890	20	0.3%	991
Office & Administrative Support	9,740	9,910	170	1.7%	1,123
Farming, Fishing & Forestry	1,240	1,330	90	7.3%	196
Construction & Extraction	4,070	4,030	-40	-1.0%	344
Installation, Maintenance & Repair	4,240	4,280	40	0.9%	368
Production	11,430	11,030	-400	-3.5%	1,106
Transportation & Material Moving	9,140	9,250	110	1.2%	1,131

Source: Long-Term Occupational Employment Projections (2022-32)
*Data may not add due confidentiality

Workforce Solutions actively supports key industry initiatives and partnerships to drive regional workforce development. Currently, we facilitate two industry partnerships that unite employers in our largest sectors: Manufacturing and Healthcare/Social Assistance. We are also exploring the formation of a new partnership focused on the forest and wood products industry, collaborating with agencies specializing in this sector.

The Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (CWIA) has identified a list of High Priority Occupations (HPOs) for the North Central Workforce Development Area, guiding workforce investment toward occupations that demonstrate strong job demand, family-sustaining wages, and opportunities for career advancement. These occupations are used to align workforce training programs and funding with regional labor market needs. Based on the 2024 data, the top 15 High Priority Occupations with the greatest annual demand in North Central PA are:

1. Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers – 252 annual openings
2. Laborers & Freight, Stock, and Material Movers – 208
3. Nursing Assistants – 163
4. Maintenance & Repair Workers, General – 112
5. Multiple Machine Tool Setters/Operators/Tenders – 109
6. Licensed Practical & Licensed Vocational Nurses – 102
7. Team Assemblers – 98
8. Home Health & Personal Care Aides – 97
9. Industrial Machinery Mechanics – 87
10. Medical Assistants – 74
11. Medical Secretaries & Administrative Assistants – 72
12. First-Line Supervisors of Production & Operating Workers – 69
13. Customer Service Representatives – 66
14. Construction Laborers – 61
15. Phlebotomists – 60

To ensure that the regional HPO list remains current and responsive, Workforce Solutions for North Central PA regularly petitions CWIA to add occupations identified by local employers as in demand but not yet listed. This process ensures that regional workforce investments support the jobs most critical to local economic success.

Employers in the region have recently reported that while applications for entry-level positions have increased, it is more difficult to fill skilled and licensed positions, especially in healthcare and social assistance. Roles such as Licensed Therapists and other certified professionals are particularly challenging to recruit, a challenge often linked to the rural nature of the region.

Additionally, many employers in the Manufacturing industry—especially those engaged in Industry Partnership meetings—consistently report strong and ongoing demand for skilled roles such as machinists and die setters. These high-skill, high-need occupations remain a top priority for training and workforce development initiatives across North Central PA.

To further refine our regional strategy, Workforce Solutions conducted a survey of employers within our Manufacturing and Healthcare/Social Assistance industry partnerships to identify high-need occupations and workforce challenges. The feedback confirmed that both sectors continue to face difficulty recruiting for critical roles such as Registered Nurses, LPNs, Nurse Aides, Electrical Engineers, Die Setters, CNC Machinists, and floor workers. Employers noted that higher-skilled positions are the most difficult to fill. Additionally, they cited persistent skill gaps, a limited talent pool, and geographic barriers as significant hiring obstacles. Employers also reported challenges with employee turnover, as workers ofen move between employers for higher wages, as well as the loss of institutional knowledge due to retirments. Training for advancement was also identified as a high priority, with respondents highlighting the need for upskilling programs in areas like CNC machining, industrial maintenance, and healthcare technology. Recruitment and retention strategies that were reported as effective included on-the-job training models including internships, tuition reimbursement, flexible scheduling, engagement with local career and technical education (CTE) programs, and increased wages/incentives. This direct input has reinforced the alignment of our training investments with real-time employer demand and continues to guide the development of career pathways that offer sustainable, long-term employment opportunities.

Our commitment to workforce innovation includes raising awareness and expanding the use of Registered Apprenticeships and Pre-Apprenticeships, particularly in non-traditional industries. Beyond these initiatives, we actively engage in several sector-based collaborations, including:

- **ENGAGE Program**: Strengthening industry connections and workforce alignment.
- **North Central PREP Network**: Supporting regional economic development strategies.
- **Community and Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)**: Enhancing long-term regional competitiveness.
- **EDA Tech Hub Grant**: Partnering on the North Central PA Pressed Materials Strategic Development Consortium to develop an implementation plan. This initiative aims to position the region as a globally competitive leader in the pressed materials industry within the next decade.

These efforts reflect our dedication to fostering a robust, innovative, and globally competitive regional workforce.

1.3 Skills Gap Analysis - *How are skills gaps defined in the local area? Provide a description of the skills that are required to meet the needs of employers in region and local area?*

Skill Gap Analysis

A skills gap analysis begins by examining current and projected employer skill demands through various methods. This includes analyzing labor market trends using data from Long-Term Industry Projections, High Priority Occupation lists, fastest-growing industry projections, and online job postings. Tools such as the North Central PA In-Demand Occupation List, data from the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis, JobsEQ, and Econovue provide critical insights. Most importantly, direct communication with employers through one-on-one meetings, networking events, and industry partnership meetings ensures that real-time needs and challenges are identified.

The skill gap analysis highlights the disparity between the skills employers require and the qualifications of the local workforce. Key insights reveal specific challenges and factors unique to the North Central region.

Skill Gap Challenges

1. Hard Skills Gaps
    - Technical Skills: Persistent shortages in manufacturing-specific skills, including welding, CNC programming, machining, blueprint reading, and lean manufacturing practices.
    - Digital Competency: High demand for expertise in Microsoft Office Suite (Excel, PowerPoint), SAP, QuickBooks, and emerging technologies like AI and VR.
    - Certification Gaps: Limited access to training for high-demand certifications, such as CDL, CNA, SAP, and healthcare-related certifications like CPR and BLS.
    - Specialized Roles: Difficulty in sourcing talent for roles such as Tool and Die Makers, Maintenance Engineers, and Low Voltage Installers due to a lack of local training programs.
2. Employability and Soft Skills Gaps
    - Employers emphasize the need for soft skills, including reliability, adaptability, problem-solving, teamwork, communication, punctuality, and a willingness to learn.
    - Gaps in work readiness skills, such as resume writing, interview preparation, and workplace technologies, pose barriers for job seekers, particularly those with limited experience.
3. Barriers to Employment
    - Rural Accessibility: Geographic isolation limits access to in-demand training and certifications, particularly in advanced manufacturing, IT, and healthcare.
    - Retention Challenges: High turnover rates due to non-competitive wages and limited career advancement opportunities, leading to talent outflow.
    - Workforce Readiness: Many job seekers face barriers like outdated skills, lack of certification, or limited experience, particularly individuals with disabilities, limited educational attainment, or other challenges.

Certifications, Degrees, and In-Demand Fields of Study

1. Top Certifications in Demand
    - CDL (Class A and B)
    - CNA and healthcare credentials (CPR, BLS, ACLS)
    - SAP and QuickBooks certifications
    - Welding certifications
    - Child Development Associate (CDA)
2. Degrees and Fields of Study
    - Advanced Manufacturing: Training in machining, welding, and CNC programming.
    - Healthcare: Focus on RN, LPN, EMT/Paramedic, and physician specialties.
    - Information Technology (IT): Skills in security software, AI, and data analytics.
    - Logistics: Supply chain management and transportation-focused certifications.

Employability and Hard Skill Development

Employability Skills
Employers across industries stress the importance of soft skills as foundational to success:

- Adaptability to changing workplace demands.
- Strong communication, both verbal and written.
- Dependability, punctuality, and reliability.
- Problem-solving and teamwork abilities.

Hard Skills

Hard skill demands vary by industry but often include:

- Advanced technical training in manufacturing and IT.
- Proficiency in digital tools, including Microsoft Office and sector-specific software.
- Knowledge of healthcare protocols and specialized certifications.

Local Area Support and Solutions

To bridge the skill gaps:

1. **Expand Training Opportunities**
    - Develop programs in advanced manufacturing, IT, and healthcare tailored to local needs.
    - Increase virtual and hybrid training formats to address rural accessibility challenges.
2. **Enhance Certification Access**
    - Partner with training providers to offer high-demand certifications, including CDL, CNA, SAP, and QuickBooks.
3. **Focus on Soft Skill Development**
    - Leverage existing platforms like PA CareerLink®, ReadySetWorkPA, and SkillUp™ PA for workshops on employability skills.
    - Incorporate work-based learning opportunities, such as internships and on-the-job training, to enhance real-world readiness.
4. **Employer Collaboration**
    - Strengthen partnerships with local employers to identify immediate skill needs.
    - Use real-time intelligence tools like JobsEQ to monitor labor market trends and adjust training programs accordingly.
    - Establish a Symposium for Ongoing Communication with a centralized hub to track goals and outcomes.
    - Foster partnerships between employers, training providers, and educational institutions to adapt training and development programs as needs evolve.

This comprehensive analysis reveals a clear need for strategic collaboration between employers, educators, and workforce development organizations to address current and projected skill gaps. By focusing on both hard and soft skills, the North Central PA region can ensure a resilient, adaptable workforce ready to meet employer demands.

1.4 Workforce Development Activities Analysis - *Provide an analysis of local area workforce development activities, including education and training.*

Workforce service delivery in the North Central Region is provided through our PA CareerLink® centers. In addition to the partners participating at the centers we have a large referral network of community-based agencies. These agencies have a long history of providing quality services to their communities. Some are small county-based entities, while others are larger with state or national affiliation.

The workforce development system consists of WIOA Title I, Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Wagner-Peyser Act employment services and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation as well as other community-based agencies which provide services to eligible job seekers. These agencies include but are not limited to Job Corps, Community Action agencies, behavioral health agencies, juvenile and adult probation agencies and homeless and housing agencies.

Strengths

Priority Sectors. The local area's priority sectors of manufacturing, healthcare and social assistance, forest and wood products (Agriculture) and building and construction provide residents with a broad array of career choices.

Workforce Solutions anticipates developing additional sector partnerships for other industries including Forest and Wood Products. Workforce Solutions is in the process of the implementation of a comprehensive, collaborative strategy to strengthen and enhance the Forest and Wood Products Industry's future in Pennsylvania. The project is being implemented through a collaboration of partners including the Alleghany Hardwoods Utilization Group (AHUG), PA Department of Agriculture's Hardwoods Development Council (HDC) North Central PA Regional Planning and Development Commission (NCRPDC), the Strategic Early Warning Network (SEWN), Department of Labor and Industry Rapid Response Unit (RR) and Workforce Solutions for North Central PA. The results of this statewide plan will be ready for implementation in July 2025. Partners are planning to implement the outcomes via a Sector Strategy with possible funding through Industry Partnership funding.

In addition, Workforce Solutions is a partner in the Economic Development Administration (EDA) funded Pressed Materials Industry Consortium Tech Hub implementation project. The agencies involved will develop a cutting edge 10-year Implementation Plan for scaling the entire pressed materials ecosystem in North Central Pennsylvania. This is a step toward our goal of creating a globally competitive hub of excellence centered around the Pressed Materials industry in North Central Pennsylvania, which will contribute significantly towards this country's economic competitiveness and national security. The purpose of this implementation plan is to identify how this region will come to possess the assets, resources, capacity, and potential to become globally competitive within approximately 10 years in the Pressed Materials industry of the future. The focus will be on what is our collective strategy to get there. This initiative is part of the EDA Tech Hubs program, aiming to bolster the industry's growth, innovation, and market reach.

The Consortium's ambitious vision centers on:
• Coordinating with and supporting globally recognized research institutions to continuously commercialize research and technological innovations across the pressed materials industry.
• Attracting new industry players, scaling existing industry players, and enabling the growth of new industry players (startups) across the region's pressed materials industry.
• Supporting the regional ecosystem to diversify and scale the production of pressed and machined parts, including metal, ceramics, and graphite.
• Connecting the regional supply chain to new, high-tech end-user markets, including electric vehicles, renewable energy, aviation, semiconductors, and defense; and
• Attracting, developing, and maintaining a world-class workforce relevant to the pressed materials industry.

Additional sector partnerships will be implemented as collaborative efforts.

Variety of Education and Training Providers. While the North Central PA region is a rural region, we do have a substantial variety of post-secondary education and training providers that includes three major university branch campuses, three career and technology centers, one community college "presence", as well as 3 privately owned schools (business school and technical training provider). There are also 2 Community Education Centers in the North Central PA region whose mission is to bring post-secondary training to our region. Workforce Solutions staff participates on many of the advisory boards of these institutions and are able to provide information and input regarding our employer needs. Post-secondary providers located within our six counties include:

1. University of Pittsburgh at Bradford
2. Penn State University DuBois Campus – May close June of 2027 however efforts are underway to discuss repurposing the facility. Workforce Solutions is part of this advisory group.
3. Commonwealth University – Clearfield Campus – Closing its doors in Fall 2026
4. Indiana University of Pennsylvania – Punxsutawney Campus
5. Butler County Community College – BC3 at Brockway
6. Brockway Center for the Arts and Technology
7. Jefferson County – DuBois Area Vocational Technical School
8. Clearfield County Career and Technology Center
9. Seneca Highlands Career and Technical Center

10. Community Education Center for Elk and Cameron Counties
11. Community Education Council for McKean and Potter Counties
12. Northern PA Regional College

Other regional entities providing training include the North West Industrial Resource Center (NWIRC) and the Clarion University Small Business Development Center (SBDC).

Workforce Solutions' Commitment to Expand Registered Apprenticeships and Pre-Apprenticeships

Workforce Solutions is dedicated to promoting Registered Apprenticeships (RA) and Pre-Apprenticeships as practical, cost-effective alternatives to traditional post-secondary education. These programs provide significant benefits for both job seekers, including high school students, and employers in the North Central region. By offering pathways to acquire in-demand skills while earning a paycheck, apprenticeships reduce education costs for individuals and ensure employers have access to a skilled labor pool.

Recognizing the potential of apprenticeships to address workforce challenges, Workforce Solutions has made the expansion of RA and Pre-Apprenticeship programs a regional priority. Workforce Solutions staff actively educate employers and stakeholders about the advantages of these programs. This includes outreach through PA CareerLink® staff, the development of employer guidance tools, and highlighting apprenticeships in Industry Partnership meetings.

To support the growth of apprenticeships, Workforce Solutions has leveraged grant funding, including PA SMART, to assist employers with the costs of Related Technical Instruction (RTI) and on-the-job training. For example, we facilitated the creation of several new RA programs, including one for Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN), using WIOA funding to support RTI and attract additional resources.

Our efforts extend to pre-apprenticeships, where we have helped secondary schools and Career and Technical Centers align their programs with RAs. Although some initiatives were paused due to the pandemic, we remain committed to increasing pre-apprenticeship opportunities in the coming years.

Workforce Solutions engages in other outreach activities including:

1. Equipping frontline staff with tools to educate employers on hiring all individuals. Sharing information about financial incentives such as the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) and Federal Bonding programs.
2. Collaborating with partners, including the North Central PA PREP network, CEDS, and CJABs.
3. Securing additional funding to expand RA and Pre-Apprenticeship programs.

With nearly half of employers reporting talent shortages, Workforce Solutions views expanding apprenticeships as a vital strategy to increase the talent pool. These programs address immediate workforce needs while preparing the region for long-term economic success.

Enhancing Customer-Focused Services

Workforce Development Board (WDB) staff remains committed to collaborating with the PA CareerLink® Operator to ensure seamless integration and avoid duplication of services in our centers. As funding continues to decline, we have prioritized efficiency and collaboration among staff to deliver cost-effective and high-quality services to our customers.

Through our Customer-Centered Design Challenge, we identified and implemented several initiatives to enhance the customer experience at PA CareerLink® centers, including:

- Developing a welcome video to introduce services.
- Creating a more inviting and accessible welcome space.
- Implementing triage processes for streamlined assistance.
- Establishing a common intake system for improved service coordination.
- Strengthening the referral process for seamless transitions between services.

We are committed to fostering ongoing engagement between staff and customers as we continue to refine and enhance these processes, ensuring our centers meet the evolving needs of the community.

Active Business and Education Partnership Initiative

Since March 2012, Workforce Solutions, alongside partners such as the Community Education Center for Elk and Cameron Counties, has been dedicated to bridging the gap between business and education. A landmark summit held nearly a decade ago laid the foundation for ongoing collaboration across the region, with over 125 participants whose engagement continues today. This summit catalyzed numerous initiatives, fostering collaboration and sharing best practices to prepare students for successful careers.

Key partnerships include:

- Community Education Center of Elk and Cameron Counties leading efforts in Elk and Cameron Counties.
- Potter County Community Education Council spearheading initiatives in Potter and McKean Counties.
- Workforce Solutions overseeing programs in Clearfield and Jefferson Counties.

Programs and Initiatives

Our partnerships offer a range of impactful programs for secondary schools, including:

- One-on-one career plan development with students, featuring job shadowing and work-based learning opportunities.
- Educator in the Workplace programs to connect teachers with industry needs.
- Company tours and career exposure activities.
- Support with Chapter 339 planning and other career readiness initiatives.

As part of our commitment to fostering career awareness, we have expanded our efforts to include:

- “What’s So Cool About Manufacturing?” Video Contest: Highlighting the manufacturing industry to engage and inspire students.
- Dream Team Development: Creating industry ambassadors in Manufacturing and Healthcare and Social Assistance to educate students about local career opportunities.
- Region-wide Healthcare and Social Assistance Industry Activities: Developing initiatives to spotlight this critical sector and its career pathways.
- Increasing awareness of career pathways in Manufacturing, Healthcare, Social Assistance, and other key industries, ensuring students understand the opportunities available locally.

Adapting to Virtual Platforms

Business and Education Partnership activities have successfully transitioned to virtual platforms. This ensures students continue to receive essential career information and exposure to local companies, empowering them to make informed career choices. We have been able to expand our outreach by providing a hybrid format for many of the activities implemented.

Workforce Solutions remains committed to strengthening the connection between business and education, ensuring that all students are equipped with the tools and knowledge to pursue meaningful careers while meeting the evolving workforce needs of our region.

Strong Collaboration with Economic Development Agencies and the ENGAGE Program

Workforce Solutions in North Central PA is deeply committed to fostering strong collaboration with regional economic and community development agencies, and this collaborative spirit is a key strength of our region and this plan. The Executive Director of Workforce Solutions serves on the board of the North Central PA Regional Planning and Development Commission, while the Executive Director of the Planning Commission also holds a board position with the North Central Workforce Development Board. This mutual representation ensures seamless communication and coordination between workforce development and regional planning efforts, allowing for more effective, unified strategies.

In addition, Workforce Solutions actively participates in the CEDs Committee, the North Central Partnership for Regional Economic Performance (NC PREP) initiative, and partners with the ENGAGE PA program. These efforts are critical in driving regional economic and workforce growth and further demonstrate the strength of our region's collaborative ecosystem. North Central PA is widely recognized for its dynamic partnerships between workforce, economic, and community development organizations.

This integrated approach is a foundational strength of the region and this plan, as it strengthens the support system for industry partnerships by providing the necessary resources and expertise to move initiatives forward. Through these collective efforts, we ensure that workforce development is closely aligned with the region's economic priorities, fostering a more resilient, thriving community and ensuring sustainable growth for years to come.

Weaknesses

1. **Inconsistent Career Pathways**
   While progress has been made, there is still a need to establish a consistent understanding and implementation of career pathways across all providers in the region. Addressing this gap is critical to improving Credential Attainment Rates and Skill Gains. Collaboration with post-secondary providers is ongoing to align credentials and training programs with the needs of local employers. However, gaps persist between employer demands and the curriculum offered by local training providers.
2. **Low Awareness of the North Central Industry Partnership Support Team Members**
   Despite strong relationships with many organizations, employers lack awareness of the many support team members able to provide them with economic, workforce and community development resources. Improving our Employer Penetration Rate and Repeat Business Customers Rate is a priority. Expanded marketing efforts through our resource website and collaborative partner activities will be essential to increasing visibility and engagement.
3. **Limited Work-Based Learning Opportunities**
   The region's workforce system does not consistently provide sufficient work-based learning opportunities, such as on-the-job training or integrated work-and-learning programs, which are essential for many in-demand careers. Expanding these opportunities will be crucial to meeting the needs of both employers and job seekers.
4. **Insufficient Public Transportation**
   The existing public transportation system does not adequately connect all areas of the region to available career opportunities, limiting access for job seekers and employees.
5. **Inadequate Childcare Services**
   The availability of childcare providers, particularly during non-traditional hours such as second and third shifts, is insufficient to meet the needs of working families.
6. **Limited Resources**
   Serving populations with significant barriers to employment often requires additional resources. With declining funding, it is increasingly important to collaborate with other agencies to leverage resources, including staff time, funding, and shared missions, to maximize impact.

Addressing these weaknesses will require ongoing collaboration, innovative solutions, and strategic resource allocation to better serve the region's employers and workforce.

1.5 What are the local area challenges in aligning existing labor force skills and education, and training activities with the needs of regional employers?

Addressing Workforce Development Challenges in the North Central Region

The North Central Region faces several significant challenges in aligning workforce skills, education, and training with the evolving needs of employers. These challenges, identified through various stakeholder meetings—including Workforce Development Board sessions, Local Plan Development Stakeholder meetings, and Industry Partnership discussions—are being tackled with strategic initiatives led by the North Central Workforce Development Board (NCWDB).

Challenges Identified

1. **Decline in Skilled Workforce due to Population Decrease**
   The region, comprising Cameron, Clearfield, Jefferson, Elk, McKean, and Potter counties, has experienced demographic shifts marked by population decline~~,~~ and an aging population. These factors challenge the region's economic vitality and workforce sustainability. To address these issues, NCWDB has spearheaded the *PA SIX* initiative, a marketing campaign that promotes the region as a destination for careers and quality living. Launched in 2020, the campaign includes resources such as housing listings and employer information to attract and retain talent.
2. **Educational Alignment with Employer Needs**
   To ensure post-secondary programs meet employer demands, Workforce Solutions facilitates annual meetings with training providers, shares labor market data, and fosters collaboration through Industry Partnerships. This effort has improved responsiveness to workforce trends and reduced duplication of training programs. Workforce Solutions will increase the use of our Incumbent Worker Training program to assist employers in increasing the skill levels of their current workforce.
3. **Awareness of High-Priority Occupations**
   Initiatives like the *Business Education Partnership* aim to educate youth, parents, and educators about local career opportunities. Programs such as Carl the Career Bear's career exploration platform and virtual industry tours have successfully engaged students and communities, fostering awareness of regional job prospects.
4. **Eliminating Barriers to Employment**
   A coordinated approach involving PA CareerLink® and community partners addresses barriers faced by eligible participants. Efforts include leveraging multi-agency resources to provide pathways to family-sustaining jobs.
5. **Expanding Employer Utilization of PA CareerLink® Services**
   NCWDB implemented strategies to educate employers on the full range of PA CareerLink® services, challenging misconceptions about its role. Business Service Teams actively onboard new employers, enhance the use of workforce data tools, and strengthen employer outreach through Industry Partnership support.
6. **Enhancing Partner Collaboration**
   Collaboration among PA CareerLink® core and partner agencies ensures employers receive streamlined, efficient services. Workforce Solutions provides training to front-line staff on programs like Incumbent Worker Training and WEDnetPA to address employer training needs effectively.

7. **Affordable Childcare**
   Recognizing childcare as a significant barrier to workforce participation, NCWDB is conducting research to design a pilot project addressing childcare accessibility and affordability in partnership with key agencies.

Strategic Initiatives

1. **Industry Partnerships**
   Workforce Solutions continues to expand Industry Partnerships to encourage collaboration between training providers and employers.
2. **Incumbent Worker Training**
   Workforce Solutions will increase the use of the Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) program by raising awareness through outreach, informational sessions, digital resources, and success stories. Employers will receive one-on-one consultations to identify specific workforce needs and learn how IWT funding can upskill current employees, creating pathways to fill entry-level roles. Simplified application processes and technical assistance will reduce barriers, while partnerships with training providers and industry networks will offer tailored solutions. By demonstrating measurable outcomes and the cost-effectiveness of the program, Workforce Solutions aims to enhance employer participation and build a stronger regional talent pipeline.
3. **Career Pathways Development**
   NCWDB has created career pathways for 12 industry clusters, providing tools such as sector guides and career maps to assist job seekers and employers. A progressive web application is under development to make individual employer career maps accessible via kiosks in schools and community centers by July 2025.
4. **Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Support**
   The *PROSPER from Recovery to Career* initiative supports individuals recovering from substance use disorders, with tailored job search assistance and employer training. The launch of this project in 2021 has led to an increase in the awareness and education of all frontline staff as they assist customers in overcoming these barriers to employment. The work will continue to ensure that employers have the necessary tools and hiring practices in place to support this population.
5. **Employer Resource Directory**
   NCWDB updates and distributes an employer resource directory annually to connect businesses with workforce development programs, training opportunities, and school collaborations to address career pipeline challenges.
6. **Customer-Centered Design**
   All workforce programs prioritize customer needs, emphasizing collaboration among economic development agencies, education providers, and community organizations to ensure effective service delivery.
7. **Untapped Labor Pools**
   Efforts continue to engage untapped labor pools, such as individuals with substance use disorders or those with criminal records, by creating holistic support systems and identifying funding opportunities.

By addressing these challenges through strategic partnerships, and innovative solutions, Workforce Solutions and the North Central Workforce Development Board are paving the way for sustainable workforce development in the region.

2. Vision and Goals

2.1 Local Board's Strategic Vision and Alignment with the Governor's Strategic Vision - *What are the local board's strategic vision and goals for preparing its workforce and its strategy for achieving the vision and goals? How will the local board's vision and goals align with, support, and contribute to the governor's*

vision and goals for the state's workforce development system, as well as any of the goals and strategies articulated in the regional plan?

Workforce Solutions, the North Central Workforce Development Board, envisions being a strategic leader in workforce development, fostering economic prosperity and self-sufficiency by preparing a globally competitive workforce. Our mission focuses on facilitating an innovative system that meets the evolving needs of employers while maximizing job seekers' career potential through customer-centered approaches.

The vision, mission and goals of Workforce Solutions remain unchanged. We are committed to continuing to accomplish our goals and to expand upon what is working well, continuously improving what isn't working well, and collaborating with all of our partners along the way.

VISION STATMENT
Workforce Solutions will be a strategic workforce development leader focused on promoting economic prosperity and self-sufficiency of individuals by creating a workforce that is competitive in the global marketplace.

MISSION STATEMENT
Workforce Solutions serves as the premier facilitator of an innovative workforce development system that meets the changing human capital needs of our employers and provides resources for our job seekers that maximizes their career potential and focuses on the customers' needs.

GOALS
1. Enhance public-private partnerships through better connectivity and communication in order to increase investment in our workforce system leading to greater economic vitality for our region.
2. Engage in Sector Strategies of our growth industries identifying current skill gaps of both the incumbent and entry-level worker that will result in skill upgrades through customized training and partnerships.
3. Design innovative workforce development strategies to reach young adults and keep them engaged through the identification of best practices and development of new programs utilizing the Customer-Centered Design Method.
4. Identify Career Pathways in major industry sectors to enhance career counselling that will result in training opportunities for our customers through skill, credential and degree attainment.
5. Ensure that our customers, both employers and job seekers, remain in the center of our design of all services and encourage our partners to do the same.

Alignment with Pennsylvania's Workforce Development Vision

Pennsylvania has prioritized six broad goals for the workforce development system:
1. Apprenticeship and Career & Technical Education: Expand opportunities for individuals to enter into Registered Apprenticeship and Registered pre-Apprenticeship programs, assist employers in building Registered pre-Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship programs, and increase the coordination with Career & Technical Education in these efforts.
2. Sector Strategies and Employer Engagement: Engage employers and industry clusters through innovative strategies to improve the connection and responsiveness of workforce programs and services to labor market demand, including recruiting, training, and retaining talent.
3. Youth: Increase opportunities for all youth to experience work-based learning through summer employment, pre-apprenticeship, Registered Apprenticeship, internships, job shadowing, mentoring, and other experiences in the workplace, including developing employability skills.
4. Continuous Improvement of the PA CareerLink® System: Identify and enact system changes and improvements that enhance the collaboration and partnership between agencies and partners in the workforce development system.

5. Barrier Remediation: Develop strategies to ensure the workforce development system is equipped to support individuals with barriers to employment in finding and maintaining self- and family-sustaining employment.
6. Addressing Workforce Shortages in Critical Industries: Prioritizing investment in industries that are critical to the economic prosperity of the Commonwealth.

The overarching theme throughout these six goals is the coordination across all systems and partners, both within state government agencies, and throughout the state and local systems devoted to developing Pennsylvania's workforce and economy. Prioritizing and achieving these goals will allow Pennsylvania's workforce development system to serve workers and businesses in the most effective ways possible.

Workforce Solutions' vision, mission, and strategic goals align closely with the Governor's vision and the Commonwealth's WIOA Combined State Plan. By fostering innovation, collaboration, and responsiveness, Workforce Solutions contributes to Pennsylvania's priorities across six core areas:

1. Apprenticeship and Career & Technical Education
Aligned with the Commonwealth's goal to expand apprenticeship opportunities, Workforce Solutions:

- Actively promotes and supports Registered Apprenticeships (RA) and Pre-Apprenticeships.
- Engages employers in RA development and assists with implementation, securing resources for RTI and OJT costs.
- Develops career pathway tools for all 12 regional industry sectors, integrating them into counseling and training efforts.

2. Sector Strategies and Employer Engagement
Workforce Solutions collaborates with industry stakeholders to address regional needs by:

- Convening employers and partners in industry sectors to identify skills gaps and workforce challenges.
- Expanding short-term credential programs to address employers' immediate hiring needs.
- Offering incumbent worker training and employer-focused workshops through PA CareerLink®.

3. Youth Engagement and Development
Workforce Solutions prioritizes youth retention and skill development through:

- Innovative work-based learning opportunities
- Partnerships with educational institutions under the Carl D. Perkins Act to enhance employability skills and credentials.
- Designing programs using customer-centered methodologies.
- Continuous Improvement of the Workforce Development System

4. Barrier Remediation and

5.Strengthening the One-Stop Delivery System
To strengthen the One-Stop Delivery System and address customer barriers, the North Central Workforce Development Board (NCWDB) focuses on a customer-centered approach, ensuring that both job seekers and employers have equitable access to comprehensive services. This approach aligns with Commonwealth Goal 5 and supports all regional goals by fostering accessibility, creativity, and innovation in service delivery.

In-Person Services through PA CareerLink® Centers

NCWDB prioritizes a **bricks-and-mortar model** to serve customers, providing a reliable and accessible hub for workforce resources:

- **Comprehensive Services**: Centers offer career counseling, resume assistance, skills assessment, training referrals, and connections to supportive services for job seekers. Employers benefit from recruitment support, job posting, and workforce planning.

- **Accessibility**: Centers are strategically located to serve regional populations effectively.
- **Partnership Support**: Collaboration with Title I providers and other partners ensures services are comprehensive and meet customer needs.

Key Focus: Maintaining robust physical locations ensures customers who require in-person support can access services without gaps.

Virtual Services for Broader Access

Acknowledging the preferences of a percentage of the population for virtual services, NCWDB has long provided flexible, innovative online options:

- **ReadySetWorkPA.com**: This website offers work readiness tutorials, career resources, and center contact information, providing a one-stop online resource for customers seeking remote assistance.
- **Virtual Job Search Clubs**: Programs like Google Hangouts support collaboration, networking, and skill-building for job seekers in a virtual setting.
- **Hybrid Service Models**: A combination of in-person and virtual offerings allows job seekers and employers to choose services that best meet their needs.

Example: Virtual workshops and one-on-one career counseling sessions have increased engagement among customers who face transportation or childcare challenges.

Mobile Services as a Strategic Consideration

While mobile workforce units are under consideration to extend reach, the board emphasizes careful implementation to prevent gaps in service delivery:

- **Access**: Ensuring that mobile solutions complement existing services without compromising continuity or quality.
- **Supplemental Support**: Using mobile sites to enhance outreach in remote areas, such as communities with limited transportation or broadband access.

Challenge Addressed: Mobile solutions aim to serve populations who might otherwise struggle to visit brick-and-mortar centers.

Creative and Inclusive Service Design

Encouraging innovation and flexibility in service delivery ensures that barriers like literacy, transportation, and childcare are addressed:

- **Customer-Centered Design**: Services are tailored to meet individuals “where they are” and address barriers preventing participation in the workforce.
- **Collaboration Across Partners**: Close work with Title I providers, community organizations, and other stakeholders fosters creative solutions.
- **Supportive Service Referrals**: Customers are connected to essential resources, such as transportation assistance, childcare support, and mental health services.

Example: Partnerships with community agencies help identify and mitigate barriers faced by eligible customers.

Key Outcomes for Strengthening the System

1. **Enhanced Access**: Combining physical centers, virtual platforms, and mobile units ensures comprehensive coverage across the region.

2. **Increased Employer Engagement**: Tailored solutions attract more businesses to use PA CareerLink® services.
3. **Reduced Barriers**: Focused efforts to address transportation, childcare, and technology access result in improved outcomes for job seekers.
4. **Sustained Collaboration**: Strong partnerships ensure continuous investment and alignment with customer needs.

By centering the design of services on customer needs and leveraging a mix of delivery methods, the NCWDB strengthens the One-Stop Delivery System and ensures that both job seekers and employers can overcome barriers to success.

Recognizing the importance of increasing the labor pool Workforce Solutions:

- Develops solutions to overcome barriers such as childcare, transportation, and literacy.
- Strengthens PA CareerLink® services
- Implements programs supporting individuals with disabilities and other employment challenges.

6. Addressing Workforce Shortages in Critical Industries

Workforce Solutions and the North Central Workforce Development Board (NCWDB) employ a multi-faceted approach to address critical skills shortages in the region by leveraging labor market information, engaging with employers and stakeholders, and aligning training programs with industry needs. These strategies ensure a workforce system responsive to regional economic demands and business requirements.

Labor Market Information Analysis
Workforce Solutions utilizes labor market data to identify skills shortages and high-demand occupations within the region. This includes:

- **Regional Industry Analysis**: Examining industries with the greatest growth potential, such as healthcare, advanced manufacturing, information technology, and energy.
- **Data Tools**: Using tools such as the PA Center for Workforce Information & Analysis and real-time job postings data to identify gaps between available labor and employer needs.
- **Skills Gap Reports**: Developing reports to understand emerging skill requirements, focusing on credentials, certifications, and competencies employers demand.

Example: Labor market research has highlighted a growing need for skilled workers in broadband and IT-related fields, prompting needed training initiatives.

Employer Engagement and Industry Partnerships
Through direct engagement with employers and industry partnerships, Workforce Solutions ensures programs are aligned with real-world needs:

- **Next Gen Industry Partnerships**: Convening employers across key industries to identify skill shortages and workforce challenges collaboratively.
- **Employer Surveys and Roundtables**: Regularly gathering feedback on workforce trends, job openings, and skill gaps.
- **Action Plans**: Creating employer-driven action plans, such as customized training solutions or pipeline development strategies, based on partnership findings.

Example: In manufacturing, employers expressed a need for CNC machinists and maintenance technicians. Workforce Solutions collaborated with training providers to develop short-term, credential-based programs.

Identification of Eligible Training Providers
Workforce Solutions maintains a robust Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) to ensure programs align with high-demand occupations:

- **Alignment with Employer Needs**: Reviewing ETPL programs to ensure they equip workers with skills employers require.
- **Rapid Credentialing Programs**: Prioritizing programs offering short-term certifications that address immediate labor shortages.
- **Performance Metrics**: Monitoring provider outcomes, such as job placements, to ensure program effectiveness.

Example: Workforce Solutions partners with local community colleges and technical training centers to offer programs like Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training and welding certifications.

Customized Training Solutions
Workforce Solutions develops and funds training programs tailored to employer needs:

- **Incumbent Worker Training**: Providing upskilling opportunities for current employees to address advanced skill requirements.
- **On-the-Job Training (OJT)**: Partnering with businesses to offset training costs for new hires.
- **Registered Apprenticeships**: Expanding apprenticeship opportunities in fields like healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and IT.

Example: The board recently helped establish pre-apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship programs in healthcare and manufacturing, addressing long-term workforce needs.

Sector-Focused Career Pathways
Workforce Solutions has developed **Career Pathway Plans** for key sectors:

- Mapping progression opportunities within industries to help job seekers navigate career advancements.
- Integrating pathways into counseling sessions at PA CareerLink® centers to guide individuals toward high-demand roles.
- Promoting work-based learning opportunities, such as internships and job shadowing, to expose job seekers to in demand industries.

Example: Career pathways in healthcare now include entry points such as CNA training and advancement opportunities through nursing programs.

Collaboration with Stakeholders
Workforce Solutions actively partners with:

- **Education Providers**: Collaborating with CTEs, community colleges, and universities to align curricula with labor market demands.
- **Economic Development Organizations**: Jointly addressing regional workforce challenges and promoting economic growth.
- **Community-Based Organizations**: Partnering to remove barriers to employment, such as transportation or childcare.

Example: In response to stakeholder input, Workforce Solutions expanded its mobile workforce unit to reach rural areas, ensuring access to training and job search resources.

Continuous System Improvements
To remain adaptable, Workforce Solutions:

- **Evaluates Training Outcomes**: Analyzing program effectiveness based on job placement rates and employer satisfaction.

- **Adapts to Emerging Trends**: Adjusting workforce strategies to reflect changes in technology and industry demands.
- **Engages Stakeholders**: Hosting regular forums to gather input and maintain alignment with employer needs.

Impact

Through data-driven planning, employer collaboration, and alignment of training resources, Workforce Solutions and the NCWDB address critical skill shortages in ways that directly benefit employers, job seekers, and the broader regional economy. These efforts support a pipeline of skilled talent that meets the demands of today's industries and prepares for future workforce needs.

New Priority Areas and Alignment with State Plan

To advance the workforce system in the North Central region and support the Governor's workforce development goals, Workforce Solutions has identified several critical priority areas for the 2024-2028 planning period. Workforce Solutions met with stakeholders to identify several additional goals/priority areas to address over the next 4 year planning period. Stakeholders included Workforce Development Board members, Chief Elected Officials, Economic and Community Development Leaders and representatives from the WIOA Core Partner programs. The priority areas are identified below and also include how they align with the state plan's goals:

1. Effective Communication Among Stakeholders

Recognizing the rapid evolution of communication technologies, Workforce Solutions will:

- Facilitate streamlined, real-time communication across school districts, economic development entities, community agencies, and other partners.
- Develop strategies to reduce service duplication and enhance inter-agency collaboration during the planning and implementation phases of workforce projects.
- Host forums and virtual roundtables to increase awareness of grant opportunities, ensuring cohesive and coordinated efforts.

Alignment with State Goals: This initiative supports Continuous Improvement of the PA CareerLink® System by enhancing system-wide communication and collaboration.

2. Supporting Employers to Accommodate All Labor Pools

Workforce Solutions will:

- Provide training and resources for employers on accommodating workers with disabilities, mental health challenges, substance use disorders, or criminal backgrounds.
- Promote tools like assistive technologies and accessibility audits.
- Collaborate with community organizations and advocacy groups to support these efforts.

Alignment with State Goals: This strategy aligns with Barrier Remediation, ensuring that the workforce system is inclusive and accessible for all individuals.

- **Expanding Customer-Centered Design**

To re-engage job seekers, Workforce Solutions will:

- Implement flexible, customer-centered approaches addressing critical barriers like childcare, transportation, and literacy.

- Expand wraparound services and connect individuals to supportive resources, including virtual service delivery options.
- Ensure personalized, client-focused career counseling and job placement assistance.

***Alignment with State Goals**:* This initiative addresses Strengthening the One-Stop Delivery System and Barrier Remediation by tailoring services to meet customers where they are.

4. Addressing Broadband and IT Workforce Needs

Workforce Solutions will:

- Conduct assessments to understand the region's broadband and IT workforce gaps.
- Partner with training providers to develop relevant upskilling and credential programs.
- Advocate for investments in broadband infrastructure to support both remote work opportunities and digital skills training.

Alignment with State Goals: This priority ties directly to Addressing Workforce Shortages in Critical Industries, particularly in IT and broadband-related sectors.

5. Increasing Job Seeker Utilization of PA CareerLink®

Workforce Solutions aims to:

- Expand outreach efforts to raise awareness about in-person and virtual PA CareerLink® services.
- Enhance service relevance by incorporating modern tools and addressing regional employment trends.
- Develop marketing campaigns to reach all eligible participants.

Alignment with State Goals: Supports Continuous Improvement of the PA CareerLink® System by increasing visibility and engagement.

6. Enhancing Employer Engagement

To strengthen employer partnerships, Workforce Solutions will:

- Expand the range of services available to businesses through PA CareerLink®, including recruitment, training, and retention support.
- Develop customized solutions to meet unique employer needs and address skill gaps.
- Host regular industry forums to keep businesses informed about resources and best practices.
    - Ensuring that employers have the knowledge of and the tools necessary to provide accommodations to potential employees/labor pool with barriers to employment including those with disabilities (including mental health, substance use disorder, criminal background, etc.)

Alignment with State Goals: This initiative supports Sector Strategies and Employer Engagement, fostering stronger collaboration between employers and the workforce system.

7. Increasing Access through a Mobile Workforce Units

To serve all communities in our region Workforce Solutions will:

- Deploy a Mobile Workforce Unit to provide on-site career services, including job search assistance, training enrollment, and career counseling.
- Partner with local organizations to identify high-need areas and coordinate service delivery schedules.
- Enhance virtual access to PA CareerLink® services for individuals unable to travel.

1. Negotiated Levels of Performance - *What are the local levels of performance that have been negotiated with the governor and chief elected officials? How will the local board's goals relate to the achievement of these measures?*

As shown in the Performance Measures Table included as Attachment 1 the Board and the local elected officials have agreed to adopt the levels of WIOA performance that have been established by the governor for the Commonwealth. An email notification will be sent to all stakeholders of the annual revisions to the local levels of performance.

The Board's five primary workforce goals discussed in the response to section 2.1, fully support these measures and the Board further promotes performance achievement by including these factors as part of its expectations in agreements with our subcontractors and the PA CareerLink® partners.

The goals ensure that our area achieves the federal performance accountability measures as the goals were developed with the measures in mind. For the past several years, board members have engaged in high-level strategic conversation about serving our customers effectively while meeting the federal performance accountability measures. Our Board recognizes that in serving the harder to serve as identified in WIOA as well as the WIOA Combined State Plan it will be more difficult to meet these measures. We feel that if we continue to design programs and services from a customer centric perspective we will be successful in meeting these measures. The goals that have been developed by the board support these measures as well in several ways.

WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS GOAL 1: Enhance public-private partnerships through better connectivity and communication in order to increase investment in our workforce system leading to greater economic vitality for our region.

- This goal will have an impact on several of the WIOA Performance Indicators – Title I. More specifically if the workforce system is better connected to the private sector this will result in better "Employment Rate" as we understand the needs of businesses more and more. As we better prepare individuals for jobs in the labor market there will be a better "Retention" for them as well. This goal will also affect the "Employer Penetration Rate" as we reach out to more businesses as well as the "Repeat Business Customer Rate" as we provide them more of what they need. When the results of the work being done by KPMG to analysis Business Services is complete, the new goals will be incorporated into our planning and performance.
- Workforce Solutions has established partnerships with economic development agencies, Chambers of Commerce, business and industry, post-secondary providers including the Career and Technical Centers.
- However, there is always room for improvement. The board will continue to enhance these partnerships.

WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS GOAL 2: Engage in Sector Strategies of our growth industries identifying current skill gaps of both the incumbent and entry-level worker that will result in skill upgrades through customized training and partnerships.

- Similar to the first goal, this goal will also improve the following WIOA Performance Indicators: "Employment Rate", "Retention", "Employer Penetration Rate", and "Repeat Business Customers Rate" for the same reasons as indicated previously.
- This goal will also have an impact on the "Credential Rate" and "Skill Gains" as we continue to discuss the opportunities of credentials with our post-secondary providers as well as our career pathways efforts. We will see more individuals with the right education and training for the jobs in our labor market with the knowledge of the career pathways to move along in the company/industry.
- Workforce Solutions currently manages three Industry Partnerships for our top industries –Advanced Manufacturing, Healthcare and Social Assistance, and Building and Construction. These partnerships meet quarterly to discuss current needs that may include workforce attraction and retention. In addition, this has been a great forum for employers to discuss the impact of COVID and to share best practices. It was

through these partnerships that the skill gaps were made known. As more skill gaps are identified programs will be developed.

- There are also employer consortia in some of our counties that meet regardless of their industry. The county consortia discuss PA CareerLink® services, common issues companies are facing such as FLSA and other human resource topics.

WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS GOAL 3: Design innovative workforce development strategies to reach young adults and keep them engaged through the identification of best practices and development of new programs utilizing The Customer Centered Design Method.

- This goal will assist in recruitment of young adults that are in need of our service. With programs and services that meet the needs of these youth (as identified below) we will meet the WIOA Performance Indicators for youth of employment, retention, and skill gains.
- Our innovative youth programs continue to be improved through the Customer-Centered Design Process. When we accepted the first USDOL challenge we took on the challenge of designing programs that will engage youth and produce great outcomes. Through this process we learned that young adults, in particular those with barriers that we serve through WIOA, have a strong desire to build relationships, lack self-esteem (not all), do not want to sit for too long and desire hands on activities. The Connection Café is designed to do just that and is bringing young adults together to learn workplace activities in a group setting and developing skills such as team work, interview skills, etc. The Connection Café is evolving and ever changing as customers' needs are identified. This program will keep young adults engaged and thus assist Workforce Solutions in meeting all of the WIOA youth measures – Placement, Retention, Earnings, Credential Rate and Program Skills Gain.
- Work experience and other work-based learning activities are additional methods of engaging youth and providing real world experience to each of them. This linked with on-the-job training can lead directly to the performance outcomes and measures that have been identified.

WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS GOAL 4: Identify Career Pathways in major industry sectors to enhance career counselling that will result in training opportunities for our customers through skill, credential and degree attainment.

- This goal will directly impact the WIOA Performance Indicator of "Credential Rate" and "Skill Gains." It will also have an indirect effect on all of the other indicators with a workforce prepared with the skills that our employers need.
- As mentioned earlier, Workforce Solutions invested in the development of Career Pathways for our twelve industry sectors. These pathways provide an opportunity for staff to case manage customers in order that they see the pathway for their chosen career. This will encourage customers potentially to enroll in education and training that will lead to a skill credential.

WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS GOAL 5: Ensure that our customers, both employers and job seekers, remain in the center of our design of all services and encourage our partners to do the same.

- The intent of Goal number 5 is to be sure to keep our customers in the center. If we continue to design programs around our customer, then we will meet them where they are and will ensure that everyone is successful. This goal will have a direct impact on all of the WIOA Performance Indicators including more success in getting a job, keeping a job, increased skills and satisfaction.

The Board gauges its progress in meeting planned outcomes through the following indicators, in addition to the expectations of our Title I contractor, that are regularly reviewed and reported by staff and reported to the board:

- Number of first visits to the PA CareerLink® center
- Number of return visits to the PA CareerLink® center
- Number of individuals accessing services virtually
- Number of customers completing occupational skill training and/or receiving certifications
- Number of EARN customers participating in a work-based learning experience

- Number of PA CareerLink® customers receiving Career Services
- Number of individuals enrolled in PA CareerLink®
- Market penetration of employers
- Repeat business of employers
- Number of Business and Education Connect Activities, including: job shadowing, company tours, classroom presentations, internships, etc.
- Number of youth served through the Business and Education Partnership.
- Number of schools served through the Business and Education Partnership.
- Number of employers served through the Business and Education Partnership.
- Outcomes of hiring events and job fairs.

OPERATIONAL PLANNING:

Local Area Workforce Systems and Investment Strategies

3.1 Local workforce system structure - *Provide a descriptive overview of the workforce system structure, including key stakeholders and entities in the local area.*

Organization Chart. An Organization Chart that depicts the structure of the North Central Local Workforce Development Area is included as Attachment 2.

The current local workforce system structure that has been developed in the North Central WDA was a collaborative effort of the local elected officials and the workforce development board with Workforce Solutions for North Central Pennsylvania serving as the Grant Recipient and Fiscal Agent. The appropriate agreements and boards have been established in the region to respect the individual roles of policy vs. program. The roles and relationships of each stakeholder follow.

Chief Elected Official (CEO)
Workforce Solutions has formed, in collaboration with the County Commissioners in the region, the Chief Elected Official Board referred to as the CEO. The purpose of this Board is to provide policy oversight in administering the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and in partnership with Workforce Solutions to:

- Establish and appoint a Workforce Development Board to assist in carrying out provisions of the Act, as identified within the Chief Elected Officials Agreement.
- Develop the mission, strategic vision, and policies.
- Identify and close gaps in local / regional workforce resources.
- Develop multiyear local and regional Workforce Development Plan.
- Designate an operator of the PA CareerLink® (one-stop delivery system) and oversee their operations.
- Certify providers of workforce development and training in the area.
- Develop performance-based accountability measures and use them to assess programs, measure customer satisfaction, and issue “consumer reports” or “report cards” on providers of training.
- Promote private sector participation in the local workforce development system.
- Develop and approve the WDB and related budgets.
- Receive additional non-federal, state, and other workforce funds as an integrated system. Membership of the CEO Board consists of: one chief elected official representative, as agreed upon by the local elected officials of that county, from each of the counties served by the North Central WDA including: Cameron, Clearfield, Elk, Jefferson, McKean and Potter. The local elected official chosen shall remain on this Board until such time as their term in office has expired or by majority vote of the elected of official of that county. Members of the CEO with complete contact information follow:

Greg Gebauer
Elk County Commissioner
County of Elk
300 Center Street
Ridgway, PA 15853
Telephone: (814)776-1161
Fax: (814)776-5379
Email: gjgebauer@countyofelkpa.com

James Moate
Cameron County Commissioner
Cameron County Courthouse
20 East Fifth Street
Emporium, PA 15834
Telephone: (814)486-2315
Fax:(814)486-3176
Email: jmoate@cameroncopa.gov

John Sobel
Clearfield County Commissioner
Clearfield County Courthouse
212 East Second Street Suite 112
Clearfield, PA 16830
Telephone: (814)765-2642 ext. 3005
Fax:(814)765-2640
Email: jsobel@clearfieldcountypa.com

Mark Humes
Jefferson County Commissioner
Jefferson County Courthouse
155 Main Street
Brookville PA 15825
Telephone:(814)849-1653
Fax: (814)849-4084
Email: mhumes@jeffersoncountypa.org

Carol Duffy
McKean County Commissioner
McKean County Courthouse
500 West Main Street
Smethport, PA 16749
Telephone:(814)887-3200
Fax:(814)887-2242
Email: cduffy@mckeancountypa.org

Robert Rossman
Potter County Commissioner
Potter County Courthouse
1 East Second Street
Coudersport, PA 16915
Telephone: (814)274-8290

Fax: (814)274-8284
Email: rrossman@pottercountypa.net

The members of the CEO also attend scheduled board meetings as well as committee meetings which are held quarterly. All meetings are held in ADA compliant buildings so that anyone interested is able to participate. While all meetings were conducted virtually via Zoom during the pandemic, we now hold our meetings in a hybrid format, offering both in-person and virtual attendance options to ensure accessibility for all to participate. Members of the Workforce Development Board are selected and appointed by the Chief Elected Officials. These members are nominated by key business agencies to the Chief Elected Officials at both the county and regional level. As a result, a highly impressive board was established with representatives of "CEO type" participating.

Fiscal Agent and Administrative Entity. The CEO has appointed Workforce Solutions for North Central Pennsylvania as the Fiscal Agent and Administrative Entity/Grant Recipient.

Workforce Solutions for North Central PA
Workforce Solutions is a 501(c)3 non-profit agency that reports to a private sector driven board (NCWDB) with twenty-three (23) members currently. Twelve (12) of the members are from the private sector while ten (10) represent the public sector – with representation from education, community based organizations, economic development, Department of Labor and Industry.
The process used to select new members for Workforce Solutions private sector members is to request nominations from business organizations (i.e. Chambers of Commerce). These nominations are then brought to the Chief Elected Officials (CEO) for appointment. When a vacancy occurs the Board solicits nominations to the local elected officials from those appropriate agencies to fill each vacancy.
Staff to the board (NCWDB) are employees of Workforce Solutions. This structure was developed and approved by the CEO and is described in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Agreement (WIOA) and the Chief Elected Officials Agreement.

The mailing address and phone number for all NCWDB staff:

Workforce Solutions for North Central Pennsylvania
(North Central Workforce Development Board)
425 Old Kersey Road
Kersey, PA 15846
Office: 814-245-1835

Pam Streich, Executive Director - pstreich@ncwdb.org
Vanessa Hasselman, Finance Director – vhasselman@ncwdb.org
Linda Franco, Workforce System Manager - lfranco@ncwdb.org
Donna Hottel, Strategic Planning and Project Manager – dhottel@ncwdb.org
Fred Redden, Business Engagement and Project Manager – fredden@ncwdb.org
Tonya Mauk, Oversight and Project Manager – tmauk@ncwdb.org
Amber Biondi, Executive Administrative Assistant – abiondi@ncwdb.org

Equal Employment Opportunity Office (EEO): The EEO Officer for the North Central Workforce Development Area is Linda Franco, Workforce System Manager for Workforce Solutions. The EEO Officer monitors and evaluates compliance with equal opportunity laws, guidelines, and policies to ensure that employment practices and contracting arrangements give equal opportunity to all.

Full contact information follows:

Linda Franco, Workforce System Manager/EEO Officer
Workforce Solutions for North Central PA

425 Old Kersey
Kersey, PA 15846
814-245-1835
lfranco@ncwdb.org

Standing Committees of Workforce Solutions
There are 3 Standing committees of Workforce Solutions as described below.

Frequency of Meetings: All committees meet quarterly in accordance with scheduled board meetings and also when necessary if a special issue rises. The exception is the Nominating Committee, which meets every two years to elect officers of the Board. Meetings are often conducted with the use of technology such as conference calls and zoom meetings being sensitive to time and travel demands on board members. Members are asked to volunteer for the committee to which they can bring their expertise and experience. Committees are also open to interested parties who are not board members. The additional members are non-voting members who have expressed an interest in assisting in meeting our goals and objectives.
The committees are as follows:

Executive Committee
Frequency of Meetings: As often as necessary to carry on the routine business of the board.
Membership: The Executive Committee consists of the Chairperson, First and Second Vice-Chairpersons, Secretary, Treasurer, and additional members in order that a private sector majority is maintained.
Responsibilities and Activities: To carry on the routine business of the board and to act on behalf of the board when time does not permit the full board to meet.

Youth Committee
Frequency of Meetings: Quarterly in accordance with scheduled board meetings, or as needed.
Membership: The youth committee is chaired by a member of the local Board, includes other members of the local Board as well as may include other appointed individuals who are determined by the Board to have appropriate experience and expertise. Youth committee members are identified by Workforce Solutions's staff and/or the Youth Committee chair. The names and relevant expertise of proposed Youth Committee members are presented for approval/appointment to the Youth Committee by the Chief Elected Local Official (CEO) board during its regularly scheduled quarterly meetings.
Responsibilities and Activities:

- To coordinate area-wide youth services, assist with planning, and oversee operational youth programs.
- To serve as the architect in designing and building comprehensive youth services at the local level.
- To identify gaps in services and develop a strategy to use competitive selections or community partnerships to the unmet needs of youth.
- To coordinate youth policy.
- To ensure quality services.
- To leverage financial and programmatic resources.
- To recommend youth service providers to the local board.

While our area easily could have met the intent of the WIOA legislation through the operation of one Pennsylvania CareerLink® center in our region, the Board has supported five comprehensive +2 affiliate Pennsylvania CareerLink® centers effective July 1, 2025) in order to better address the needs in a rural area. The Board meets the intent, however goes above and beyond in doing so.

Nominating Committee
The Board Chairperson appoints members prior to the October meeting of every even-numbered year to develop a slate of Officers and Executive Committee members. This committee also reviews the composition of the full Board at least annually to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity

Act (WIOA). This committee reaches out to current officers to determine interest in remaining in their officer role if they have not reached their term limit. If new officers are determined to be needed, the committee reaches out to potential board members. Officers are elected every 2 years.

Workforce Solutions will also form Ad Hoc Committees on an as needed basis. Ad hoc committees are temporary committees formed to address a specific task or issues that is not already covered by an existing committee. Ad committees typically formed to handle unique or urgent matters typically include advising on a special project, proposing solutions to challenges or making recommendation on a particular topic or policy.

As the WDB becomes involved in various initiatives at the local, state and federal level a staff person is assigned as the point person to ensure timely attention to reports and other matters. In addition, committees of the Board oversee specific initiatives and are responsible for the information being exchanged in a timely fashion. In addition to quarterly / or as-needed meetings we utilize email, website postings, phone conferences and virtual video conferencing.

One such committee is the Local Management Committee (LMC) which is a Department of Human Services (DHS) entity implemented through the Bureau of Employment Programs (BEP). The LMC is responsible for direct oversight and coordination of programs that are funded through the Department of Human Services. These programs offer welfare to work activities and services to individuals identified and solely referred by the local County Assistance Offices. Workforce Solutions has taken the lead in organizing the LMC meetings on a quarterly basis.

One Stop Operator

Workforce Solutions has successfully implemented a One Stop Consortium Model Operator. The partners that mak up the Operator Consortium are identified in Attachment #2. The North Central WDA One-Stop Operator plays a critical role in managing and coordinating the day-to-day operations of the PA CareerLink® centers, ensuring the effective delivery of workforce development services in alignment with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The Operator is responsible for fostering collaboration among WIOA partners, Workforce Solutions/the North Central Workforce Development Board (NCWDB), and community stakeholders to provide integrated, customer-centric services that meet the needs of both job seekers and employers. Key responsibilities include overseeing service delivery strategies, implementing WIOA-compliant policies and procedures, and ensuring the availability of both universal and individualized career and business services. The Operator monitors and reports quarterly WIOA performance metrics, identifies opportunities for continuous improvement, and develops strategies to enhance customer service and staff development based on customer feedback, foot traffic trends, and performance data. Additionally, the Operator must demonstrate a strong background in workforce development, a commitment to customer satisfaction, and the ability to meet key performance deadlines outlined in the work plan, such as onboarding, performance reporting, and annual evaluations. Key to the success of this model is the One Stop Operator Director who regular meets with our PA CareerLink® Site Administrators to ensure that the vision, mission, goals and policies and directives of the North Central Workforce Development Board are being implemented. Following meetings with the Site Administrators, the Operator Director meets with the Consortium Members which include representation from Titles II, III and IV or WIOA to further discuss and align goals. Workforce Solution staff meet with the Operator Director two times per month or as needed to discuss outcomes, goals and to address challenges. The Operator procurement process is identical to the Title I WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth process outlined in Prompt 3.2.

3.2 Programs included in local workforce delivery system - *What programs are included in the local workforce delivery system and how will the local board work with the entities carrying out all workforce programs to support service alignment?*

Workforce Solutions and all of the partners in the workforce delivery system work closely together to ensure that all North Central PA CareerLink® centers are high-performing work places with staff that will ensure quality of service. The Local Board, with the agreement of the Chief Elected Official (CEO) has developed and entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Local Board and the One-Stop Partners, consistent with WIOA Sec. 121(c)(2), concerning the operation of the one-stop delivery system in a local area.

The PA CareerLink® Workforce Service Delivery System Program Partner/Provider Lists for each of the centers in the North Central PA region can be found in Attachment #3, and is posted on the Workforce Solutions website (www.workforcesolutionspa.com). The list identifies the programs, the program provider(s) and where in our region the program may be accessed.

WIOA identifies several required One-Stop System partners and allows for additional partners to be designated. Below is a list of the required partners and any other partners that are present in the North Central PA CareerLink® centers and how these programs align with the strategic vision.

Programs authorized under WIOA – (services of each of the following bulleted partners are summarized below):

- Title I (Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth)
- Wagner-Peyser Act employment services administered by DOL
- Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program administered by the Department of Education
- Rehabilitation Act Title I program administered by DoEd.
- Title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965
- Career and technical education programs authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, as amended by the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) (20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq.)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.)
- Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers programs (activities authorized under chapter 2 of title II of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. 2271 et seq.))
- Jobs for Veterans State Grants program (programs authorized under 38, U.S.C. 4100 et. seq.)
- Senior Community Service Employment program (programs authorized under title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965 (42 U.S.C. 3056 et seq.))
- Community Services Block Grant (Employment and training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant Act (42 U.S.C. 9901 et seq.))
- Reintegration of Ex-Offenders program (programs authorized under section 212 of the Second Chance Act of 2007 (42 U.S.C. 17532))

1. **Title I WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth** – Services for Title I WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth are competitively procured through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process. The initial award is for one year, with the option to renew for up to three additional years. Currently, services are provided by EQUUS Workforce Solutions staff and they are present in all of the PA CareerLink® centers in the North Central Workforce Development Area including the affiliate site in Cameron County. Title I staff provide individualized career services as well as intake, assessment, job search workshops, rapid response services, individualized employment plan (IEP) and individual service strategy (ISS) development and case management for all WIOA eligible customers. Individuals must register and provide information to support eligibility. WIOA services align with and implement the strategies and vision of Workforce Solutions through the implementation of effective and efficient services being provided to our business and job seeker customers. Staff evaluate the needs of our customers (business and job seekers) continuously to ensure that our local employers have access to and education and skilled workforce.

2. **Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act**;
Title II Adult Education staff are co-located in all of the PA CareerLink® sites (excluding Jefferson County and Elk County). Staff are considered part of the PA CareerLink® staff, and whether co-located at the centers or not, serve

on the various teams and are involved in assessment, staff meetings, and professional development opportunities. Customers are referred to Title II for services such as workplace, post-secondary and training prep, GED test prep, English as a second language (ESL) and immigrants who are English language learners, and more. Eligibility is limited to adults who are at least 16 years of age and not currently enrolled, or required to be enrolled in high school. Additional eligibility criteria include one or more of the following: basic skills deficient,; lack a high school diploma or equivalent; function below the level of high school graduate; or unable to speak, read, or write the English language. Title II Adult Education is provided by Intermediate Units 9 and 10, as well as Community Action for Jefferson County, through a subcontracting agreement with Intermediate Unit 9. Title II staff provide services to job seekers referred to them by other agencies and PA CareerLink® partners and help to ensure the creation of a skilled workforce. In addition, Title II refers customers to other PA CareerLink® partners for additional services.

3. **Title III Programs authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act** (29 U.S.C. 49 et seq.);
Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations (BWPO) staff are also present in all of the PA CareerLink® centers in the North Central Workforce Development Area including the affiliate site in Cameron County. This program serves both job seekers and employers. BWPO staff provide core services including intake, job screening and referrals, employer outreach services, job search workshops, rapid response activities and case management for job seekers. Eligibility is determined by the type of services being requested. BWPO and Title I staff match job seekers with employers in need of their skills by providing basic job search skills and information to entry-level job seekers, labor market information to employers and job fairs. When necessary, entry-level workers are referred to Title I and other programs when they are in need of more intensive services. Title I and BWPO staff work collaboratively to meet the vision and goals of Workforce Solutions.

4. **WIOA Title IV Program authorized under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973**
OVR staff are also present in all of the PA CareerLink® centers in the North Central Workforce Development Area and have representation on the North Central Workforce Development Board. The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) provides services to Individuals with disabilities to help them secure and maintain employment and independence. These services are designed to prepare OVR customers to become qualified trained members of the workforce increasing the regional workforce and the overall number of skilled workers available to business in the region.

Additionally, OVR business services staff can identify resources to assist any employer to diversify their workforce to include individuals with barriers to employment. Specifically, for individuals with disabilities, OVR provides multiple services to the business community designed to assist businesses with onboarding pre-screened qualified employees with disabilities. OVR on-boarding supports for a qualified new hire can include; reasonable accommodation consultation, OJT wage reimbursement), referral on tax credits or deductions. OVR also offers no-cost consultation on the Americans with Disability Act (ADA), accessibility standards and helping a business to retain current employees following an accident, injury or disability. Eligibility to receive services under WIOA Title IV may only be determined by a qualified OVR Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors determine eligibility for and work with customers to develop an Individual Plan for Employment, providing necessary to meet their specific vocational goal.

5. **Senior community service employment program (SCSEP) activities** are authorized under Title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965 (42 U.S.C. 3056 et seq. Older individuals are able to participate in the full range of services available in our PA CareerLink® centers. Our PA CareerLink® centers collaborate with the providers of SCSEP activities and share common goals and opportunities such as helping seniors find stable, long-term employment; providing skill training and career development; fostering employer partnerships and enhancing financial independence for seniors. In addition, services to older individuals are coordinated with either Associates for Training and Development (A4TD) or the AARP Foundation depending on the county. All providers post job openings on PA's Workforce Development System of Record as required by Title V regulation. This collaboration aligns with the goals of Workforce Solutions as it represents a strategic alliance for the betterment of our local communities.

6. **Postsecondary vocational education activities under the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act (20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq)** and our PA CareerLink® centers share the common goal of increasing employment opportunities, especially for individuals seeking careers in technical fields. Common goals include: connecting Perkins-trained students and adult learners with workforce opportunities; providing training, apprenticeships, and certification opportunities in high demand technical fields; building relationships with employers to create internship, apprenticeship, and job placement opportunities for participants; and facilitating the transition from education to employment by integrating Perkins CTE programs with workforce services available through PA CareerLink®. Participants use Pennsylvania's workforce development system of record, and PA CareerLink® ensures that job seekers have access to all programs approved for their local area. Staff at the PA CareerLink® centers help job seekers navigate and access this list of approved programs. Additionally, Workforce Solutions collaborates with post-secondary training providers, including vocational and technical schools, to ensure their programs meet the required criteria for approval. Job seekers also have access to all training programs available in the North Central Region. Through its Business and Education Connect Initiative, Workforce Solutions emphasizes the importance of technical education to job seekers, ensuring that information about these opportunities is available at PA CareerLink® centers. Moreover, board staff are actively involved in several advisory boards, including occupation advisory boards at the region's Career and Technology Centers (CTCs).

7. **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.)** Programs authorized under Section 403(a)(5) of the Social Security Act, programs authorized under Part A of Title IV of the Social Security Act (TANF) programs authorized under Section 6(d)(4) of the Food Stamp Act of 1977. The Department of Human Services is represented in all of the PA CareerLink® centers in the North Central Region via referral and through the EARN contracted program with the board. In addition, the Local Management Committee (LMC), made up of all of our counties CAO Executive Directors, workforce board staff, and community partners providing services to all eligible DHS customers, meets on a regular basis. When necessary the Committee addresses concerns elevated to the LMC from other local teams such as the Direct Service Team (DST) and the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT). Workforce Solutions receives EARN and TANF Youth Development funding which is subcontracted to the Title I Provider to provide these services in the PA CareerLink® centers. This "one-stop" approach ensures that job seekers are provided with the most efficient and effective services available to them. TANF funding is utilized to provide in school youth with a work experience program that includes work readiness components to prepare them with the soft skills need to succeed.

8. **Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers programs (activities authorized under chapter 2 of title II of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. 2271 et seq.))** authorized under Chapter 2 of Title II of the Trade Act of 1974, as amended (19 U.S.C. 2271 et seq.) and Section 123(c)(2) of the Trade Adjustment Assistance Reform Act of 2002 (Pub. L. 107-210), respectively. Many partners within the PA CareerLink® centers in North Central PA are involved in the TAA program. While BWPO staff administer and coordinate the case management and training proposals for eligible job seekers, other staff including Title I staff assist in the assessment process to identify transferable skills as well as identify the employers looking for these skills thus ensuring employers have access to a skilled and educated workforce.

9. **Jobs for Veterans State Grants program (programs authorized under 38, U.S.C. 4100 et. seq.)** Activities authorized under chapter 41 of Title 38, U.S.C. (local veterans' employment representatives and disabled veterans outreach programs); Veteran's Representatives are available in all of the PA CareerLink® centers in the North Central Workforce Development Area including the affiliate site in Cameron County and have representation on the board through BWPO. Services to Veterans include case management, job development and referrals and ensure our employers have a skilled and educated workforce. The skills of Veterans are recognized by employers as highly transferrable.

10**. Community Services Block Grant (Employment and training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant Act (42 U.S.C. 9901 et seq.))** The Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) is the main source of federal funding for Community Action. Community Action agencies create, coordinate, and deliver comprehensive programs and services to many people living in poverty in order to help these individuals and their

families achieve self-sufficiency. The Community Action Agencies that serve the North Central WDA include Northern Tier Community Action, Community Action for Jefferson County and Community Action of Central PA. Community Action is represented on our Youth Standing Committee. PA CareerLink® staff collaborates with Community Action to ensure the most appropriate services are provided to eligible customers. Many times the agencies work collaboratively to provide customers with a mix of services to assist them in reaching their training and employment goals.

11. **Reintegration of Ex-Offenders program (programs authorized under section 212 of the Second Chance Act of 2007 (42 U.S.C. 17532))** Currently there are no programs available in our region through the Second Chance Act. Workforce Solutions and PA CareerLink® staff do work with Criminal Justice Advisory Boards, Collaborative Boards, Probation offices and Domestic Relations offices in each county to ensure collaboration and referrals for services are occurring. Staff also ensure that employers are aware of the Federal Bonding Program that was created as an incentive to employers to hire at-risk, hard-to-place job seekers. Collaboration has improved with the addition of our Reentry grant from Labor and Industry in PY 2023.

12. **Employment and training activities carried out by the Department of Housing and Urban Development** – currently these services are not available in the North Central PA region however when applicable we do work with the HUD housing agencies in our region. Frequently we have requests form housing agencies to attend meeting to share Labor Market Information with them, discuss services available at the PA CareerLink® centers and brainstorm ways we can collaborate. When appropriate the program managers at the housing agencies are connected to PA CareerLink® staff to discuss participants, referrals, etc. We are members of McKean County Family Self-Sufficiency Program Coordinating Committee that is being led by the McKean County Redevelopment and Housing Authority. In addition, we collaborate with the McKean County Housing Agency to ensure that the programs they are offering are working. We also provide match services as well as letters of support to grants written by several housing agencies for projects that involve and employment and training requirements, such as the Resident Opportunity Self-Sufficiency (ROSS) program.

13. **Programs authorized by state unemployment compensation laws** are made available to customers by PA CareerLink® staff. Each comprehensive PA CareerLink® in the North Central PA region has UC Connect staff onsite. UC Connect is a statewide program available to all Pennsylvanians needing assistance with their Unemployment Compensation claims – especially those without access to online tools, with limited English proficiency, or who prefer offline support. At a UC Connect appointment, a UC representative can answer questions and help address issues with a customer claim. Appointments are offered on most Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 8:30 am to 2:30 pm each week. Days and times are subject to change based on holiday closings and staff availability. To make an appointment, call 855-284-8545. Individuals will be asked to provide name, phone number, and email address. Individuals will then receive a text or email reminder a few days before the appointment. The staff on this line do not have access to answer general claims-related questions. They are only available to individuals scheduling an in-person appointment to speak with a UC representative at a local PA CareerLink®, to reset an online password to change your address, and/or to provide basic ID.me troubleshooting assistance.

Other Programs authorized by WIOA: Please note that there are no programs in the North Central PA region currently available for any of the following 4 programs however see below for details of how we ensure that we are collaborating with these programs to the extent possible.

Job Corps program – Youth are referred to the Job Corps centers on a regular basis. Periodically, a Job Corps representative provides an orientation to the programs via video conferencing at one of our PA CareerLink® centers and will meet with interested students answering their questions and providing them with additional information.

Youth Build program – While there are currently no Youth Build Programs in the North Central PA region, we continue to search for opportunities similar to the Youth Build Programs currently in place in the Commonwealth.

Native American Programs - Upon identification of an eligible individual, we will assist in connecting them to the Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center, Inc. located at 120 Charles Street, Pittsburgh PA 15238 or by calling them at 412-782-4457 ext. 219. Website is http://www.cotraic.org.

Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker programs - Upon identification of an eligible individual we will assist in connected them to the Pathstone Corporation –Located at 421 McFarlan Road Suite E Kennett Square, PA 17103. Typically, we will call them first at: 310-925-5600.

As described previously in this plan Workforce Solutions' strategic vision is enhanced by the WIOA services provided in the North Central PA region, particularly in the PA CareerLink® centers. No longer do job seekers and employers obtain employment and training services through several points of contact. As was the intent of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and further strengthened in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act WIOA), a central point of contact for these services results in a proactive, efficient and effective system. Workforce Solutions seeks to continuously improve the system and to ensure satisfaction on both our employers and job seekers. PA CareerLink® staff in our region work collaboratively to ensure the programs offered align with our vision and ensure customers are provided seamless services from the intake process and throughout their involvement with the workforce system.

All of the partners and their programs, as mentioned earlier, are aware of and part of the strategic planning of the Board. Regular updates are provided to staff. It is expected the programs offered through the PA CareerLink® center align with the strategic vision of the Board. This is evaluated on a regular basis both informally and formally. The PA CareerLink® Operator provides functional supervision of the PA CareerLink® Administrators to ensures the vision is being carried out.

Consistent with the vision of WIOA Partnerships in American Job Centers (TEGL 4-15) – PA CareerLink® centers, Workforce Solutions continues to strive for a seamless workforce delivery system. The vision as referenced in TEGL 4-15 is:

- Connect all customers to the full range of services available in their communities;
- Provide Seamless, customer-focused, integrated service delivery across all programs and enhance access to the programs' services;
- Ensure that businesses and job-seekers have access to information and services that lead to positive employment outcomes.

Grantees, subrecipients, and contractors funded under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) must abide by WIOA law, regulations, and guidance, state and local WIOA policies. Workforce Solutions recognizes that this begins with the core partners of the system but continues with the required and additional partners in our region in order to effectively align service delivery and maximize resources.

The Commonwealth "strives to consistently provide excellent service to workforce development customers, both individuals and businesses" and therefore has committed to establishing minimum requirements for PA CareerLink® career services orientation, basic career services customer flow and a customizable template for development of the Individual Employment Plan. Workforce Solutions, in alignment with the state WIOA Combined Plan, has also implemented similar initiatives:

- Development and implementation of the required single Memorandum of Understanding which was discussed and negotiated at the local level and describes the services to be provided as well as contains agreements on funding the costs of services and the operating costs of the system.
- In addition, as agreed to in the Memorandum of Understanding core partners agree to:

    - Provide substantive referrals in accordance with this policy – to customers who are eligible for supplemental and complementary services and benefits under partner programs.

- Workforce Solutions drafted a Referral Guidance document that not only describes different forms of referral processes but require feedback and follow-up that will be monitored by staff. Our goal for this policy is to ensure that partners understand the value and importance of following up on referrals to ensure that our customers do not experiences trouble using other services available to them without assistance.

- Core and additional partners are represented on all of the committees of the board often utilizing their expertise to serve as chairs of the committees.

- Workforce Solutions staff implemented a Workforce "Spotlight Meeting" in which different topics were presented for notification/clarification. Topics of interest included discussion of federal, state and local policies and procedures as well as the customer centered design approach to serving customers. The "Spotlight Meeting" was started as a monthly meeting and is now offered on an as-needed basis.

- Workforce Solutions staff strive for a cohesive and seamless workforce delivery system where we can openly collaborate for the successful economic vitality of our rural region.

- Workforce Solutions staff participate on a wide variety of advisory councils and boards that represent not only workforce but other entities with similar missions such as the North Central PA PREP, Northwest PA Area Health Education Center (AHEC), PA Workforce Development Association (PWDA), Junior Achievement, Advisory Boards for all Career and Technical Centers, secondary schools and many of our post-secondary education providers.

Each year prior to the beginning of a new program year the WDB Executive Committee for the board reviews the performance of the Title I Contractor for Adult and Dislocated Worker Services. This review includes the following:

- successful attainment of the federally mandated performance measure.
- successful attainment of the board's goals including enrollment in key activities, career services, workshops, work-based training, and other training.
- review of expenditures including attainment of 80% obligation in Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth; and comparison of budget to expenditures.

In addition, in preparation for WIOA reauthorization, Workforce Solutions is positioned to meet new regulations and funding requirements. We are already working toward several potential goals and gradually increasing the funding allocated for job seeker training, including incumbent worker training.
If any deficiencies are noted during this review or anytime throughout the year, the board will work with the Title I Contractor to address those concerns.

In summary, as reflected on the Organizational Chart (Attachment 2), the Chief Elected Official Board (CEO) specifically is responsible for the activities of the Workforce Development Board. The WDB operates through its three standing committees as described in Section 3.1. The WDB also entered into an agreement with the PA CareerLink® Operator to oversee the activities of our PA CareerLink® centers. WDB staff are employed by Workforce Solutions but answer to the WDB and CEO. The fiscal agent falls under the responsibility of the WDB. The PA CareerLink® Operator is responsible for oversight of the PA CareerLink® centers through collaboration with the Site Administrators.

Alignment with Other Partners Programs:
In addition, there are other agencies within the North Central WDA that provide a variety of services benefiting both our job seekers and business customers. Workforce Solutions considers all of these agencies as part of the service delivery network in the NCWDA. The agencies include but are not limited to: local and regional economic development agencies, the Small Business Development Centers, Drug and Alcohol agencies, Mental Health agencies, 4-H Cooperative extension, Junior Achievement, Chambers of Commerce, etc. Workforce Solutions has

taken great steps at ensuring that all agencies are working together to the best of their abilities and at the very least are aware of the other programs and services available to our customers.
Below is a list of examples of how this extended service delivery network operates in our region:

- Directory Development - Directories of Chambers of Commerce, Secondary and Post-Secondary Schools and Training Providers, Career and Technical Centers, Libraries, Agencies serving youth, economic development staff, etc. are compiled and updated on a regular basis. Workforce Solutions communicates and provides outreach to all on a regular basis (at the very least quarterly) to share best practices, share grant opportunities and others means of collaboration.
- North Central Business and Education Partnership – encouraging the collaboration between business and education through regular meetings, dialogue, sharing of labor market information and most importantly providing activities that connect business with education.
- Sector Partnerships – a regional (all 6 counties of the NCWDA) approach to ensuring that our local employers are aware of the programs that are available to assist them as well as ensuring access to the skilled workers that they require.
- Career Pathways in 2024, Workforce Solutions launched a Career Pathway Mapping pilot, collaborating with two consulting agencies. One agency is gathering and organizing data from volunteer pilot employers while the other is developing an app to showcase the career pathways by company. Currently under construction, the app is expected to go live by June 2025, featuring pathways from approximately 100 employers. Employers who did not participate in the pilot will have the option to create pathways through the app's guided process. The app's goal is to provide awareness among job seekers about the career opportunities that exist in the North Central PA region.
- PA SIX - PA SIX is an initiative designed to increase awareness about the great career opportunities that exist in the counties of PA SIX as well as promote the exceptional quality of life residents enjoy. PA SIX, also known as North Central Pennsylvania includes the counties of Cameron, Clearfield, Elk, Jefferson, McKean and Potter. This initiative was led by Workforce Solutions for North Central PA who partnered with employers, economic development agencies, communities, chambers of commerce and individuals to develop and execute the PA SIX Marketing Campaign. Through the PA SIX brand we desire to raise awareness of PA SIX as a career destination and ultimately attract and retain talented individuals so that PA SIX employers can continue to thrive into the future. More at https://www.discoverpasix.com.
- Registered Apprenticeship – Workforce Solutions works with the Apprenticeship and Training Office (ATO) within the PA Department of Labor and Industry for guiding and promoting the expansion of apprenticeships in North Central PA. This relationship has improved with our successful applications for L&I apprenticeship grant dollars. Examples of newly registered apprenticeship programs include the Western PA Electrical Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee (JATC) and the Penn State Extension Butcher Apprenticeship programs. We continue to increase Registered Apprenticeship and Pre Apprenticeship Programs in our region by enrolling staff in the Registered Apprenticeship Navigator Program implemented by the Keystone Development Partnership (KDP), partnership with the German Chamber of Commerce located in Pittsburgh PA and through collaboration with our industry partnerships and business service teams.
- Pre-Apprenticeship – Workforce Solutions has also been successful in increasing the awareness of pre apprenticeship programs in the region. Examples of pre-apprenticeship include the approval of Christ the King's Feeding pre-apprenticeship and the expansion of Bradford High School's Child Care program through Early Connections in Erie, PA.

The board will increase our work with Agricultural employers through the Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS) so that staff are able to assist these employers with their permanent, temporary and / or season labor job postings in PA's workforce development system of record and by marketing openings to job seekers. The board will work to identify the migrant farm workers as may be identified by the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (CWIA).

Workforce Solutions Supporting the Agricultural Sector in Pennsylvania, with a Focus on Forest and Wood Products

Workforce Solutions for North Central Pennsylvania is at the forefront of a significant initiative to bolster the forest and wood products industry, a cornerstone of Pennsylvania's economy and a key segment of the agriculture sector. This industry, underpinned by the state's abundant 16.62 million acres of hardwood forest, generates $39.1 billion in economic impact annually and employs over 60,000 people, accounting for 10% of the state's agricultural workforce.

Collaborative Efforts and Partnerships

Workforce Solutions is collaborating with key regional and statewide stakeholders, including:

- Allegheny Hardwoods Utilization Group (AHUG)
- PA Department of Agriculture's Hardwoods Development Council (HDC)
- North Central PA Regional Planning and Development Commission (NCRPDC)
- Strategic Early Warning Network (SEWN)
- PA Department of Labor and Industry's Rapid Response Unit (DL&I RR)

This coalition aims to strengthen the industry's economic and workforce capacity through a comprehensive strategy that positions Pennsylvania as a global leader in forest and wood products.

Deliverables and Outcomes

A consulting firm has been engaged to conduct an in-depth study addressing the following:

1. **Economic Impact Assessment**: A detailed evaluation of the current landscape and economic contributions of Pennsylvania's wood industry.
2. **Regional Assets Analysis**: Identification of market opportunities and challenges, supply chain constraints, production costs, and emerging trends like biofuels, mass timber, and biochar.
3. **SWOT Analysis**: Insight into the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing the industry, to inform strategic initiatives.
4. **Industry Attraction Strategy**: Development of a roadmap for economic and workforce growth over the next 3–5 years.

Regional and Statewide Impact

This initiative underscores Workforce Solutions' role in facilitating partnerships and leveraging resources to address critical challenges in the forest and wood products industry. The study's findings will inform policies and programs that:

- Enhance workforce capabilities.
- Address supply chain and production challenges.
- Support sustainability and innovation in emerging markets.
- Drive economic growth and job creation across all 67 counties in Pennsylvania.

By aligning economic and workforce development strategies, Workforce Solutions demonstrates its commitment to ensuring the long-term vitality of Pennsylvania's agriculture sector, particularly the forest and wood products industry, benefiting both the North Central region and the entire Commonwealth.

3.3 Adult and Dislocated Worker training activities - *Provide a description and assessment of the type and availability of adult and dislocated worker employment and training activities in the local area.*

WIOA Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker (A/DW) Employment and Training Activities

Overview of Activities and Accessibility. Workforce Solutions delivers a robust array of WIOA Title I Adult (A) and Dislocated Worker (DW) employment and training activities, addressing both foundational and advanced skill-building. Services are organized into three tiers: Basic Career Services, Individualized Career Services, and Training Services, with eligibility-based access to the latter two. Activities include workforce preparation, skills training, work-based learning, and support services. Key initiatives focus on individuals with barriers to employment, including those with basic literacy needs, ensuring equitable access through multilingual support, referrals, and community partnerships.

Assessment and Planning. The board employs a structured, data-driven approach to assess the effectiveness of A/DW programs:

- Service Analysis and Surveys: Regular review of WIOA performance metrics, labor market trends, and stakeholder feedback, including employer surveys and industry partnership insights, to identify service gaps and confirm local needs.
- Benchmarking and Best Practices: Comparison with peer local workforce development areas within Pennsylvania and nationwide to refine program delivery.
- Collaborative Input: Feedback from regional planning committees and economic development partners ensures alignment with strategic workforce priorities.
- Increased outreach to training providers to encourage and assist them in adding their training programs to our Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) to ensure that programs align High Priority Occupation List, provide increased opportunities to Adults and Dislocated Workers, provide online training option, and ensure that eligible training programs meet the needs of our local employers.

Streamlining Co-Enrollment and Braiding Funds. Workforce Solutions fosters seamless co-enrollment of participants across A/DW programs and other services, such as Department of Human Services (DHS) programs, by:

- Integrating data-sharing systems to track participant progress and funding sources.
- Facilitating regular partner meetings for case management coordination.
- Promoting a braiding funds approach that complements rather than supplants existing services, enhancing participant outcomes through shared resources.

Procurement and Selection of Activities. The board evaluates and selects A/DW activities using key criteria, including:

- Alignment with Regional Needs: Activities must address in-demand industries and high-priority occupations.
- Provider Quality: Eligible Training Providers (ETPs) undergo rigorous vetting to ensure offerings meet state and federal requirements.
- Performance Monitoring: Continuous oversight of providers ensures adherence to contractual and performance benchmarks.
- Procurement Steps: Requests for Proposals (RFPs) solicit competitive bids, assessed for innovation, cost-effectiveness, and capacity to meet workforce needs.

Priority of Service Policy

The Priority of Service policy, aligned with TEGL 7-20 and the Workforce System Policy Priority of Service of the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry (April 28, 2022), ensures access to services for public assistance recipients, low-income individuals, and those with basic skills deficiencies. Key strategies include:

- Outreach and Awareness: Targeted campaigns through local agencies and community networks to effectively reach eligible populations.
- Informed Access: Displaying policy details prominently in PA CareerLink® centers and virtual platforms to ensure customers are fully aware of Priority of Service policies.

- Barriers Assessment: Utilizing tools such as Individual Employment Plans (IEPs) to identify and address employment challenges with a comprehensive support approach.
- Policy Updates: This policy will be updated as new guidance is provided by USDOL and the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry.

Addressing Barriers to Employment
Collaboration with key partners strengthens support for individuals facing employment challenges:

- Disability Services: Partnering with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) to provide customized support for individuals with disabilities.
- Basic Literacy Skills: Cross-training with Title II Adult Education partners ensures workforce staff understand roles within the system. Participants identified as having basic skills deficiencies receive recommendations and referrals for reading and math remediation.
- English Language Learners: With the increasing number of English Language Learners moving into the region, a referral process has been established with Title II Adult Education partners. Title II assesses individuals and refers them to appropriate resources, such as Penn State University and Catholic Charities, which offer English classes.
- Justice-Involved Individuals: Collaboration with Criminal Justice Advisory Boards and related agencies creates pathways for successful reentry.
- Senior and Veteran Programs: Partnerships with organizations like the PA Department of Aging's SCSEP and veteran services expand tailored opportunities for these groups.
- Department of Human Services Programs: Partnerships with DHS enhances coordinated service delivery through programs such as EARN, KEYS, SNAP JETS and ELECT, where applicable. These programs provide critical support for individuals receiving public assistance, young parents, and low-income adults. Through co-enrollment, shared case management, and braided funding strategies, participants gain acces to job readiness training, education supports, and other wraparound services that address significant employment barriers.
    - **EARN – Employment, Advancement and Retention Network**

      Description:
      The EARN program is designed to help Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients gain the skills and experience needed to secure and retain employment. The program provides job readiness training, job placement assistance, educational services, and supportive services (like transportation and childcare) to help individuals move toward self-sufficiency.

    - **KEYS - Keystone Education Yields Success**
        - Description:
          The KEYS programs is a collaborative program between DHS and Pennsylvania Community Colleges. KEYS assists TANF and SNAP eligible individuals in earning a careere-specific credit or non-credit bearing certificate or an associate degree leading to employment in high priority occupations with family sustaining wages and benefits, as well as great opportunities for advancement.
    - **SNAP – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program**
        - Description:
          SNAP, formerly known as food stamps, provides monthly benefits to low-income individuals and families to help purchase nutritious food. Administered federally by the USDA and locally by DHS, SNAP aims to reduce food insecurity and promote healthier lives through improved access to nutrition.
    - **SNAP JETS – SNAP Job Experience Training and Support**
        - Description:
          SNAP JETS sites are partnership between non-profit organization, the United States

Department of Agriculture, and the Dpartment of Human Services (DHS) at the state level. Non-profit organizations leverage their funding to provide career-specific skills training for people receiving SNAP benefits. SNAP JETS program participants gain skills through program completion that help them get a job and excel in career paths like culinary arts, hospitality, banking, health care, and skill labor. The programs also help with job placement and job retention skills.

Note: In regard to the programs listed above, including the EARN program, an individual must be receiving TANF or SNAP benefits to be enrolled in these programs or receive the supports associated with them (i.e., childcare, transportation, educational/work expenses).

- **ELECT – Education Leading to Employment and Career Training**
  - Description:
    The ELECT program is a federally funding program that workds collaboratively to assist expectant and parenting youth. The ELECT assists school districts, cyber and charter schools in coordinating the continuity of educational services for pregnant and parenting youth, under 22 years of age, to obtain community resources that will allow them to obtain a high school diploma or it equivalent. **Enhancing Training Opportunities.** The board actively promotes Career Pathways and work-based training options, including pre-apprenticeships, registered apprenticeships, and on-the-job training (OJT). These programs are tailored to foster industry-specific skill development and ensure alignment with employer needs.

Continuous Improvement and Staff Training. Workforce Solutions regularly updates assessment criteria for A/DW activities based on evolving labor market data. Staff training emphasizes understanding priority of service requirements, cultural competence, and co-enrollment strategies.

Fund Transfer and Allocation. The board leverages flexibility in transferring funds between A and DW programs as needed, with decisions guided by demand and eligibility trends.

Promotion of Career Pathways and Collaboration. The board integrates Career Pathways into all workforce strategies, ensuring clear progression opportunities for participants. Co-enrollment and collaborative case management across multiple programs ensure holistic participant support, while work-based learning enhances skill acquisition and employment outcomes.

This approach positions Workforce Solutions as a leader in delivering comprehensive and innovative workforce development services tailored to regional needs.

3.4 Youth workforce investment activities - *Provide a description and assessment of the type and availability of youth workforce investment activities in the local area.*

Workforce Activities for WIOA Eligible Youth: Workforce Solutions will procure for WIOA Title I Youth services each year if necessary as we do have the option to renew a subcontract with our provider for an additional three years so that services are not disrupted. The WIOA Youth Request for Proposal was released by Workforce Solutions in January 2024 and was written in alignment with the vision and goals of the Commonwealth's combined state plan. Due to limited resources projects that do not serve all six (6) counties of the North Central Workforce Development Area (NCWDA), specifically Cameron, Clearfield, Elk, Jefferson, McKean and Potter were not considered. This ensures consistency in our counties and the ability for one entity to ensure the provision of all 14 WIOA Youth Elements. In addition, we realize that all youth can benefit from workforce programs and have implemented and partnered with others to ensure all youth have access to the information needed to make informed career choices as well as awareness of career opportunities in our local area.

The role of the youth standing committee is to provide information and to assist with planning, the operational oversight, ensuring intentional collaboration with all things youth and other issues relating to the provision of services to youth. The Committee is led by a Board member. The make-up of the Board includes other Board members and staff from organizations that are identified by the Youth Committee Chair and/or Workforce Solutions based on the relevant expertise of the member and are presented to the chief Elected Local Official Board for approval/appointment to the Youth Committee.

Providers are required to utilize at least 75% of the award to serve Out of School Youth. In addition, at least 20% of the total WIOA Youth allocation must be spent to provide work experience for WIOA eligible and enrolled youth. Workforce Solutions with recommendation by the youth committee chose to define the "additional assistance" category for WIOA youth eligibility as those receiving assistance through Department of Human Services (to include Medical Care, SNAP, etc.) as stated in our Eligibility Polic TANF Youth Development funding is leveraged to provide services to youth who may not be eligible for WIOA. When applicable and appropriate eligibility for youth is determined for both programs to enhance the services available to them. Co-enrollment in partner programs significantly strengthens services by addressing individual needs and expanding access to opportunities. This coordinated approach helps eliminate barriers and fosters increased employment prospects.

Workforce Solutions strongly encourages the development of proposals that leveraged existing resources and expanded upon successful youth programs currently operating within the community. Crucial to youth programs are the Recruitment and Outreach methods. We have encouraged providers to conduct activities, including outreach to local government facilities, non-profit and faith-based organizations that provide support services to disconnected youth and young adults; including the use of word-of-mouth referrals, and social media platforms. Other suggested activities for youth services provider staff include:

- Utilize the Connection Café to recruit youth in need of services. The Connection Café was developed by a team of workforce professionals through the Customer Centered Design Process.
- Visiting local parks, homeless shelters, and other places that disconnected young people are known to frequent and speaking to them one-on-one in that environment, and in terms that make them the most comfortable.
- Going into low-income communities and neighborhoods and speaking to friends, families, and young adults about available services and opportunities.
- Creating a program application process that is easy to complete by removing as many of the administrative hurdles as possible.
- Using text messages and social media. While this strategy may not be as effective for recruitment, it is a highly effective strategy for keeping participants engaged, as well as reconnecting those participants who have disconnected from the program.
- Considering the tailoring of strategies for young adults by age group, 18-21 and 22-24. Younger individuals may be more ready to enroll in programs when compared to older individuals. Young adults, ages 22-24, are more likely to have been unemployed or separated from educational institutions longer than those in the younger age group. This older group requires more resource-intensive outreach and recruitment efforts. An emphasis on available work experiences and employment services, rather than education and basic skill building, is preferred for this older group.
- Engagement. Many disconnected young adults face challenges and life obstacles that result in the cycling in and out of program services. Such challenges are many and varied and may include: periods of homelessness, issues with the criminal justice system, pressures to provide for their families, and substance abuse, among others.

Recognizing the unique hardships of each individual and working to establish trust between participants and staff, that is respectful of roadblocks preventing regular attendance, creates an atmosphere where participants feel staff are invested in their success. It is recommended that proposals ensure the following are taken into consideration when responding to our Request for Proposals.

- Provision of a mentor to assist youth in the navigation of services.

- Develop relationships with youth before introducing them to the required paperwork involved in the programs.
- Empathize with the youth.
- Encourage parental involvement.
- Encourage youth involvement in the programs while enrolled and following the completion of a program (i.e. bring them in to serve as mentors to other youth).
- Once a participant is enrolled, communicate regularly and effectively. Explain the program's available services and activities, the expectations of the participant, and any available support services that may be necessary.
- If a participant disengages from the program at any point, calls, texts, visits and messages on social media are ways to find out why the participant is no longer engaged and let the participant know that he or she can return whenever he or she is ready. Engage adult mentors along with case managers. Such mentors can play a key role in keeping participants engaged with the program.
- Early in the process set achievable goals with the participant and communicate the status of their progress towards meeting those goals often.
- Engage peers. Placing young adults in cohorts allows individuals to move through the program and receive services with others. Participants often become friends and gain a sense of togetherness and accountability within the cohort. Such engagement may also open the door for young adults to take a leadership role, such as tutoring other participants, giving presentations, etc.
- Ensure WIOA Title IV pre-employment transition services are made available for students with disabilities in order to assist with the transition from school to post-secondary education or employment.
- Ensure that supportive services are made available to participants to help remove barriers that would prevent them from continuing with the program.
- Encourage re-engagement. If an individual leaves the program, the case manager/youth provider staff and adult mentor should remain in contact with the individual to encourage re-engagement through phone calls, texts, social media, or in-person visits at their 'hangouts' or homes.
- Collaborate with stakeholders to ensure that youth are exposed to Job Corps, AmeriCorps and related programs. As mentioned previously, we currently do not have Youth Build programs in our region but seek to find similar activities and services for our youth.

Program Design. Outreach and recruitment take place through discussions with county-based partners to identify the target populations, conduct presentations on services, share referrals, and conduct information sessions at the PA CareerLink®.

Each referral is assessed for enrollment eligibility, basic career needs, and provided referrals to remediate barriers as part of the orientation process prior to scheduled enrollment. The Individual Service Strategy (ISS) is based on a comprehensive assessment of customer needs. Front line staff have initiated through the Customer Center design project the "Connection Café" which may be used throughout the service plan from outreach and case management to counseling and follow up. Each month and in some cases weekly, staff may schedule the "Connection Café" at the PA CareerLink®, social halls, public libraries, establishments where youth may gather as well as virtual events (due to the pandemic) to share information, listen to the youth issues, and provide support with the goal to enroll youth, link services with partners and advise the youth in their education and employment plans. In many cases initially the youth require intervention leading to partner services prior to or concurrently with the WIOA performance goals.

Workforce Solutions will leverage TANF funds to focus on activities that reduce dependency by helping parents move towards self-sufficiency through job preparation, work and the promotion of marriage in accordance with the proposed rule. We will work to connect both parents and children/youth in strategies that address the needs of the whole family. This may include utilizing a family centered approach to integrate youth and parent support services, the coordination of workforce development activities for youth and parents, promoting financial independence and self-sufficiency and strengthen families through marriage and relationship education. We recognize that this strategy will have the greatest impact on family stability and economic mobility.

Customer Experience. Each youth receives an orientation addressing the 14 WIOA Elements and program activities highlighting the service flow and identifying the specific type of activities under each of the 14 WIOA elements. Title I staff review the 14 WIOA elements highlighting the service opportunities and partners' network available to serve the youth.

The key steps and milestones of the program design for the Title I Year-Round Youth Program begins with outreach and recruitment in collaboration with PA CareerLink® partners and local youth agencies serving eligible youth and young adults. Experience has shown many of the eligible youth face many challenges and are or have been engaged with a variety of social and human service organizations. Youth staff will coordinate dual enrollments with the partner agencies to establish integrated plans supporting the fourteen (14) WIOA elements of service. Eligibility determination, assessments through interviews and testing, partner referrals for additional services and job ready workshops will follow the orientation in addressing the Individual Service Strategy in a manner encouraging and supportive of the youth. The bottom line is providing access to information and experiences that lead the youth to succeeding in their employment goal. Recognizing in many cases the youth lack positive family or social support staff will develop connections with other agencies, employers; and maintain follow up in support of the youth. Presently past customers give back to the program as presenters and mentors to the enrolled youth.

WIOA youth and WIOA young adult's awareness of career pathways starts at orientation and is reinforced through the Individual Service Strategy, labor market information, counseling, workshops, and engagement with employers. Workforce Solutions has developed Career Pathways Toolkits, One Page Industry Cluster Maps and Career Mapping tools that all staff have been trained to utilize. These tools demonstrate to youth the entry level requirements into an industry as well as the training that will help them move along a career pathway within the industry of interest. Many other online tools are available and utilized when work with youth to assess their career interests. Young adults will be exposed to Career Pathways through the Career Exploration workshop, use of O*Net to research career interest and occupations, and engage employers in discussion groups, and work experience. Likewise, our Career Pathway Mapping pilot, as mentioned previously, takes career pathways to the next level by exposing our youth not only to the employers in our region, but the career pathways and other ancillary positions they offer. Related information including the qualifications, education and skills needed; technology used; and average wage data are included.

Work-based learning opportunities are provided, as identified in the Individual Service Strategy, and arranged by the scheduling of paid work experience, job shadowing, and On the Job training (OJT). A Work Experience Standard Handbook is provided to all customers. In-School Youth will be identified and placed in paid work experiences year round in both non-profit public worksites and for-profit worksites exposing them to the world of work and assist in expanding their knowledge of occupations in the workplace. To the extent possible the work experience will align with the career of interest for each youth. Out-of-School Youth will have the opportunity to participate in work experience throughout the program year, tour places of business and research career pathways with the opportunity to reconsider post-secondary education or secure unsubsidized employment.

The 20% of funds for work experience is highlighted in the operation budget and will be implemented during year round work experience program for both In-School and Out-of-School Youth and during the program year for Out-of-School Youth (young adults). Title I staff will coordinate with the Business Service Representatives to identify potential sites and employers interested in accepting young adults to set up the work experience locations. Worksites will be established by several factors and be driven by the discussion and development of the service needs in the Individual Service Strategy. Additionally, virtual work experiences, allowable under WIOA and supported during the pandemic, are an alternative format to broaden work experience opportunities, especially in our more rural areas.

Work readiness training program curriculum and competencies ReadySetWorkPA is a website implemented by Workforce Solutions for job seekers, students, training providers, employers and social service agencies. It is widely used in our PA CareerLink® centers and currently has 8 workshops that were specifically designed around

the needs of employer in the North Central PA region. The workshops are: The Art of the Interview, Conflict Resolution, Effective Communication, Get Empowered, Online Applications, Resume Writing, Skills and Strengths and Succeeding in a New Job. The courses on this site have been designed to meet the needs of individuals in our area and include current best practices for topics that were selected to ensure you're job ready. The learning is made more fun and engaging through gamification, peer-to-peer learning, and the ability to receive rewards, including certificates of completion.

Financial literacy education is centered on education awareness from financial aid to budgeting and financial life skills. All youth are required to participate in the Financial Literacy Workshop. In addition, and often as part of his or the Banking 101, Workforce, staff have traditionally brought in financial aid officers or held Career Fairs to help youth receive information and guidance on financial aid for attending post-secondary training. Financial literacy education goes a step further with the goal to expose youth to budgeting, insurance, and financial planning. In addition, entrepreneurial opportunities will be exposed to interested youth through appropriate referrals, connection with the Small Business Administration.

Program measurement and continuous improvements will be monitored on a regular basis as mentioned through youth staff meetings and the Youth activity report presented to the Workforce Development Board each quarter. Included in the report are success stories highlighting the activities throughout the program year, barriers to employment, and caseloads. Programmatically each youth has an Individual Service Strategy plan that is a live and ongoing document capturing services and may be modified at any point to reflect the interest and changes to assist the youth to be successful.

Tutoring, study skills training and dropout recovery services are addressed through staff assistance and more formally through the partnership with Title II Providers and literacy volunteer groups in each county. Along with the Title I staff using the T.A.B.E assessment to determine reading and math proficiencies, partnership in the PA CareerLink® as an example with Title II Providers affords the youth remedial services and high school equivalency diploma preparation. Partnering with the area Community Education Councils and in some counties the Community Based Organizations provides additional partner support and referral services to the youth in need as identified on the ISS.

Youth and young adult preparation to training or post-secondary education begins with the development of the ISS. Title I staff will open discussion with the youth and young adults regarding their education and employment goals. Recognizing many youths may be unsure or unaware to the options and opportunities, Career Exploration workshops will provide the background and competencies for youth to research career interest and occupational skills information to make an informed choice. Youth and young adults will have the opportunity to speak with people in the respective career fields, job shadow, company tours, and use web-based sites to review a variety of information from an interest inventory to High Priority Occupations and skill requirements.

Determined by need, youth and young adults will have the opportunity through the summer employment experience and work experience placement to be exposed to the world of work. Specific to financial aid for training, staff will work with the training providers and young adults to complete an Educational Cost worksheet and research training providers on the State approved training provider's list of schools recognized by the Workforce Development Board and the Department of Labor and Industry. Along with the educational cost worksheet, staff arrange for financial aid officers to present on scholarships, work study programs and other financial packages available for attending post-secondary training.

Education and training programs may include Individual Training Accounts (ITAs), On-The-Job Training (OJT), summer employment and work experience to explore career interest and/or exposure to the world of work. Each provides training or experiences that will prepare the youth for mapping their career choice or securing unsubsidized employment. Recognizing the limits on funding the focus is on work experience; as well as, many of the young adults may be dual enrolled with other WIOA programs accessing financial aid for schooling or employer-based contracts for employment. Job shadowing on site with various employers will expose the youth

and young adults to job profiles and have the opportunity to speak with employees in jobs of interest. All of these activities are captured in the youth's ISS.

Additionally, we have placed greater emphasis on digital literacy skills within our PA CareerLink® centers to the enhance employment and career advancement opportunities of our job seekers. By partnering with various stakeholders (community organizations and educational institutions), we are continuing to build and strengthen partnerships to facilitate ongoing support for digital literacy.

Education and training programs may lead to employment through the linkage with the role of the Business Service Representative and networking with additional partners in the function of job development and job placement. Following the Job Ready workshops, work experience, post-secondary training or occupation training, the youth will work with the Business Service Representative to search for active job orders on the PA CareerLink® system. Each youth will, from the initial enrollment, establish a personal account on PA CareerLink® to post their resume and actively job search. Business Service Representatives will conduct outreach to employers to arrange job interviews, job fairs, and job placement leading to unsubsidized employment. The Business Service Consultants will provide Career Club workshops to customers reviewing job search activities, providing tips on resumes and interviews, and following up on employment leads as needed. This is also an opportunity to bring Human Resource contacts to present on job expectations, skill requirements, and career options to the youth. In many cases, youth lack previous work history therefore the training programs help establish career plans moving the youth from their initial employment to plans to advance to better paying jobs as identified on the ISS. Follow up is a service staff use to maintain contact with the youth to advise, refer and guide to partner services, update their career plans, and their employment goals. As with any job seeker losing their job is a reality and staff will conduct follow up 12 months after exit to offer counseling and additional referral service to keep the youth engaged or seek out additional education and employment services.

Support Services. Support services will be addressed through the collaboration with partner organizations and appropriate referrals to the relevant organization. As mentioned transportation, lack of family support network, housing, child care cost, and lack of work experience or lack of a high school diploma/high school equivalency diploma are significant barriers to not only employment but in many cases the partner services needed to prepare a youth for education and employment opportunities. Workforce staff commit a significant amount of time coordinating referrals and partner services prior to and in concert with the Individual Service Strategy leading to training and employment. In many cases staff collaborating with a housing authority or additional human services is necessary prior to enrolling a youth into Job Ready workshops, high school equivalency diploma preparation, or work experience opportunities.

Support services based on need may be a gas incentive card for transportation, high school equivalency cost, clearances, purchase of shoes or clothing for work, or reimbursement for cost of participation. In the past we have contributed to the cost of a bicycle because this is the only means of reliable transportation for the youth to participate or get to work. In addition, we recognize many of the adult youth are dual eligible for Adult funded program services and Department of Human Services (DHS) program services. In the past year we have dual enrolled youth to address support service, work experience and post-secondary training based on eligibility and limitation on funding.

Performance, Administration, and Project Management. The Title I program focus is on building partnerships that prepare today's youth to be tomorrow's productive citizens through education and employment opportunities driven by linkages with the PA CareerLink® system partners, social services agencies and community and faith-based organizations.

Monitoring and tracking youth performance measures begins with the PA workforce development system of record which is the State's database of record for any agency serving WIOA customers. Title I staff use the PA CareerLink® database for all eligibility determination, entry of services and tracking performance measures. In addition, the enrollment goals, demographics, support service awards, work experience slots and expenditures,

and WIOA performance measures are tracked weekly through an internal spreadsheet. The Youth report is part of the quarterly Title I report to the Board.

Compliance and proper documentation begins with all eligibility determination and enrollment documentation upon completion being sent to the Administrative office for filing. Personnel packets for enrollment into the year round employment for In-School Youth and work experience for Out-of-School Youth is routed to the Administrative office for review and submitted to the Title I's subcontracted provider for payroll processing. The Individual Service Strategy plan is updated and submitted to the Administrative office for review prior to any youth enrollment into a paid work experience or occupation training activity and includes an Individual Referral Contract (IRC), Individual Training Account (ITA), and On the Job Training (OJT).

WIOA youth and WIOA young adults' awareness of career pathways starts at orientation and is reinforced through the development of the Individual Service Strategy (ISS), provision of labor market information, counseling, workshop and engagement with employers. For example, employers identified by the Business Service Representative may present at a workshop or participate in Connection Café. In addition, young adults will be exposed to Career Pathways through the Career Exploration Workshop utilize O*Net to research career interest and occupations and engage employers in discussion groups and work experience.

Workforce Solutions requires our WIOA youth provider to coordinate and / or implement all fourteen (14) WIOA elements as follows:

Tutoring, study skills training

- Adult Education
- Post-Secondary School Programs
- Connection Café
- Khan Academy

Alternative Secondary Schools or drop out recovery services

- Cyber School
- Alternative Education at High Schools
- Adult Education for GED Preparation
- Khan Academy

Work Experience and Summer Employment Opportunities

- Paid and Unpaid Work Experience
- Virtual Work Experience
- On the Job Training
- Job Shadow
- Volunteer Opportunities
- Entrepreneur Training

Occupational Skills Training

- College and Technical Trainings
- Short- Term Trainings
- Certification Programs
- Licensing Programs

Post-Secondary Education Training Activities

- Career Exploration
- FAFSA Information Sessions / Financial Aid Nights
- Community Resources

- Labor Market Information, including employment growth per career
- Discussions on financial and other resource needs to remediate barriers

Education offered in same context as Workforce Preparation Activities

- Digital Literacy
- Tutoring Activities
- Job Ready Workshops
- Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs – plan to implement

Leadership Development

- Exposure to postsecondary educational possibilities
- Community and service-learning projects
- Peer-centered activities, including peer mentoring and tutoring
- Organizational and teamwork training, including team leadership training
- Training in decision-making, including determining priorities and problem solving
- Citizenship training, including life skills training such as parenting and work behavior training
- Civic engagement activities which promote the quality of life in a community
- Other leadership activities that place youth in a leadership role, such as serving on youth leadership committees

Adult Mentoring

- Training Advisors
- Probation Officers
- Work Experience Employers
- Identified Community Members

Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling

- Referrals to providers of mental health and substance abuse counseling or case management
- Collaboration with providers of mental health and substance abuse counseling or case management
- Comprehensive Assessments to identify mental health or substance abuse (beyond intake assessment)
- Trauma-based Interviewing
- Training in self-care; self-esteem building; test anxiety; and stress management

Labor Market Information and Employment

- Workshops
- Job Development
- Career/Job Fairs
- O*Net Online
- Career Counseling and Exploration
- Career Assessments
- Career Preparation workshops
- Career Guides and Other Websites

Financial literacy Education

- Guest Speakers
- Budgeting and other financial literacy workshops
- Budgeting Handbook
- Web Sites (My Next Move, PA Career Zone, etc.)

Entrepreneur Skills Training

- Junior Achievement Curriculum
- SBDC Speakers
- Chamber of Commerce
- Business Services Team
- Workshops

Supportive Services

- GED® and/or HiSET test fees
- Transportation
- Work Clothes
- Clearances
- Items to Secure or Retain Employment

Follow Up

- Mailings
- Social Media
- Regular Contact and support (appointment, drop-in and phone calls)
- Employer/Postsecondary Education

All WIOA 14 youth program elements are available. However, not all participants are required to receive all 14 WIOA youth program elements. Program elements received will be based on individual needs as determined by the participant and case manager; including TANF.

Workforce Activities for all youth: Business Education Partnership. Workforce Solutions recognized that there was both a need and interest in connecting business with education in 2012. Our employers had expressed concern over the years that our young people aren't always aware of the opportunities or completely prepared to enter the work world. So, we kicked off a partnership in March of 2012 at our Youth Summit – "Preparing our Youth for the 21st Century." Since the inception of this initiative partners have come together to ensure that all secondary schools have access to programs that can help their students make career decisions. Activities include job shadowing, educator in the workplace, company tours, mock interviews (with employers) and other work based learning activities as identified. Many of these activities to include virtual and hybrid platforms which has led to an increased collaboration with more schools and students. The individual programs serving each of our six counties are:

Elk and Cameron Counties – DISCOVER partners implemented by the Community Education Council for Elk and Cameron Counties

McKean and Potter Counties – Business and Education Connect implemented by the Potter County Community Education Council.

Clearfield and Jefferson Counties – Career Counselor Staff are present in all schools in Clearfield and Jefferson Counties providing career counseling to students on an individual basis as well as assisting schools with activities that connect business and education and the implementation of their Chapter 339 Guidance Counseling plans.

Our Business and Education Connect Initiative is building a much-needed pipeline of talent to ensure that career pathways are identified that will lead our youth and other job seekers on a pathway to prosperity. The Business and Education Connect is also increasing and improving the connection between job seekers and employers.

Best Practices through Collaboration:

- Our go to source for best practices in youth services is WorkforceGPS.org – the Employment and Training Administration's (ETA) new technical assistance website. We regularly participate on webinars and utilize toolkits and best practices for youth programs as well as all other workforce programs.
- Workforce Solutions partnered with an AmeriCorps VISTA team through a partnership with the Headwaters Charitable Trust. The VISTAs assisted us in the development of a matrix for the Building

Trades Industry by compiling information necessary for youth to apply for one of the many Registered Apprenticeship Programs available through the North Central PA Building Trades Council. The document, updated annually provides an overview of each trade, a video if available demonstrating the work performed in this trade, application guidelines, prerequisites for each trade as well as contact information.

- As a core partner, OVR has the ability to collaborate with the local Workforce Development Board to provide in-school youth transition services and other services to gain skills and knowledge to enter the workforce. In partnership with the Workforce Development Board and Title I providers, OVR may provide both OVR eligible and potentially eligible in-school youth with disabilities services to enter competitive integrated employment.

These meaningful opportunities allow in-school youth with disabilities to assess their own strengths and skills, while exploring vocational possibilities and removing barriers from employment. Work based learning is an important experience for in-school youth with disabilities to engage in so that they may be afforded opportunities to discover career paths.

Other services that may be provided to OVR in-school youth with disabilities include:

- Counseling and guidance from professional vocational rehabilitation staff to explore career and training options as well as understand VR services.
- Independent Living Skills training will allow students to gain knowledge to perform the daily tasks essential for maintaining or obtaining independence. Independent Living Skills can include the following: household budgeting and financial management; utilizing public transportation; navigating through the social services system.
- Self-Advocacy Training to assist students with disabilities to gain knowledge on disabilities opportunities to participate in pre-employment transit disability awareness, advocating during an IEP process, understanding transition processes, and advocating for themselves in post-secondary education, employment, and coordinating social services.
- Workplace Readiness Training will provide students with knowledge needed to find and maintain competitive integrated employment. Curriculums can include soft skills training, interview skills, job readiness, job-seeking skills, HR practices, and other skills needed to become “workplace ready”.
- Job Shadowing will provide students with disabilities a one to five one-day job shadowing experience, for a maximum of 25 hours per school year, in an occupation of interest within a community integrated setting. Students will be provided an opportunity to shadow employees and obtain an overview of the knowledge, tasks, and abilities needed to work in this setting.

TANF Youth Development Program – TANF is an acronym for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Workforce Solutions is awarded TANF funding to serve TANF eligible youth. In collaboration with the Department of Human Services (DHS), Bureau of Employment Programs (BEP), Workforce Solutions utilizes these funds to provide career counseling and exploration, employment skills preparation and training, paid work experiences, supportive services and incentives to TANF Eligible Youth. TANF YDP is an integral component of our youth workforce investment strategy, designed to provide comprehensive services to young people in our region. This program targets youth who are from low-income families, especially those with a household income at or below 235% of the federal poverty level. Eligible participants must: 1) be between the ages of 12 (completed the 5th grade) and 24; 2) have proof of a social security number; 3) have proof of identity; 4) be a US citizen; 5) be a Pennsylvania resident; and 5) have a household monthly gross earned income that does not exceed 235% of the federal poverty income guidelines.

Our Title I provider employs staff who are responsible for recruiting TANF youth participants. The recruitment efforts are coordinated with other in school programs however and therefore many partners assist with the recruitment of TANF Youth including Business Education Partnership staff, Department of Human Services, Office and Vocational Rehabilitation, Guidance Counselors at local secondary schools and other agencies that serve youth. Communication with these agencies is the most effective method for recruitment however other methods used include: Attendance at Career Fairs held at local schools and Career and Technical Centers, Recruitment

events at PA CareerLink® centers highlighting Financial Planning, the Game of Life, Cupcakes and Careers. Workforce Solutions has a strong Business Education Partnership (BEP) that work with all schools in the region to provide career awareness and career exploration activities and information. In collaboration with the BEP, schools are made aware of the TANF Youth Development Program and eligible students are referred to the appropriate staff. Outreach for potential public and private worksites involve an orientation, supervisor's protocols, child labor laws, and site postings. A Worksite agreement is established with all placements of youth identifying allowable supervisors and supervision responsibilities.

Title I/TANF Youth Staff meet on a regular basis and as needed to discuss recruitment efforts for TANF YDP. EARN staff attend weekly Direct Service Team meetings reviewing customer services under the EARN program. During the Direct Service Team meetings, EARN staff ensure that all in attendance are aware of TANF Youth Development program providing a strong recruitment effort. This is a premium opportunity to engage key staff and partners in the outreach and recruitment of TANF youth. Release of information forms and information packets are used to receive referrals and market the service opportunities for eligible youth.

The Paid work experience wage, determined by the WIOA Title I provider, is currently set above minimum wage and is agreed upon as the base rate established in the agreement with the employer providing the work experience. Work experience positions are expected to be at least 120 hours but no more than 240 hours of work related activities.

Upon eligibility determination in coordination with Workforce Solutions (board staff), youth receive a program orientation reviewing program goals and expectations. Individual Service Strategy (ISS) is developed for each TANF youth allowing for their career pathway interest. The document captures the youths' interests, strengths, and barriers to their employment goals. Youth age-appropriate will be instructed on how to secure working papers through the local school district. Staff will counsel the youth in matching their career interest with potential work site opportunities. Once a recommended match is determined staff will review the work experience expectations detailed in the Work Experience Handbook, the general job duties at the worksite, and completion of the personnel packet.

In addition, worksites receive an orientation on supervision responsibilities, child labor laws, allowable work schedules, and a review of the Worksite handbook covering policies and procedures of the program. All worksites are required to identify the designated supervisors of youth placed at the site and sign off on the Worksite agreement acknowledging a third party vendor that our Title I provider utilizes as the employer of record and organization responsible for daily supervision. Worksite Supervisors are encouraged to review safety procedures and work assignments daily to reinforce teachable moments at the worksite.

The recruitment of employers and other organizations for work experience is a team effort of all Title I staff and other PA CareerLink® partners. Title I Business Service Consultants are responsible for building relationships with area employers. When they meet with these employers they discuss the variety of programs available including the TANF Youth Development paid work experience program. As employers express interest in the program, staff work together to place youth with these employers. In addition, the Title I staff are building relationships in the community with agencies that hire youth for paid work experiences. It is the Youth Talent Development Specialists who then maintain the connections with employers and organizations providing a work experience for the youth. Phone calls, email and visits to employers and organizations are the methods utilized for recruitment. The Workforce Solutions Business Education Partnership Career Counselor also assist in referring youth to the TANF youth development program as they are collaborating with all schools in our region to provide career related activities.

Our Title I provider utilizes staff to leverage WIOA out of school youth funds with TANF funding to maximize the continuum of service opportunities foreligible youth and dual enrollments enhancing the linkages of education and employment leading to potential credential training, completion of a diploma or GED, and improve work related soft skills and practical work experience.

Recognizing the eligibility requirements of the TANF funds, staff continues to recruit and develop relationships with OVR staff, school counselors, Children and Youth service staff, Probation, and CAO staff to be engaged with the county based partners including Intermediate Units, OVR, Housing authorities and Mental health agencies partner to provide remediation, support services and additional counseling to guide youth through overcoming barriers to career goals and employment. TANF and WIOA youth are also able to participate in all activities provided through our Business Education Partnership.

Both public and private worksites are recruited for potential placement in work experience opportunities – sites are identified by Business Service Teams, youth committee, Industry Partnerships and other outreach within the region. While we do not expect these sites to make any monetary and / or non-monetary contributions our Title I / TANF Youth Development staff enter into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) as required by Workforce Solutions. The MOA outlines the responsibilities of both Title I/TANF Youth Development and the work experience site. Work experiences sites typically agree to provide 12 months of adult mentoring to the youth in addition to a work experience.

Incentives are considered awards to youth participants for their achievement and successful participation in workforce development activities. The following is a list of incentives that may be awarded at the discretion of the LWDB to youth participants based on funding availability:
Successful completion of work experience: $50.00
Received High School Diploma and/ or GED: $50.00
Completed Post-Secondary Semester: $25.00

All TANF Youth are made aware of the incentive policy of the board as well as the procedures of the provider during the time of eligibility determination prior to the start of the program activity. Youth are informed that incentives are not an entitlement and that all incentive awards are subject to availability and budgeting of TANF Youth Development funds and applied at the discretion of Workforce Solutions.

Incentive payments are documented in the youth's Individual Service Strategy (ISS) when a youth is co-enrolled in WIOA and are directly tied to the goals of the specific program. When youth are not co-enrolled, the payments are documented on the Individual Service Strategy (ISS).

For youth being served as TANF Youth only, the board requires the provider to maintain a list of all incentives issued, and include at a minimum, the following information: amount and type of incentive issued, name of individual receiving incentive, dates issued and reason for issuance of incentive.

Monitoring
Workforce Solutions staff monitors youth (participant) files quarterly each year utilizing the monitoring tool the state provided. Some modifications were made to this document to add required clearances as well as a cover sheet to summarize results. Additionally, Workforce Solutions has made the decision to monitor TANF participants quarterly. Worksite monitoring, supervisor interviews and participant interviews have also been added to our monitoring plan and corresponding tools developed. We are currently working with the provider to finalize the timeline for notifications to the worksites as well as updates to written materials (employer/participant handbook).

Workforce Solutions staff monitors a sampling of TANF Youth Development files 4 times per year and provides a detailed report on findings to the board. The board then works with our provider to ensure compliance and if necessary a corrective action plan is requested from the provider.

Contact information for TANF Youth Development Program

Name and complete contact information of LWDB staff member responsible for the implementation, tracking and reporting TANF YD activities and expenditures:
Donna Hottel, 814-245-1835, dhottel@ncwdb.org
Vanessa Hasselman, 814-245-1835, vhasselman@ncwdb.org

Name of Designated TANF Provider Contact Person(s):
Josh McConnell, 814-834-2857, josh.mcconnell@equusworks.com

Name of LWDB staff member responsible for monitoring:
Tonya Mauk, 814-245-1835, tmauk@ncwdb.org

3.5 Coordination between Title I and Title II - *How will the local board coordinate WIOA title I workforce investment activities with adult education literacy activities under WIOA Title II?*

Workforce Solutions reached out directly to our Title II providers for input regarding the development of this plan. A strategic planning session was held as well as the sections of the plan were sent to Title II for clarifications/input. The Title II providers read through the applicable sections of the plan and provided us with input on the language for these sections.

Representation of Title II Adult Education exists within the system. Regular communication and active participation are necessary on both Title II and the Board's part to achieve a smooth and integrated 2024-2028 WIOA Local Area Plan.

Both WIOA Title I and WIOA Title II partners have committed to cross-training of staff, as appropriate, and to providing other professional learning opportunities that promote continuous quality improvement.
Partners will further promote system integration to the maximum extent feasible through:

- Effective communication, information sharing, and collaboration with the one-stop operator,
- Joint planning, policy development, and system design processes,
- Commitment to the joint mission, vision, goals, strategies, and performance measures,
- The design and use of common intake, assessment, referral, and case management processes,
- The use of common and/or linked data management systems and data sharing methods, as appropriate,
- Leveraging of resources, including other public agency and non-profit organization services,
- Participation in a continuous improvement process designed to boost outcomes and increase customer satisfaction, and
- Participation in regularly scheduled Partner meetings to exchange information in support of the above and encourage program and staff integration.
- Referrals from each provider to the other as well as follow up on these referrals to ensure that customer are being served in the most effective way possible.

Workforce Solutions is not directly involved in WIOA Title II solicitation and procurement; the Title II competition is run solely by PDE, and all funding decisions are made solely by PDE. We will review applications submitted to PDE for WIOA Title II funds for alignment with the goals and strategies of the local area plan, and then provide recommendations to PDE on ways to improve alignment, if applicable.

Federal regulations require PDE to establish the process by which the local boards will review the WIOA Title II applications for alignment with the local area plan and submit recommendations to PDE for improvement of alignment. PDE will receive the applications for Title II funds and then distribute applications to the appropriate LWDB for review. PDE will develop related review documents and rubrics and provide them to the local boards along with training on how to conduct the review and return the documents to PDE. All local boards must use the

review documents and rubrics provided by PDE. Local boards have flexibility in determining which members of the local board participate in the review of applications. The review work may be led by local board staff but cannot be limited to local board staff. Board members connected to entities that submit applications for WIOA Title II funds or that have other conflicts of interest cannot participate in the review.

It is our understanding that the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) will establish procedures, and accompanying rubrics and documentation, for Title II applications to be provided to local boards to review for alignment with their local plan. After reviewing the applications, the local boards will be responsible for submitting to PDE comments regarding alignment of the applications to the local plan.

3.6 Wagner-Peyser Act - *Describe the plans, assurances, and strategies for maximizing coordination, improving service delivery, and avoiding duplication of Wagner-Peyser Act (29 U.S.C. 49 et seq.) services and other services provided through the one-stop service delivery system.*

Workforce Solutions requires that each partner commits to cross-training of staff, as appropriate, and to providing other professional learning opportunities that promote continuous quality improvement.
Partners will further promote system integration to the maximum extent feasible through:

- Effective communication, information sharing, and collaboration with the one-stop operator;
- Joint planning, policy development, and system design processes;
- Commitment to the joint mission, vision, goals, strategies, and performance measures;
- The design and use of common intake, assessment, referral, and case management processes;
- The use of common and/or linked data management systems and data sharing methods, as appropriate;
- Leveraging of resources, including other public agency and non-profit organization services;
- Participation in a continuous improvement process designed to boost outcomes and increase customer satisfaction; and
- Participation in regularly scheduled Partner meetings to exchange information in support of the above and encourage program and staff integration.

Workforce Solutions staff continues to work with the PA CareerLink® Operator regarding integration and non-duplication of services in our centers. Staff are co-located in the centers work together to collaborate on services for cost efficiencies and better services to our customers. In addition, each PA CareerLink® center employs a Workforce Navigator that is funded through the shared operational budget. Our Title I provider serves as the employer of record for the Navigators. The role of the Navigator is to assist in the triage of services while building strong relationships with customers and staff to work effectively and efficiently as a team for the best outcome of our customers. The roles of the Workforce Navigator include but are not limited to – welcoming visitors, clients and customers to the centers, triage all who enter and define how and who may best fulfill their needs by first ensuring all customers sign in on the digital intake kiosk, assist customers with PA CareerLink® registration, referrals to internal programs, provision of an orientation to PA CareerLink® services.

3.7 Core program facilitation - *How will the local board work with the entities carrying out core programs to: Expand access to employment, training, education, supportive services, and co-enrollment for eligible individuals, particularly individuals with barriers to employment. Facilitate the development of Career Pathways in core programs (specify on-ramps from adult education). Improve access to activities leading to a recognized postsecondary credential (industry-recognized certifications or portable, and stackable certifications).*

Workforce Solutions collaborates with organizations throughout the North Central region to expand access to employment, training, education and supportive services, to eligible participants.

Workforce Solutions requires / expects the workforce system to be a seamless system that results in employment of its customers.We maintain six (6) comprehensive centers and one (1) affiliate center in our six-county region and each center is focused on service access, delivery and quality by offering job seekers and employers a "one-stop" to all services provided by its partners. Staff are well trained, cross trained and aware of other services available to job seekers and employers that are not housed in the centers.

This begins with outreach to all eligible participants including the hard to serve categories as required in WIOA and the populations identified in the boards Priority of Service Policy as described below:

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA or Opportunity Act) requires priority be given to public assistance recipients, other low-income individuals and individuals who are basic skills deficient, when providing individualized career services and training services using WIOA title I Adult program funds. In addition, Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) No. 3-15 specifies that priority should also be applied to individuals that are both underemployed and low-income. WIOA provides a focus on serving individuals with barriers to employment, and the intent of this priority in the law is to ensure access to these populations on a priority basis. Under the WIA priority was required for public assistance recipients and other low-income individuals when funds were limited. Under the WIOA, priority of service is required regardless of the funding levels and also is expanded to include individuals who are basic skills deficient.

Workforce Solutions recognizes the intent of Congress through WIOA to utilize our funding to better serve those with barriers to employment. Services will be refined to best meet eligible participant's needs and to collaborate with partner agencies on the removal of barriers.

Below please find more detailed information on service strategies for specific populations with barriers to employment:

- Approach to identify qualified applicants for partner programs – There is a Workforce Navigator in each of our PA CareerLink® comprehensive centers that is responsible for welcoming customers, visitors and guests as well as triage all who enter defining how and who may best fill their needs. The navigators are trained on the eligibility requirements of all partner programs in the centers and provide an initial assessment of all customers so that they are triaged to the appropriate staff. The navigators are fully supported by the Operating Budgets and the PA CareerLink® Site Administrators are responsible for their day to day duties.
- Workforce System staff must verify eligibility prior to the provision of services to all customers. Individuals whose eligibility is not yet determined may receive interim support from Wagner-Peyser, WIOA Title III. Staff must ensure that individuals receiving labor exchange services under Wagner-Peyser are legally authorized to work in the US, as required by federal law. To meet this requirement, staff should verify work authorization status prior to or at the time of service delivery.. Workforce Solutions in accordance with Labor and Industry's Workforce System Guidance No. 04-2015, recognizes the need for self-certification as a viable source for documenting eligibility. With the exception of Out of School Youth, the use for self-certification is limited and only available after all other sources of eligibility verification are exhausted. Self-certification may be accepted from an individual who has experienced a loss of documentation due to 1) a natural or man-made disaster such as fire, flood, tornado; 2) eviction from residence resulting in a loss of supporting documentation; or 3) individual is fleeing or has fled an abusive or untenable home situation. Workforce staff must use self-certification in a manner reflective of the aforementioned guidance (i.e. limited and rare circumstances; or last resort) and only for the following criteria elements:

    - Date of Actual Dislocation (Dislocated Worker)
    - Displaced Homemaker (Dislocated Worker)
    - Reemployment Opportunity is Poor / Unlikely to Return-to-Work (Dislocated Worker)
    - Permanently or Temporarily Laid Off as a Consequence of the Disaster (Dislocated Worker)

- English Language Learner (Youth)
- Homeless (Youth and Adult)
- In/Aged Out of Foster Care System (Youth)
- Offender (Youth)
- Pregnant or Parenting (Youth)
- Runaway (Youth)
- School Status at time of Registration (Youth)
  Telephone/Document Inspection Verification is allowable to verify eligibility as well however only as a last resort. Applicant Statements as a form of self-attestation and if used a rationale must be provided via case notes on PA CareerLink® in the applicant's electronic case record describing the other methods of verifying eligibility through the workforce staff attempted prior to the use of an applicant statement. Applicant statements and self-attestations cannot be used for family size/family income criteria in determining eligibility.
- Workforce Solutions requires Title I staff to report the use of each of these methods for eligibility on a quarterly basis. Workforce Solutions the utilizes a random sampling methodology to ensure the accuracy of the self-attestations for all title I programs eligibility.
- Services to Migrant Seasonal Farm Workers – Typically this type of individual is also in need of workshops (including work readiness) and education/training. Many times, these individuals are lacking a solid work history and need work experience prior to being placed in full time work.
- Services to Veterans and related eligible persons, including National Guard and returning veterans. Although the (shared) Veterans Representative is available in each PA CareerLink® to disabled Veterans, Non-disabled Veterans and /or eligible spouses have all services available to them. Workforce Solutions has a Priority of Service to Veteran Policy in place which ensures Veterans and / or eligible spouses are identified at the point of entry so they can take full advantage of the priority of services. The Veterans Priority of Service policy is applicable to six programs offered in the PA CareerLink® System to include WIOA Adult, WIOA Dislocated Worker, National Emergency Grants, Wagner-Peyser State Grants, Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) and Senior Community Service Employment Program.
- Workforce Solutions also ensured that our PA CareerLink® centers are aware of and providing the services available to veterans through the "Gold Card Initiative". When a veteran presents a "Gold Card" to PA CareerLink® staff they are receiving enhanced intensive services including 6 months of follow up.
- Services to TANF customers and low–income individuals – Workforce Solutions receives TANF and EARN funding and award funding to the Title I Contractor. Therefore, a job seeker who is also a public assistance recipient is referred to the appropriate Case Manager to explore opportunities through the EARN contract.
- Services to displaced homemakers -– This type of individual is trying to secure employment opportunities after years of being out of the workforce. Typically, workshops and education/training are the services most appropriate to this job seeker population.
- Services to women and minorities - Typically this type of individual is also in need of workshops and education/training. Many times, these individuals lack a solid work history and need work experience prior to being placed in full time work.
- Training for Non-Traditional Occupations – Training for nontraditional employment is encouraged and is recognized by the WDB approved/ State ETPL-Eligible Training Providers List. Workforce Solutions partners with training providers in our region to provide short term training to job seekers including returning veterans, minorities, women and the economically disadvantaged in non-traditional occupations. The training consists of job search skills, communication and teamwork and hands on training required by this industry for entry level employment.
- Services to individuals with multiple barriers to employment, including:
  - Older individuals – Services to older individuals are provided at all PA CareerLink® centers in the North Central Region. Older individuals are able to participate in the full range of services available. In addition, services to older individuals are coordinated with Associates for Training and

Development, Pathstone or the AARP Foundation depending on the county. Associates for Training and Development, Pathstone and the AARP Foundation staff posts all job opening on PA CareerLink® as required by Title V regulation. Collaboration with Associates for Training and Development and Pathstone in the PA CareerLink® centers include: job clubs held at the PA CareerLink® or connect virtually with internet access, PA CareerLink® centers sometimes provide a training site for participants, often as greeters, office support workers, security guards, or career resource area attendants. These participants are trained as peer mentors to be able to assist older job seekers with referrals to SCSEP services.

- Persons with limited English proficiency – Services are coordinated with the appropriate ESL provider in the local area.
- Persons with disabilities – The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation is the sole WIOA Title IV provider of services to eligible persons. Eligibility to receive services under WIOA Title IV may only be determined by a qualified Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) Counselor. In addition, OVR staff provide technical assistance regarding the provision of disability related services to one-stop staff and partners.
- Ex-offenders – Services are coordinated with the local judge and/or probation officers as appropriate. Workforce Solutions has ensured that all PA CareerLink® staff are aware of the legal limitations on the employment of Ex-Offenders in PA in order to better serve this population. This has been accomplished by building a relationship with each of the county Criminal Justice Advisory Boards (CJABs) and then introducing them to PA CareerLink® staff requesting that a local representative attend the CJAB meetings and increase the collaboration with other members. The board encourages more than just referrals be made but rather discussion about leveraging staff time and resources. With the addition of a Re-entry grant from L&I, Workforce Solutions has been able to build new relationships as well as strengthen old relationships to improve services to this group.
- Individuals Needing Basic Education Skills – Services are coordinated with Providers who are partners in the PA CareerLink® centers. Job seekers in need of the Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma will be enrolled in Title II adult education classes. These classes will prpare them to sit for the high school equivalency exam, also known as the GED® and HiSET®.
- Services to Dislocated Workers and Trade Act eligible participants – Rapid Response activities are available to those workers who have permanently lost their job. Included are re-employment, training and education opportunities; as well as an orientation of the various services available to this specific population. Services are coordinated at the PA CareerLink® centers with Unemployment Compensation, Trade Act Program Services and other agencies as appropriate for the individual.
- Native Americans – the board will continue to explore a partnership with the state of NY to increase the services and opportunities available to the Native American population that we share or are in close proximity to.

- *Facilitate the development of Career Pathways and co-enrollment, as appropriate, in core programs (specify on-ramps from adult education).*

Career Pathways Development. Career Pathways – In 2020, Workforce Solutions developed and implemented Career Pathways Sector Guides for each sector recognized by the PA Department of Labor and Industry. The sector guides are designed to provide information about career pathways in the North Central PA region and benefits workforce development professionals, businesses and job seekers. All PA CareerLink® staff were trained in the use of the sector guides. The guides provide a general overview of the potential progression of occupations within the region but are not specific to a single employer but rather industry sectors. Workforce Solutions implement Career Pathways Mapping as a follow up to the development of the guides. Working with a consulting firm, a companion guide was developed that provides business service teams with the knowledge and skills to create employer

specific career pathways maps. These maps, developed in collaboration with the business service teams and the employers can assist in employers with updating job descriptions, can be used in new hire orientations to illustrate progression and potential for promotion within the organization and to show employees how they can move from one job to another with that company.

In 2024, Workforce Solutions took Career Pathways to the next level and launched a Career Pathway Mapping pilot, collaborating with two consulting agencies. One agency is gathering and organizing data from volunteer pilot employers while the other is developing an app to showcase the career pathways by company. Currently under construction, the app is expected to go live by June 2025, featuring pathways from approximately 100 employers. Employers who did not participate in the pilot will have the option to create pathways through the app's guided process. The app's goal is to provide awareness among job seekers about the career opportunities that exist in the North Central PA region.

Co-enrollment processes within the PA CareerLink® system. Within our PA CareerLink® centers, Title I, Title II and Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations (BWPO) staff work together to ensure co-enrollment on intake. Through the PA CareerLink® Certification process the board has established goals for each center. Co-enrollment is one of those measures the board uses to evaluate the success of each center. In addition, co-enrollment is a benchmark of our Title I provider the board uses to evaluate their effectiveness. The Title I staff provide individualized career services as well as intake, assessment, job search workshops, rapid response services, IEP and ISS development and case management for all WIOA eligible customers.

Title II staff provide outreach, initial assessment of skill levels, referrals to and coordination of activities with other programs and services, and provides information on supportive services that allow students to attend class and transition to postsecondary education/training. BWPO staff provide core services including intake, job screening and referrals, employer outreach services, job search workshops, rapid response activities and case management for job seekers. BWPO and Title I staff match job seekers with employers in need of their skills by providing basic job search skills and information to entry level job seekers. Career Pathway and high priority occupation information is used with job seekers to individuals them set goals and assist them in their job search, help job seekers connect to adult education and other resources to eliminate barriers to employment. Case managers then help connect job seekers to employers' career pathways once they have completed their education and/or developed the skills that will match employers' needs.

Eligibility to receive services under WIOA Title IV may only be determined by a qualified OVR Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. Vocational rehabilitation counselors determine eligibility for and work with customers to develop an Individual Plan for Employment, providing services necessary to meet their specific vocational goal. As a core partner, OVR provides Vocational Rehabilitation services for people with disabilities. Eligible OVR customers receive multiple services that may include but not be limited to, diagnostic, vocational counseling and guidance, vocational evaluation, restoration, training, job placement and pre-employment training services for eligible and potentially eligible high school students with disabilities. These individualized services are designed to prepare OVR customers to become qualified trained members of the workforce. OVR recognizes the value of customer access to various services and resources and encourages co-enrollment across programs as appropriate.

- *Improve access to activities leading to a recognized postsecondary credential (industry recognized certifications or portable and stackable certifications).*

Registered Apprenticeship and Registered Pre-Apprenticeship. Workforce Solutions is committed to increasing the number of RAPs and Pre-RAPs in our region because we agree that employers who sponsor these programs will be positioned to build a pipeline of workers who are better retained and invested in their job. Apprenticeships can aide in reducing recruiting costs and improve work productivity. We view this as a partnership with the PA

CareerLink® centers, particularly the Business Services Teams, Title I staff, board staff and the PA Apprenticeship and Training Office (ATO).

Workforce Solutions has committed time and resources to ensure that we have the staff capacity to accomplish this work. Additionally, we apply for and have received Labor and Industry funding to support the building of apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs. Likewise, we use WIOA dollars (ITA, OJT and Incumbent Worker) to support apprenticeship programs. This also supports activities that lead to post-secondary credentials and/or industry recognized credentials. We have created and implemented a Registered Apprenticeship Policy document that has been shared with all PA CareerLink® staff to outline the process for RAP and Pre-RAP development and implementation and to provide information and other resources to increase the knowledge of RAPS and Pre-RAPS so they can assess and refer employers to board staff for further assistance as well as assess and refer job seekers to established RAPs and Pre-RAPs. Workforce Solutions is also committed to utilizing WIOA and other identified funding to support RAPS and Pre-RAPs in our region through all programs including: TANF Youth Development, WIOA Youth, and EARN. Likewise, RAPs and Pre-RAPs are considered essential to all of the work we do around career pathways, co enrollment and services for those with disabilities.

3.8 ITA Accounts - *How will training services be provided using ITAs, fund programs of study, or through the use of contracts for training services that fund work-based trainings.*

Training Services Overview. Historically, the Board has used ITAs to fund occupational skills training activities for its eligible customers. A customer who is assessed as having a need for skill improvement or enhancement may choose training activities utilizing an ITA or a work-based learning program. Agreements may also be entered into for short-term training which has been identified within the region as having a particular need for employees when other training options are not identified. The High Priority Occupation List (HPO) will be utilized in the approval of these short-term trainings. ITA-funded training may be completed in conjunction with work-based learning activities, such as OJT, customized training, and internships. Such coordination will be clearly identified in the customer's IEP.

Participants are expected to utilize information such as skills assessments, labor market conditions/trends, and training provider performance included on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). Customers will be encouraged to make an informed choice when selecting the training provider that best meets their needs.

An overview of the Board's ITA and work-based learning polices is provided below:

ITAs. The Board may enroll individuals who are determined eligible for training services into occupational skills training programs utilizing an ITA. It has adopted the following policies for the provision of ITAs.

- Funding is limited to $7,500. This $7,500 cap was increased from $4,500 in January 2020 due to the increase in the cost of post-secondary education and training as well as the increase in available resources.
- Training must be in an occupation identified as a growth occupation or within a in demand industry sectors.
- Training must result in an employment wage sufficient to attain self-sufficiency.
- In general, all training programs must be within a reasonable commute of the local area and may include out-of-the-area and out-of-state training institutions. Out-of-the-area training programs that are not within commuting distance to the local area may be approved on a case-by-case basis. All approved training must be located within the contiguous United States.
- All applicants must apply for the PHEAA/Pell Grant. Depending on the need and availability of WIOA funding, PHEAA/Pell funds will be utilized first to cover educational costs. WIOA funds will cover expenses over and above those covered by financial aid.
- Continuing Education and other similar courses may be approved if the following conditions apply:

    - The customer must have a specific occupational goal.
    - The customer must have a work history or educational background that relates to the occupational goal.
    - The customer must present evidence describing how the proposed training will increase his or her employment marketability.
- ITA funding is limited to tuition. Supportive Services may be requested for expenses related to training, including but not limited to the following: books, tuition and fees, supplies, tools, uniform pants and shoes, certification, licensing, testing fees, background checks, drug testing for entrance into training, medical requirements for training entrance, etc.
- Customers accepted on a provisional basis will receive assistance on a case-by-case basis.
- ITAs will not be used for payment of late fees caused by customer error or delay. The customer will be responsible for these fees, as well as other fines or penalties.
- Workforce Solutions has an ITA policy and procedures document that outlines limitations, requirements, exceptions as well as outlines procedures to follow.

Customers eligible for ITAs are served through our Title I provider. The Title I provider uses a process where participants are encouraged to utilize informed choice by researching available local positions as well as researching three training providers offering the training of interest. The participant evaluates the training and determines the best fit for their particular circumstances. All services, including ITA, are able to be adapted to meet each individual's needs with provided accommodations. The process/assessment of ITA approval may be accommodated as appropriate to meet the needs of each individual in an effort to support their success. In the event Workforce Solutions determines that there are an insufficient number of eligible providers of training, a procurement process may occur dependent on the particular industry and expected outcome. This process is guided by federal, state, and local procurement regulations and will ensure that training services are delivered effectively, equitably, and in alignment with workforce goals. A needs assessment as previously outlined will identify gaps in training capacity, offering, and employer needs. With the insufficiency of training providers documented, the board will publish a notice of intention for a 30-day public comment period. Taking any feedback from the community into account, Workforce Solutions will determine means by which providers will be selected (RFP, invitation to bid). Workforce Solutions aims to support local area needs through recognition of available local training which is not part of the ETPL. Contract training may be initiated in instances where there are training services programs provided by community-based organizations or other private organizations that benefit the needs of individuals with barriers to employment (20 CFR 680.320.)

Additionally Workforce Solutions may recognize it would be most appropriate to award a contract to an institution of higher education or other eligible provider of training services in order to facilitate the training of multiple individuals in in-demand industry sectors or occupations. All contracts for training are not to limit customer choice.

Workforce Solutions will consider on a case-by-case basis, situations that warrant a pay-for-performance contract instead of an ITA. To date, we have not utilized this option.

In most cases, contract training will be accessed through the Title I provider with participants following informed choice procedures. Workforce Solutions will evaluate training providers on effectiveness through research on demand of occupation, participant completion rates, and employment outcomes.

Work-Based Learning. The Board has historically encouraged work-based learning programs such as on-the-job training (OJT), work experience, internships, co-op programs, apprenticeships, and transitional jobs to meet any unique/specific skill needs of employers in the area. Future strategies to promote these efforts may include:

- Targeting high-growth industries for potential work-based learning opportunities.
- Educating employers, including Chambers of Commerce and industry associations, about how work-based training can enhance their businesses by decreasing turnover and improving productivity.
- Assisting businesses by streamlining work-based learning documentation requirements.

- Assessing job candidates to determine their eligibility and suitability for work-based learning opportunities.
- Utilizing our Career Pathways Initiative in the industry sectors that align with work-based learning activities.
- Including work-based learning as part of its agendas and topics of discussion during business forums and summits.
- Requiring the Business Services Team to actively promote work-based learning as key service for local businesses.

Establishing time periods and caps for work-based learning activities.

Workforce Solutions is committed to increasing the number of RAPs and Pre-RAPs in our region because we agree that employers who sponsor these programs will be positioned to build a pipeline of workers who are better retained and invested in their job. Apprenticeships can aide in reducing recruiting costs and improve work productivity. We view this as a partnership with the PA CareerLink® centers, and in particular the Business Services Teams and Title I staff as well as the board, staff and the PA Apprenticeship and Training Office (ATO).

Workforce Solutions encourages the use of WIOA funding for Registered Apprenticeships and has revised our Individual Training Account Policy (ITA) and On the Job Training Policies (OJT) to include an exception to our training cap allowance of $7,500. For individuals participating in Related Technical Instruction (RTI) through a Registered Apprenticeship that is on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) and On-the-Job Training – we have increased the training cap to $9,000. As a best practice, Workforce Solutions will continue to support registered apprenticeship programs utilizing WIOA funding.

3.9 Coordination with adult education programs - *How will the local board coordinate relevant secondary and postsecondary education programs and activities with workforce investment activities to support strategies, enhance services, and avoid duplication of service(s).*

Workforce Solutions continues to fully utilize the resources and services available through the area's secondary and work-based institutions, including those programs authorized by the Carl D. Perkins Act to increase educational achievements as well as postsecondary credentials. We promote the alignment of our workforce strategies and services along with those of its community partners, including adult education, community education councils, community colleges, CTECs, online training programs and others to increase access, enhance outcomes, maximize resources, eliminate skill gaps and avoid duplication of efforts by connecting and coordinating workforce programs with relevant secondary and postsecondary education offerings and to avoid duplication of efforts.

Workforce Solutions has agreements through the One-Stop MOU with Title II providers to deliver Adult Education to increase academic and workforce preparation skills. The Board further supports local Career and Technical Centers and secondary schools through dual enrollment programs. Additionally, it utilizes Chapter 339 Career Guidance Plan Development as a coordinated effort for college and career readiness. The Board provides access to postsecondary opportunities and financial aid information through the PA CareerLink® system, and its statewide list of approved training providers.

Workforce Solutions staff also participate in the CTE comprehensive needs assessment with all schools that have CTE programs. Staff also participate on the advisory councils at all Career and Technical Centers in our region and provide input from industry and labor market trends as well as access to the High Priority Occupation list.

Workforce Solutions interacts with our providers on a regular basis and in particular through the HPO Petition process to ensure that our providers are offering relevant education programs that will lead to gainful employment. In addition, through our Industry Partnerships we go through an RFQ process with our providers to

solicit providers to offer industry recognized/needed training. Our hope is that once this training is provided the school will continue to offer the program on a regular basis.

Workforce Solutions is committed to increasing the number of RAPs and Pre-RAPs in our region because we agree that employers who sponsor these programs will be positioned to build a pipeline of workers who are better retained and invested in their job. Apprenticeships can aide in reducing recruiting costs and improve work productivity. We view this as a partnership with the PA CareerLink® centers, and in particular the Business Services Teams and Title I staff as well as the board, staff and the PA Apprenticeship and Training Office (ATO).

Workforce Solutions has committed time and resources to ensure that we have the staff capacity to accomplish this work. We have worked with the State Apprenticeship Office for several years preceded by work with the Federal Apprenticeship Office which has resulted in board staff with extensive knowledge of Registered Apprenticeship Programs. We currently have a staff completing a Registered Apprenticeship Navigator Program. The state completing the Navigator Program as well as other board staff will continue to inform and educate secondary and post-secondary school systems of the work being done around RA and Pre-RA. This is completed through direct outreach, participation on Local Advisory Councils for many schools in our region, Occupation Advisory Councils, regular meetings with post-secondary training providers (including Career and Technical Centers) as well as through our Business Education Partnership and youth committee of the North Central Workforce Development Board.

ReadySetWorkPA is a website implemented by Workforce Solutions for job seekers, students, training providers, employers and social service agencies. This virtual training platform aimed to increase customer engagement and provide a system access on-line which will provide basic training to all customers. It is widely used in our PA CareerLink® centers and currently has 8 workshops that were specifically designed around the needs of employer in the North Central PA region. The workshops are: The Art of the Interview, Conflict Resolution, Effective Communication, Get Empowered, Online Applications, Resume Writing, Skills and Strengths and Succeeding in a New Job. The courses on this site have been designed to meet the needs of individuals in our area and include current best practices for topics that were selected to ensure you're job ready. The learning is made more fun and engaging through gamification, peer-to-peer learning, and the ability to receive rewards, including certificates of completion. Data that can be collected from the website includes: Attendee name, participant ID, course completion, time spent in course, as well as assessment outcomes and answers. Each course includes a course evaluation to provide user experience qualitative data pertaining to the workshop content and presentation.

4. Local Area Workforce Delivery System

4.1 Business and Employer Engagement

- *Support a local area workforce development system that meets the needs of businesses in the local area*

Workforce Solutions has implemented several regional strategies to ensure that the workforce development system meets the needs of businesses in the local area and to facilitate engagement of businesses and other employers. These methods include:

Industry Partnerships - We oversee three active Industry Partnerships for the following industries: Manufacturing, Healthcare and Social Assistance and Building and Construction. The partnerships meet quarterly and are employer driven. A support team made up of workforce, economic and community development agencies, post-secondary education providers, small business development centers, WEDnetPA providers, and other appropriate agencies collaborate on solutions to address the needs and priorities of business. As emerging sectors are identified and needs arise the board will form Industry Partnerships to meet the demand of the emerging industries as was done when the Marcellus Shale industry was more present in our region. Industry champions are utilized to facilitate employer engagement within the respective partnerships, where available. The Workforce

Board engages in-demand, industry employers to ensure that employment and training activities are meeting the needs of the employer.

Additionally, our partnerships serve to influence workforce training by: 1) playing a central role in shaping curriculum for local training programs, ensuring they are aligned with the latest industry standards and specific skills employers are seeking; 2) collaborating with training providers to design sector-specific training programs, apprenticeships, and certifications; and 3) developing best practices that serve as a model for broader workforce development initiatives.

Our BSTs are focused on increased business and employer engagement strategies. These strategies focus on understanding employer needs, offering customized services, streamlining access to resources, and demonstrating the value of workforce development solutions.

We have created a Business Services Policy document to ensure that our business services teams are active, collaborating with all partners and increasing the employer penetration rate. We also provide the business service teams with information on other programs that exist to assist employers including but not limited to: WEDnetPA funding, Registered Apprenticeships, Work Opportunity Tax Credits and other programs as they are identified.

We regularly provide Labor Market Information to partners in our region, including local businesses. Expanding businesses often request data to ensure they can access a skilled workforce. While, existing businesses typically want wage and employment statistics. New companies moving into our region reach out for various labor market insights, often referred by our county and regional economic agencies.

Registered Apprenticeship - Workforce Solutions has been successful in increasing the awareness of Registered Apprenticeships as a recruitment and retention tool for employers from all industries through the PA SMART grant opportunity. Ten new Registered Apprenticeship programs were developed with our outreach and assistance. Workforce Solutions works with the Apprenticeship and Training Office (ATO) within the PA Department of Labor and Industry for guiding and promoting the expansion of apprenticeships in North Central PA. This relationship has improved with our successful applications for L&I apprenticeship grant dollars. Examples of newly registered apprenticeship programs include the Western PA Electrical Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee (JATC) and the Penn State Extension Butcher Apprenticeship programs. We also implemented a guidance tool that provides all PA CareerLink® staff with the information needed to assist in the recruitment of employers to consider implementing Registered Apprenticeship program to assist with their workforce challenges. One of the apprenticeships developed is for Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN) and we were able to utilize WIOA funding to support the Related Technical Instruction (RTI) for the apprentices which leveraged additional funding.

Pre Apprenticeship – Workforce Solutions has also been successful in increasing the awareness of pre apprenticeship programs in the region. Examples of pre-apprenticeship include the approval of Christ the King's Feeding pre-apprenticeship and the expansion of Bradford High School's Child Care program through Early Connections in Erie, PA. Likewise, one of our apprenticeship grants targets the expansion of apprenticeship model to include the development of pre-apprenticeships programs to serve as feeder to registered apprenticeship programs or in the development of new apprenticeships.

Workforce Solutions is committed to increasing the number of RAPs and Pre-RAPs in our region because we agree that employers who sponsor these programs will be positioned to build a pipeline of workers who are better retained and invested in their job. Apprenticeships can aide in reducing recruiting costs and improve work productivity. We view this as a partnership with the PA CareerLink® centers, and in particular the Business Services Teams and Title I staff as well as the board, staff and the PA Apprenticeship and Training Office (ATO).

Workforce Solutions has committed time and resources to ensure that we have the staff capacity to accomplish this work. We have created and implemented a Registered Apprenticeship Guidance document that has been shared with all PA CareerLink® staff to outline the process for RAP and Pre-RAP development and implementation

and to provide information and other resources to increase the knowledge of RAPs and Pre-RAPs so they can assess and refer employers to board staff for further assistance as well as assess and refer job seekers to established RAPs and Pre RAPs. Workforce Solutions is also committed to utilizing WIOA and other identified funding to support RAPS and Pre RAPs in our region through all programs including: TANF Youth Development, WIOA Youth, EARN. Likewise, RAPs and Pre RAPs are considered essential to all of the work we do around career pathways, co enrollment and services for those with disabilities.

Industry Partnership Intern Program – funded by a PA SMART through the Department of Labor and Industry, internships reimbursements are available to the Manufacturing, Building/Construction, and Healthcare and Social Assistance employers who hire interns who meet eligibility criteria. Employers can receive up to a 50% reimbursement of student wages up to a maximum of $3,000. An employer 50% match is required.

DCED Manufacturing to Careers – is an internship opportunity funded through PA Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). This training-to-careers grant supports projects that result in short-term work-readiness training, entry-level job placement, or the advancement of the manufacturing industry. Eligibility is required and employers are reimbursed up to 50% of intern wages up to a maximum of $3,000.

Incumbent Worker Training – businesses may apply for incumbent worker training for the reimbursement of training which advances current workers and/or is necessary to retain employment or avert a layoff. Eligibility is required. Employers receiving funds for incumbent worker are required to pay for a percentage (based on company size) match.

On-the-Job Training (OJT) – is a WIOA funded program where individuals are hired by an employer who is reimbursed for a percentage of occupational training costs associated with the training plan developed by the Title I staff. Reimbursement is typically up to 50% of the wage rate of the participant for the extraordinary costs of providing the training and supervision related to the training. There is an expectation of receiving full time employment following the OJT.

Career Pathway Initiatives - In 2020, Workforce Solutions developed and implemented Career Pathways Sector Guides for each sector recognized by the PA Department of Labor and Industry. The sector guides are designed to provide information about career pathways in the North Central PA region and benefits workforce development professionals, businesses and job seekers. All PA CareerLink® staff were trained in the use of the sector guides. The guides provide a general overview of the potential progression of occupations within the region but are not specific to a single employer but rather industry sectors. Workforce Solutions implement Career Pathways Mapping as a follow up to the development of the guides. Working with a consulting firm, a companion guide was developed that provides business service teams with the knowledge and skills to create employer specific career pathways maps. These maps, developed in collaboration with the business service teams and the employers can assist in employers with updating job descriptions, can be used in new hire orientations to illustrate progression and potential for promotion within the organization and to show employees how they can move from one job to another with that company.

In 2024, Workforce Solutions took Career Pathways to the next level and launched a Career Pathway Mapping pilot, collaborating with two consulting agencies. One agency is gathering and organizing data from volunteer pilot employers while the other is developing an app to showcase the career pathways by company. Currently under construction, the app is expected to go live by June 2025, featuring pathways from approximately 100 employers. Employers who did not participate in the pilot will have the option to create pathways through the app's guided process. The app's goal is to provide awareness among job seekers about the career opportunities that exist in the North Central PA region.

- *Manage activities or services that will be implemented to improve business engagement;*

Business Service Teams. Our business service team policy is consistently revisited and revised to ensure changes from WIOA are captured and that each PA CareerLink® center's Business Service team is meeting on a consistent basis. We have enhanced our business service teams to improve customer service. The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) now has a business service representative that sits on the teams. In some centers, Title II staff sit on the BST as well. County Economic Development Agencies, Chambers of Commerce, Small Business Development Centers and Industrial Resource Centers are all encouraged to participate on these teams as well. The teams meet monthly, share labor market information updates and discuss strategies regarding how the various partners can work together to better serve regional employers.

Workforce Solutions measures outcomes through a comprehensive approach outlined in our business service policy. The policy provides clear guidance on labor market information tools, technical assistance, and expectations for team goals, objectives, and responsibilities. Workforce Solutions has set specific goals for each business service team, including:

1. Expectations for engaging a defined number of new employers each quarter.
2. The required number of outreach activities, such as tours and ENGAGE visits.
3. Participation in Industry Partnership meetings.
4. The number of hiring events and open interviews conducted each quarter.

These goals are closely tracked by the PA CareerLink® centers and reported to the board on a quarterly basis, ensuring accountability and progress in employer engagement efforts.

Workforce Solutions' staff also play an integral role in supporting each business service team. They are responsible for ensuring that team members have access to the necessary tools and resources to meet their goals, objectives, and responsibilities. This support is provided through the dissemination of labor market data and technical assistance as needed.

In addition, the Operator works collaboratively with Workforce Solutions staff and PA CareerLink® site administrators to strengthen and maintain a robust Business Service Team (BST). This ensures the team is well-equipped to implement employer engagement strategies, outreach efforts, and match meetings. The Operator also establishes policies and procedures for continuous program improvement, which includes analyzing customer satisfaction surveys, professional development self-assessments, and program performance. Additionally, performance is benchmarked to ensure continuous growth and effectiveness in meeting goals.

- *Better coordinate regional workforce and economic development strategy, messaging, engagement and programs; and*

Workforce Solutions has a long history of collaborating with economic development agencies and local employers. We aim to create a robust workforce development system that is closely aligned with the needs of local businesses, enhances regional coordination and provides seamless support for individuals and employers alike. Workforce Solutions is instrumental in the facilitation and alignment of the following:

- Regional Coordination – sharing of data and insights on regional economic trends, labor market forecasts, and sector growth areas to develop a unified, strategic workforce development plan.
- Integrated Messaging and Alignment – reinforcing clear and consistent messaging about our services and programs; including unifying communications on workforce development initiatives to increase awareness among employers and job seekers alike;
- Cross Sector Partnerships - building of strategic partnerships with regional institutions, economic development organizations, and labor unions to create a seamless approach to workforce development and ensure that economic growth and workforce development strategies are mutually reinforcing.

One example of our seamless approach to workforce development and business engagement is the ENGAGE PA program. This initiative showcases how effective partnerships and adaptive strategies can meet the evolving needs of local employers. As a non-funded partner in the PREP program, Workforce Solutions plays an integral role in ENGAGE PA by actively participating in visits and providing valuable support to employers. Staff members are well-trained in utilizing tools like Executive Pulse, which enhances the communication and coordination between employers and workforce development services.

While in-person ENGAGE visits were limited during the pandemic, we swiftly adapted by transitioning to virtual engagements. Workforce Solutions continued to be a key player in these virtual visits, ensuring that employers received the same level of support and attention as before. When referrals are made through ENGAGE visits, Workforce Solutions is quick to respond, offering tailored workforce solutions to address employers' immediate needs. This seamless coordination exemplifies our commitment to fostering strong business relationships and delivering effective workforce services.

- *Strengthen linkages between the PA CareerLink® service delivery system and unemployment insurance (UI) programs.*

Unemployment Insurance Linkages. Workforce Solutions ensures support for the unemployment insurance program through resources that benefit local businesses and unemployed individuals. Our PA CareerLink® centers offer essential assistance to those filing for UI by connecting them with workforce services and helping them transition back to employment.

In compliance with the Commonwealth's Register for Work and Work Search law, we assist unemployed individuals with registering on the PA CareerLink® system, ensuring they meet the necessary requirements for job search efforts.

Furthermore, individuals who are at risk of exhausting their unemployment benefits are identified through the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program. These individuals are directed to visit a PA CareerLink® location for comprehensive job search assistance and other workforce services.

At our PA CareerLink® centers, claimants receive an orientation of services and undergo an initial assessment to determine their specific workforce needs. Based on these assessments, individuals may be referred to additional resources and services such as job search workshops, one-on-one staff-assisted job search activities, partner programs, supportive services, or training activities to help them secure new employment or transition into a new career.

Our centers are equipped with accessible resource areas, including multiple desktop computers. One computer is specially designated for handicap accessibility, and another is reserved for Unemployment Compensation (UC) purposes. Additionally, free internet and printing services are provided to assist claimants with their job search efforts.

Any potential UC eligibility issues identified during RESEA assessments or any other interactions with UC claimants are promptly referred to the State's Unemployment Insurance department for resolution.

As a core partner, OVR participates in Employer Engagement and provides multiple services to the business community designed to assist businesses with onboarding prescreened qualified employees with disabilities. OVR on-boarding supports for a qualified new hire can include reasonable accommodation consultation, On the Job (OJT) wage reimbursement,, referral on tax credits or deductions. OVR also works with businesses through connecting students involved in OVR’s pre-employment transition services. Services under pre-employment transition services include programs like paid work experiences, job shadowing, and workplace tours. OVR also offers no-cost consultation on the Americans with Disability Act (ADA), accessibility standards and helping a business to retain current employees following an accident, injury or disability. Statewide business services staff

can identify resources to assist any organization on how to improve access compliance and steps to diversify their workforce to include citizens with a disability.

Unemployment Compensation (UC) representatives are currently deployed in all the PA CareerLink® comprehensive centers. Customers and/or claimants may call a designated number to schedule an appointment with an unemployment compensations agent either in person or on occasion virtually. In the event UC staff are not present, claimants can use the CRC to connect with the unemployment compensation filing system. A kiosk system is being deployed throughout the commonwealth to assist with ID.me connectivity issues some claimants have encountered. The kiosk will assist identification verification in order for the claimant to have full access to their unemployment compensation claim dashboard on the state website.

For those UC Claimants looking to file an appeal, forms are provided and submitted via fax at no charge and with limited wait. Staff provide copies of the confirmation printout for all faxes sent on behalf of Claimants. In addition to a variety of printable resources for both Claimants and Employers, UC handbooks are also made available.

LWDBs will ensure identified local staff meet with the local ATO representative at least annually to review current Registered Apprenticeships in the local area.

4.2 Promotion and Coordination of Entrepreneurial Skills and Microenterprise - *How will the local board coordinate local area workforce investment activities with regional economic development activities that are specific to a local area? How will the local board promote entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services?*

Coordination with Regional Workforce and Economic Development Strategy. Workforce Solutions strategically coordinates workforce investment activities with regional economic development efforts to ensure a cohesive, responsive approach to meeting industry needs, promoting entrepreneurship, and fostering economic growth within the local area. This coordination includes working closely with regional economic development partners and local employer stakeholders to align workforce development efforts with broader economic goals.

Workforce Solutions is an active partner in the North Central PA PREP, participating in all meetings and initiatives within the partnership. As part of the Partnership for Regional Economic Performance (PREP) initiative, economic development service providers in the North Central region of Pennsylvania have built upon a long history of collaboration to formalize the North Central PREP. This regional partnership leverages shared resources and expertise to create a more competitive economic environment for the region.

Two key examples of our strategic collaboration with economic development partners are the Regional Action Plan and the Employer Services Matrix:

1. Regional Action Plan:
   The Regional Action Plan was developed in response to concerns expressed by manufacturing employers about the future of their workforce. Many employers recognized that their applicant pool for skilled positions was shrinking due to regional demographic trends. To address this, Workforce Solutions applied for and received a grant to assist in the development of this plan. A series of strategic sessions were held with stakeholders across the region, culminating in a comprehensive strategy to:
   - Attract individuals to relocate to our region for both living and working.
   - Encourage individuals to commute to the region for employment opportunities.
   - Retain our young people after high school or post-secondary school to keep them living and working in the region.

   In response, twelve action items were identified to enhance the region's appeal to potential residents and workers, including targeted outreach and incentives for relocation.

2. Employer Services Matrix:
   The Employer Services Matrix was developed at the request of our Manufacturing Industry Partnership to help employers quickly access the variety of services available to them. This comprehensive document includes resources related to Economic Development, Workforce Development, Technology Assistance, Small Business Development, and Tourism Development. The matrix is updated regularly and shared with all employers in the region to ensure they are aware of the full range of support available to them. This tool has proven invaluable in helping employers understand and navigate the resources at their disposal, making it easier for them to access the services that will best support their growth and workforce needs.

In addition, WDB staff collaborate with economic development in the following efforts:

- WDB staff participate on the Community Economic Development System (CEDS) committee.
- WDB staff are members of the North Central PREP.
- WDB staff work closely with county economic development agencies.
- WDB staff coordinate often with the Clarion University SBDC, Penn State PA LaunchBox, and the Northwest Industrial Resource Center.
- WDB staff collaborate with our WEDnetPA provider in our region during the application process as well as throughout the year. This collaboration ensures the best use of funds through both WEDnetPA, Industry Partnerships, Incumbent Worker Training programs and avoids any potential duplication.

Workforce Solutions currently measures employer outcomes results in several ways. Workforce Solutions requires PA CareerLink® centers to reach out to 5 new employers per quarter (actual number varies due to # of establishments per center) to increase employer participation. We then look at the employer penetration report available on PA's workforce development system of record to determine if the percentage has increased. Workforce Solutions also requires staff to participate in 3 of 4 industry partnership meetings per year and hold 3 to 5 hiring events per quarter.

Training for Self-Employment. Entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services should provide the basics of starting and operating a small business. Some examples of such skill development include, but are not limited to, the following abilities:

- Taking initiative;
- Creatively seeking out and identifying business opportunities;
- Developing budgets and forecasting resource needs;
- Developing a customer-centered environment;
- Understanding various options for acquiring capital and the tradeoffs associated with each option; and
- Communicating effectively and marketing oneself and one's ideas.

Individuals who are interested in self-employment are referred to community partners, such as the PennWest Clarion Small Business Development Center, to receive specialized assistance that includes but is not limited to:

- Entrepreneurship education that introduces the values and basics of starting and running a business. These programs typically guide individuals through the development of a business plan and may include business start-up simulations, offering participants hands-on experience in running a business.
- Enterprise development programs, which provide additional support for developing viable business ideas. These programs assist individuals by helping them access small loans or grants for business operations and provide tailored guidance to refine their business concepts.
- Access to micro-loans and grants available to start or expand businesses.
- Consulting and business assistance services to help start or expand businesses.
- By collaborating with the partners in our region such as PennWest Clarion SBDC, Workforce Solutions is supporting and promoting a training strategy that leads to self-employment. When working with individuals with barriers to employment, self-employment is a viable means to provide income, assets and other elements of self-sufficiency. Workforce Solutions requires the Business Service Teams to include as

members' representatives from the SBDC that serves our region which has led to the SBDC offering several of their business development workshops in our PA CareerLink® centers when appropriate.

4.3 Business and Employer Program Support - *What services, activities, and program resources will be provided to businesses and employers in the local area?*

The PA CareerLink® Business Services Team (BST) provides coordinated support to businesses and employers in the region. The BST is a collaborative effort consisting of the various PA CareerLink® partner staff. The team is managed locally by a designated coordinator who ensures that all partners work together, avoiding any isolated actions by individual vendors.

Workforce Solutions plays a key role in overseeing and guiding the BST's activities, ensuring alignment with regional workforce development goals. The BST offers services such as job matching, recruitment support, training programs, and strategic workforce planning. The team also collaborates on employer visits, job fairs, and resource sharing to provide comprehensive, tailored solutions to local businesses. This coordinated approach ensures that businesses have access to a full range of services while minimizing duplication and enhancing efficiency.

The BST may also engage partners not directly represented on the BST. Such partners may vary by county and may include: Workforce Solutions' Business Engagement/Project Manager, the PA CareerLink® Operator, Business Education Partnerships, Chambers of Commerce, county and regional economic development agencies, the Northwest Industrial Resource Center (NWIRC), PennWest Clarion Small Business Development Center (SBDC), and others identified by each BST.

Program partners work together to connect with employers through coordinated efforts. Non-BST partners, like adult education providers, collaborate on employer visits to link services such as basic education and workplace literacy to businesses. Employer outreach is streamlined to avoid duplication and provide businesses with comprehensive support. A shared data system tracks business services, enabling partners to monitor outcomes and adjust strategies as needed.

The One-Stop Operator also works with the Office of UC Service Centers Customer Services Section to coordinate seminars for employers, which address UC topics such as rights and benefits. These services provide additional opportunities to inform employers of all services provided by PA CareerLink® partners.

Employer services under WIOA Title III (Wagner-Peyser Act) include job matching, recruitment assistance, labor market data, and workforce planning to help employers fill vacancies, retain staff, and plan for future needs. Employers also receive support in establishing registered apprenticeship programs, gaining access to a skilled workforce and OJT funding. These services are available through direct engagement with PA CareerLink® staff or online platforms, offering flexibility in how they are accessed.

Employer services under WIOA Title IV (Rehabilitation Act of 1973) provides support for hiring individuals with disabilities by offering resources, training on hiring practices, and assistance with workplace accommodations which enhance the workplace and supports businesses in meeting legal and social responsibility standards.

BSTs also engage with education through collaborations with local colleges, trade schools, and universities to build partnerships that enhance workforce readiness. These partnerships offer opportunities for internships, apprenticeships, and customized training programs. Educational institutions also work with businesses to align curricula and training with industry needs, creating a talent pipeline that meets local workforce demands.

BST agenda items shall include but not limited to; Industry Partnerships, High Priority Occupations, Metrix Learning, Registered Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeships, New Employers, Lay Offs, etc. Teams review Job order processes, i.e. listing/writing job orders, reviewing team member responsibilities, discussion of

local/regional labor market and/or other employer data/analysis. This is also a good opportunity for all partners to discuss their services and how collaboration can best occur.

Business Service Teams include the Business Engagement and Project Manager staff from Workforce Solutions. This position is responsible for ensuring that team members have access to the necessary tools and resources to meet their goals, objectives, and responsibilities. Likewise, the Business Engagement and Project Manager ensures the BST has up-to-date information on workforce initiatives, including Registered Apprenticeships (RAPs) and Pre-RAPs. Support is provided through the dissemination of labor market data and technical assistance as needed.

Workforce Solutions is committed to increasing RAP and Pre-RAP availability by recognizing the value in building a skilled, retained workforce while reducing recruitment costs and boosting productivity. The Board collaborates with PA CareerLink® centers, Business Services Teams, Title I staff, and the PA Apprenticeship and Training Office (ATO) to promote and support RAPs.

To support this effort, Workforce Solutions has created a Registered Apprenticeship Policy document for PA CareerLink® staff, outlining the development process and resources to promote RAPs and Pre-RAPs. They also leverage funding from WIOA, TANF, Youth Development, EARN, and other programs to support these initiatives.

LWDBs will ensure BST members are provided the Registered Apprenticeship Desk Guide and Apprenticeship Strategic Plan Guide for PA CareerLink® staff.

Workforce Solutions staff actively participate in Business Service Team meetings to discuss priorities, including internships, grants, and apprenticeships.

Business Service Team responsibilities include but are not limited to:

- Employer outreach
- Labor market information
- Explanation of PA CareerLink® services and partner services
- Maintain and build employer relationships
- Determine employer needs and referral to other agencies
- Implement and assist with job fairs, mass recruitments/layoffs and coordinate use of PA CareerLink® facilities for interviewing, testing etc.
- Develop relationships with local business and agencies to promote the PA CareerLink® and host various events that will be of interest to businesses and employers
- Assist Workforce Solutions with data entry for Industry Partnerships and other Workforce Solutions sector strategies as implemented by the board

OVR meets the needs of businesses by providing no cost services to include ADA Awareness training, ADA Accessibility evaluations, accommodation recommendations for current employees and retention services. OVR also continues to partner with employers with On-the-Job Training (OJT), providing 100% wage reimbursement to businesses that hire OVR customers. OVR also works with businesses through connecting students involved in OVR's pre-employment transition services. Services under pre-employment transition services include program like paid work experiences, job shadowing, and workplace tours.

WIOA Title IV eligible OVR customers receive multiple services from qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors that may include but not be limited to, diagnostic, vocational counseling and guidance, vocational evaluation, restoration, training, job placement and pre-employment training services for eligible and potentially eligible high school student with disabilities.

4.4 Continuous Improvement - *Describe how the local board will ensure the continuous improvement of eligible providers through the system and that such providers will meet the employment needs of local area employers, workers and job seekers.*

Workforce Solutions is committed to ensuring the continuous improvement of eligible providers within the workforce system, ensuring they meet the evolving needs of local employers, workers, and job seekers. To assess the variety, quantity, and quality of workforce services, we utilize regional and local labor market information, including the High Priority Occupations (HPO) list, to inform the development of workforce activities and set goals. We regularly collect feedback from employers, workers, and service providers to ensure services remain aligned with current needs and emerging trends.

Workforce Solutions anticipates the needs of employers, workers, and job seekers by evaluating the regional labor market and pipeline demands. This includes identifying skills gaps, in-demand occupations, and future workforce needs. To strengthen employer connections, Workforce Solutions has an outreach plan in place, focusing on understanding employer needs and enhancing the delivery of employment, education, and training services. We use data and market insights to ensure a sufficient number of qualified providers, addressing service gaps while meeting the needs of both employers and job seekers.

In alignment with WIOA Section 122 and Workforce System Guidance No. 02-2015, and in collaboration with the PA Department of Labor and Industry, Workforce Solutions solicits training providers from within and outside the local area to ensure a competitive market that promotes consumer choice and supports data-driven career pathways and sector strategies. We regularly monitor the eligibility of training providers, ensuring their alignment with the High Priority Occupations in the NCWDA. Workforce Solutions maintains open communication with providers to ensure the accuracy of performance data related to programs in-demand industries, both locally and regionally.

Workforce Solutions uses a variety of methods to ensure continuous improvement of eligible training providers, including monitoring outcomes and processes at PA CareerLink® centers. These methods include regular meetings with partners, sharing labor market reports, obtaining industry partnership feedback, conducting surveys and focus groups with employers, collecting training satisfaction surveys, and participating on advisory boards of regional training providers.

In line with PA Department of Labor and Industry's Workforce System Policy 04-2015, Workforce Solutions ensures a broad range of providers and opportunities are included in the Local Training Provider List (LTPL). We solicit training providers— including work-based and cohort training providers, as well as registered apprenticeship program sponsors— within and outside of our local area, ensuring a competitive market and successful implementation of career pathways and sector strategies. We also focus on ensuring adequate access to services for individuals with disabilities and complying with eligibility requirements as outlined in the Workforce System Policy.

Workforce Solutions meets periodically with training providers to stay updated on offerings and encourage the addition of high-quality programs to the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). While feedback from providers on program additions has been limited, we remain committed to reducing administrative burdens and continue to recruit new providers to ensure ample options for job seekers. Key strategies include

Workforce Solutions will also utilize the LTPL to incentivize providers, including community-based organizations, private organizations, and other training providers, to offer credential training that may not be on the ETPL but leads to post-secondary or industry-recognized credentials. Key strategies include actively recruiting diverse providers, collaborating with employers and industry groups to align training with regional workforce needs, and offering support to providers to enhance their capacity and program quality. The board ensures that providers meet performance standards through regular monitoring, using labor market data to identify gaps, and creating career pathways that lead to recognized credentials. Additionally, the board works to streamline the ETPL

application process and improve provider participation. These efforts help ensure a sufficient number of high-quality providers that meet the needs of both employers and job seekers.

Workforce Solutions follows a clear procurement and eligibility process to assess and approve training providers. This includes a review of performance data, program quality, and alignment with in-demand industries and occupations. Workforce Solutions also ensures compliance with relevant laws and policies set forth by PA Department of Labor and Industry.

Workforce Solutions tracks key metrics like completion rates, job placement, and earnings to ensure that providers deliver quality outcomes while also gathering feedback from employers and job seekers to continuously assess provider effectiveness.

The procedures for system-centric training follow Workforce System Policy 04-2015, Eligible Training Providers:

Step One – Select the reason the program of training of services was contracted:

- Training service is not on the ETPL;
- The training will serve individuals with barriers to employment;
- Training services will be provided by the local board through a pay-for-performance contract; or
- It is more appropriate to offer this type of training to facilitate the training of multiple individuals in in-demand industry sectors or occupations. Note: This training option, also known as 'cohort training' must be provided by an accredited institution of higher education or an eligible training provider included on the statewide ETPL.

Step Two - Provide the purpose for utilizing a contract for training services. This statement may include a rationale for why this training cannot be accomplished through programs on the statewide ETPL.

Step Three - Select the type of entity that is providing the training:

2. Post-secondary education;
3. Apprenticeship;
4. Other public or private provider of training, which may include a joint labor-management organization and an eligible training provider of adult education and literacy activities under WIOA Title II if such activities are provided in combination with occupational skills training (i.e., integrated education and training); or
5. Community-based organization or private organization of demonstrated effectiveness.

Step Four - Provide the following information:

6. A description of the training program;
7. Cost details, to include but not limited to tuition, books, other fees;
8. Evidence of state licensure requirements and licensing status as applicable;
9. A description of credential earned to include, at minimum, information supporting applicable training program leads to a post-secondary credential or an industry-recognized credential; and a description of the credential;
10. A description of the accessibility of training services (i.e., is this program of study facility-based training, or is it accessible throughout the commonwealth, to individuals in rural areas, through the use of technology);
11. A description of the demonstrated effectiveness (e.g., through the provision of performance data) in serving employed individuals and individuals with barriers to employment; and
12. Data regarding program alignment with in-demand sectors or high-priority occupations, or in a career pathway leading to an HPO.

Step Five - Attest that the following assurances have been verified:

13. Physical and programmatic accommodations as required by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended; the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended and the regulations implementing these statutory provisions;
14. Compliance with nondiscrimination and equal opportunity laws;
15. Disclosure of any and all conflicts of interest with state or local workforce development members and/or staff including, but not limited to, family ties, fiduciary roles, employment or ownership interests in common;
16. Exclusion from the commonwealth's debarment list;
17. Provision of performance information for each program as required;
18. Provision of student data for each program as required;
19. Timeliness and accuracy of required information; and
20. Permission for onsite visits by any federal, state or local agency as legally authorized to monitor activities for which funds have been provided.

In order for programs to be considered for the ETPL under the System-Centric Training they must meet performance, including:

21. Program completion rate; entry into unsubsidized employment at second quarter after exit; entry into unsubsidized employment at fourth quarter after exit; and median earnings during second quarter after exit.

Workforce Solutions staff will develop, maintain, and disseminate the LTPL in collaboration with the Department.

In addition to performance monitoring, Workforce Solutions maintains an appeal process for training providers to add back programs that were removed from the list. We also gather customer satisfaction data from job seekers and employers through electronic surveys, which are used to identify issues and drive systemic improvements within the workforce system. Survey results are shared with site administrators, who are responsible for addressing any concerns, ensuring continuous quality improvement.

4.5 Technology and Remote Access - *Through the use of technology, how will the local board facilitate access to services provided through the one-stop service delivery system, including in remote areas?*

Workforce Solutions continues to leverage partnerships and expand service delivery to ensure access to the workforce development system across all areas of our rural region. In recognition that not all individuals can travel to our six comprehensive PA CareerLink® centers, we have extended service delivery through strategically located access points. These include partnerships with local housing authorities, borough buildings, and other community-based facilities where PA CareerLink® staff provide services on a limited but consistent basis. These outreach efforts are supported by a communication strategy that ensures both job seekers and employers in those communities are informed of the available services. Our goal is to meet customers where they are—eliminating barriers and increasing equitable access to the supports they need to enter or advance in the workforce.

In addition to in-person outreach, we have significantly expanded our virtual service offerings. All PA CareerLink® workshops are now offered online, with sessions scheduled at various times of the day—including evenings—to accommodate diverse schedules. This flexibility has increased participation and engagement, particularly among individuals with transportation challenges, caregiving responsibilities, or other time constraints. To further support digital inclusion, we have implemented a lending library program that allows customers without personal devices to borrow Chromebooks from our PA CareerLink® centers, enabling them to participate in virtual services such as workshops, job search activities, and training programs.

Workforce Solutions also continues to build system capacity through strong collaboration with a broad network of stakeholders, including PA CareerLink® partners, economic development entities, education providers, community

organizations, and employers. We intentionally coordinate efforts to avoid duplication of services and to leverage existing resources. A prime example of this approach is our Industry Partnerships, which bring together employers within the Manufacturing and Healthcare and Social Assistance sectors to identify shared workforce challenges. Workforce, economic, and community development partners participate as a support team, collaborating to design solutions based on employer feedback. These partnerships have improved connections between employers and local Career and Technical Education programs, resulting in increased hiring of co-op and work experience students. Additionally, employers have been introduced to programs such as On-the-Job Training, Work Experience, and Transitional Jobs through our PA CareerLink® Business Services Teams, helping to meet employer demand for skilled workers while offering valuable opportunities for job seekers.

We also leverage resources through collaboration with our partners in the development and implementation of our PA CareerLink® MOU.

Access to PA CareerLink® Services. As discussed in previously the Board has established five comprehensive centers and two affiliate center in each county to provide easy access to all partner services. The board continues to support bricks and mortar presence in order that customers most in need are able to access services.

Providing Access in Remote Areas. The Board will continue to provide and expand services in the remote locations of the region. Several years ago, we received a Community Based Grant that provided funding for the development of access points throughout the region. The goal was to take the services to locations with a population of people that lacked transportation to the comprehensive centers. Locations such as libraries, secondary school offices, churches and probation offices/jails were utilized to meet with customers. The results included an increase in the awareness of PA CareerLink® services as well as new employers and job seekers registering on the PA CareerLink®. The pandemic caused a decrease in this outreach however with the increase in virtual services we found we were able to reach even more job seekers and employers. The offering of virtual services will continue in addition to face to face. Workforce Solutions will continue to brainstorm ways to implement the following strategies:

- Promoting use of the PA CareerLink® services available at https://www.pacareerlink.pa.gov/jponline/JobSeeker/SearchJobs;
- Promoting use of readysetworkpa.com – access to job search tutorials and other information to support their career search;
- Promoting and supporting efforts to expand broadband throughout the region;
- Hosting of virtual job fairs and online hiring events;
- Providing digital access to labor market information;
- Continuing to evaluate the need to set-up temporary locations to provide services as needed; and
- Encouraging staff to meet customers in public settings (meet where they are), when it makes sense, to provide services, while ensuring privacy

Other ways that Workforce Solutions will facilitate access to services provided through the one-stop service delivery system:

- Continue to promote the use of on-line job clubs and other strategies to “virtually’ connect job seekers with support and resources available in the system.
- Encouraging and allowing the use of technology, including text messaging, social media, online video conferencing, Internet searches, and other state-of-the-art methods to locate, communicate, and contact jobseekers and industry personnel.
- Continue to expand its existing network community partnerships to include additional community-based entities, faith-based organizations, employer-sponsored groups, and government organizations to increase access throughout the region.
- Continue to identify other regional community sites where outreach and virtual services can be offered at specific times to allow access to the population with transportation barriers.

Utilizing Case Management Systems. The PA CareerLink® system and partners utilize the PA CareerLink® to capture data and information on all customers, including job seekers and employers. To promote the timeliness and accuracy of information, staff are required to enter information into the systems within 24 hours of customer interaction/services/activities. All staff input their own data in relation to the customer, job seeker or employer, they are working with. Staff also utilize the referral module in PA CareerLink® to track referrals to core partners in the system. The board, in support of system referrals, developed Referral Guidance to assist staff in best practices of customer referrals.

Other State-Owned Case Management Information Systems. To ensure that individuals participating in adult basic education and English learning programs have direct connections to career pathways leading to high-quality jobs, Workforce Solutions and other partners collaborate with our Adult Education partners to identify strategies that improve service coordination and access to customer information. The providers of adult basic education input data specific to their customers into their case management system.

Likewise, OVR staff are responsible for data entry of their customers into their case management system. Shared customers' data, as applicable, is entered into PA's workforce development system of record by the appropriate partner staff.

Other WIOA Program Data Entry into PA's workforce development system. Customers not provided with WIOA Title I and Title II career and training services but enrolled in other WIOA programs services are entered into PA's workforce development system according to the program direction of their specific departments. Services that are trackable in the system are expected to be entered in a timely manner.

There are no other non-commonwealth owned or leased information management systems utilized in the North Central Workforce Development Area.

Career Pathways. Workforce Solutions Career Pathway Initiative is mentioned throughout this plan. This initiative was developed through a procurement process. They were developed with the experience of Title II in career pathways work. The pathways were developed in a comprehensive approach for all customers not one specific target population. The documents developed as part of this initiative includes toolkit for each industry cluster, a one-page career pathways document for each cluster and a training manual to instruct front line staff on the use of the tool kit and one page documents. Workforce Solutions provide training for all staff on the use of these documents.

Digital Literacy. Workforce Solutions has placed greater emphasis on digital literacy skills within our PA CareerLink® centers to the enhance employment and career advancement opportunities of our job seekers. By partnering with various stakeholders (community organizations and educational institutions), we are continuing to build and strengthen partnerships to facilitate ongoing support for digital literacy. We designed and implemented a comprehensive Digital Literacy training initiative through funding received from the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry. The goal of this program is to equip job seekers with the essential digital skills needed to thrive in today's technology-driven labor market. Delivered through our six comprehensive PA CareerLink® centers, this initiative aligns with our commitment to building a skilled workforce that meets the evolving needs of regional employers. While the initial development and launch of the program were made possible through grant funding, Workforce Solutions is committed to sustaining and expanding digital literacy efforts beyond the life of the grant to continue supporting job seekers in our rural communities.

The program engages key partners, including EQUUS Workforce Solutions, local libraries, and PA CareerLink® staff, to collaboratively deliver training that meets both participant and employer needs. Curriculum development is guided by the PA Adult Education digital literacy competencies and structured around four core focus areas: Digital Fundamentals, Digital Job Seeking, Digital Citizenship, and Digital Navigation. Participants will learn foundational skills such as using computers and mobile devices, safely navigating the internet, managing online

communications, and evaluating digital information. With small group instruction and flexible scheduling—accommodating individual learners when necessary—Workforce Solutions aims to train at least 50 individuals through 10 learning cohorts. Each training module includes hands-on lab hours to reinforce learning, ensuring participants are prepared to apply these skills effectively in both job search activities and the workplace.

Information sharing. The board continues to stress with our PA CareerLink® centers the critical importance of cross-training of all staff in our centers. It's important that they understand all of the programs benefits and expectations in order that they can best share this information with their shared customers. Information for all partner programs is available both in print and through virtually. Our PA CareerLink® Operator is responsible for ensuring that cross-training is occurring throughout the region. With the recent release of the Workforce Staff Training website from Labor and Industry there is an online, on demand training option that is being completed by all staff in our PA CareerLink® centers. The modules were designed and implemented by a workgroup comprised of state staff and subject matter experts from all of the core programs and led by staff funded with Title II funds is creating a series of online, on-demand training courses.

The first course, *Introduction to the PA CareerLink® System: Referrals and Best Practices*, is now available. This course consists of two modules:

- The first module introduces participants to the PA CareerLink® system and provides an overview of the WIOA core programs.
- The second module shares referral best practices to support participant co-enrollment across WIOA programs. The course includes a user guide with additional activities that workforce partners can complete to encourage collaboration and referrals among WIOA core programs.

Meeting the Needs of Individuals with Barriers to Employment. Efforts are made to ensure that individuals with disabilities as well as other barriers to employment including basic skills deficiencies receive access to all services provided within the PA CareerLink® centers. The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) focuses on individuals with the most significant disabilities who are eligible under WIOA Title IV. WIOA Title I staff will assist individuals with disabilities who do not want or need OVR services or are not found eligible for OVR services. They will also play a role in recruitment and outreach to this population. Sensitivity training is provided for PA CareerLink® staff, as well as training on the various adaptive technologies used within the PA CareerLink® sites. As with other participant groups, referrals are also made, as appropriate, to other partnering community agencies to ensure full accessibility to needed services.

PA CareerLink® center staff partner with community organizations and travel to remote areas of the region to provide services to individuals with transportation challenges. Many of our services, including workshops are now available virtually, as are Chromebooks for jobseekers that may not have the technology to access those services.

Workforce Solutions applied for Statewide Activities funding for the acquisition of a Mobile Workforce Unit as mentioned previously. We anticipate having this unit ready to provide workforce services by the beginning of 2026.

Improving Access to Services for English Language Learners as part of its service strategy, the board requires the PA CareerLink® center to utilize services provided through Language Line Services Inc. or Propio Language Services that may include Video Remote Interpreting (VRI). Telephone-based translation services may be used for languages other than English, if necessary. Staff are also trained in Google Translate, which can be used in real time.

Improving Access to Services for Deaf and hard of hearing individuals on-site OVR personnel are available to assist individuals with other disabilities as needed. A TTY telecommunication device, amplified telephone receiver speakers and the provision of a Pennsylvania certified American Sign Language interpreter upon request in advance are available for Deaf and hard of hearing individuals. The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation staff

provide direct services to those interested persons who have been determined eligible to receive WIOA Title IV services.

Workforce Solutions has strategies and approaches to provide services for individuals with disabilities, including identifying significant barriers encountered and offering the means to address them. EO/ADA compliance reviews for the PA CareerLink® centers are performed annually. Workforce Solutions has an equal opportunity point of contact for staff, as previously identified, and also has a monitoring and compliance team that works with the one-stop operator and partners in the PA CareerLink® to ensure that all comprehensive and affiliate PA CareerLink® centers are EO and ADA compliant. In addition, these staff members will be trained annually on policy updates and EO/ADA compliance changes. The EO Officer provides frequent opportunities to all PA CareerLink® staff to participate in EO/ADA/LEP webinars, presentations, and in person training. In conjunction with the EO Officer, OVR conducts annual on-site ADA Compliance evaluations, to ensure all sites remain accessible. Workforce Solutions staff are provided EO updates at team meetings; and the local board and employers are provided with opportunities to engage in sessions pertaining to equal opportunity and ADA compliance and employee accommodations. Different EO topics covered include: discrimination and harassment, corporate compliance and ethics and employee health and wellness, ADA accessibility, and accommodations for employees with various barriers. Business service teams encourage employers to hire individuals with barriers and provide information on accessibility, accommodations, and tax credits.

All brochures, pamphlets, and flyers which detail services specific to PA CareerLink® locations include the TTY number. This includes job seeker flyers, weekly workshop and class flyers, a monthly events calendar, job seeker and employer satisfaction surveys, etc. Staff are also encouraged to include the TTY number on email correspondence and business cards.

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and to support equitable access to all individuals, Workforce Solutions ensures that all PA CareerLink® centers (comprehensive and affiliate) meet or exceed ADA standards for physical accessibility. Such physical accommodations may include: ADA compliant entryways and interior/exterior ramps for individuals using mobility devices; accessible parking spaces clearly marked and located near facility entrances; accessible restrooms with appropriate grab bars, door clearance and turning space; braille signae and tactile wayfinding indicators throught facilities to assist individuals with vision impairments; designated ADA compliance service counters and customer service desks to accommodate wheelchairs; clear, unobstructed pathways throughout public areas; installation of Ubi-Duo devices to facilitate communication between deaf and hearing individuals in real time; and more.

To ensure the ongoing accessibility and safety of our facilities, Workforce Solutions, in conjunction with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), performs annual on-site ADA compliance inspections. Any identified issues are prioritized and resolved promptly to maintain continuous compliance.

Staff also receive regular training to identify and address physical access barriers and provide appropriate accommodations, ensuring that services are fully accessible to indivuals of all mobility levels. Physical access is considered in facility planning and renovation projects, and customer feedback regarding accessibility is actively solicited through satisfaction surveys and community engagement efforts.

Technology is used to ensure access to services by using a digital platform for remote assessment, intake/orientation, instruction, and student support activities. In addition, students can take advantage of computer-based instruction to supplement real-time remote instruction. Students who do not have access to laptops to do remote instruction are provided one through our device lending program.

Workforce Solutions takes the requirements of WIOA law and regulations seriously with regard to providing access to services to all individuals, ensuring that no person is discriminated against for any reason.

- Identifying agencies, organizations, non-profits, and other community-based organizations that serve eligible populations and build key partnerships with those entities;

- Providing outreach material, information, and programmatic access through these partnerships ensures that we better reach various populations through braille, large print, audio assist, and TTY.
- Ensuring that customers at each PA CareerLink® center have opportunities to share their experiences about ways Workforce Solutions can improve services through customer surveys.

Also, at each comprehensive location, representatives of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) are available to provide vocational rehabilitation services to individuals eligible for WIOA Title IV services, which in Pennsylvania means those with significant disabilities. Services of all partners are available to all persons with barriers to employment. All PA CareerLink® centers have TTY-TTD phones, and the staff has been trained on the system. To ensure accessibility to all customers, all delivery of all services complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Recently, Workforce Solutions applied for and received funding to purchase for each comprehensive center: New braille and TTY telephones, Ubi-Duo units, Video Magnifiers and new ADA compliant desks.

Staff will be trained to provide services to all, regardless of range of abilities, mobility, age, language, learning style, or comprehension or education level. All requests for accommodations must be addressed and reasonable accommodations will be made available to customers as necessary to ensure physical and programmatic accessibility to all customers within the PA CareerLink®. Such accommodations will include but are not limited to an interpreter provided in real time or, if not available, within a reasonable timeframe to any customer with a language barrier, assistive devices, such as screen-reading software programs (e.g., JAWS and DRAGON), and assistive listening devices.

4.6 Transportation and Supportive Services - *How will the local board coordinate WIOA Title I workforce investment activities with the provision of transportation and other appropriate supportive services in the local area?*

Workforce Solutions recognizes that supportive services are critical to the success of a jobseeker successfully completing training, education and employment in the public workforce system. It understands the value of supportive services and includes the following as anticipated supportive services needs such as transportation, child and elder care, work clothes, shoes and other special attire essential and required for successful work, and other items as necessary.

WIOA supportive services are provided on the basis of need as determined by the Title I Program Provider or other partners as approved by the Workforce Development Board to eligible participants.

Upon determination of need by the Title I staff or partner staff a request form is filled out and submitted to the appropriate supervisor for review and approval. This request must take into consideration previous supportive services received. In situations where immediate approval and provision of the supportive services is necessary consultation with that staffs' supervisor via telephone call is accepted. The phone call can them be followed up with the required documentation.

The maximum award identified below is per WIOA participant participation period.

Supportive services may only be allotted to an eligible participant after all other options are exhausted. When an Individual Service Strategy (ISS) or an Individual Employment Plan (IEP) is developed for a customer, barriers are identified. Counselors within the PA CareerLink® are educated on the available community resources through interagency meetings, communications, resource guides, and databases/systems such as, PA CareerLink® and PA211.org. Staff are cross-trained on services available through core partners and these referrals are made seamlessly. Community partners are leveraged and referrals facilitated for customers including confirmation of referral status. Evidence of these referrals to other resources as well as the outcomes are documented in PA CareerLink® Case Notes.

Types of Supportive Services. Workforce Solutions has determined that support services may be provided for the following and cannot total more than $1,000 per participant:

a. Transportation
b. Clothing (as required and necessary for job)
c. Physical (as required for job)
d. License Fee (i.e. CDL)
e. Child Care
f. Dependent Care
g. Housing

As needs are identified in a customer's objective assessment of needs, they may make a request to Workforce Solutions if a service is not on the previous list. Workforce Solutions will ensure that the request meets the language of WIOA prior to approval.

Workforce Solutions and our partners identified transportation as a critical barrier for many of our customers to participate in training as well as employment. This issue has been identified and discussed for many years. Due to the rural nature of our area public transportation is not always an option on a regular basis in a most cost-effective method. The Local Management Committee of the Board responsible for oversight of the EARN program has discussed this issue many times and we continue to struggle to find a solution. We've discussed the possibility of promoting UBER in our region to entice individuals to become drivers. We had hoped to increase the availability of options and have recently learned the UBER is now offered in one of our counties.

Employers in our region also recognize this as a major barrier to employment for many of their potential entry-level workers. Some have discussed promoting ride-sharing amongst their current employees. Others don't feel that it is their responsibility to assist in finding solutions.

We continue to evaluate our options and network with others across the country to look for creative solutions. In addition to administering WIOA Title I funds the Workforce Development Board staff partners with the Transportation and Community Development staff on the Community and Economic Development Plan (CEDs) plan and the Long-Term Transportation Plan.

Public transportation services in the region are provided by the Area Transportation Authority (ATA) with its mix of fixed-route, deviated fixed-route, and Call-A-Bus services. ATA was established in 1976 and offers both fixed-route and demand-responsive services throughout our six-county region.

In addition, there are other community and faith-based organizations in our region that may provide supportive services. These entities are identified in county resource guides as well as the PA211.org online tool. Our PA CareerLink® centers utilizes these resources to identify additional supportive services resources that may be available to customers and referrals are made as appropriate.

4.7 Rapid Response - *How will the local board coordinate workforce investment activities and ensure they are carried out in the local area with statewide rapid response?*

Workforce Solutions collaborates with Rapid Response activities in the North Central Region. Each PA CareerLink® center has its own Rapid Response Team. The North Central WDA takes a regional approach to mass layoffs of 50 or more and Rapid Response activities occur in cooperation with the State and Regional Rapid Response Coordinator. Title I staff are part of the Rapid Response Team and work with partnering staff to organize Rapid Response Meetings with affected employees and the Title I provider may rotate staff to accommodate larger WIOA enrollments and to provide timely services.

When a company plans to lay off less than 50 employees the same Rapid Response activities are coordinated locally with the Rapid Response Unit Coordinator.

Workforce Solutions intends to increase collaboration with the Regional Rapid Response Coordinator to share information and to discuss major dislocation events in our region. This collaboration will help to ensure that both the board and the Regional Coordinator are aware of programs and resources that may be available to them in addition to the services and programs available at the PA CareerLink® centers.

The board will also increase collaboration and understanding of the Strategic Early Warning Network (SEWN) which provides layoff aversion services to help business, particularly in the manufacturing sector, to remain competitive and keep workers employed.

4.8 Individuals with Barriers to Employment - *What services, activities and program resources will be provided to participants, including those outlined at WIOA Sec. 3(24), Individuals with a Barrier to Employment, and WIOA Sec. 188, in the local area?*

Through our Customer Centered Design Challenge Workforce Solutions implemented several processes that have improved the customer experience at the PA CareerLink® centers including: triage, common intake, and a stronger referral process. These efforts have also improved coordination of services among the various staff. Within our PA CareerLink® Title I staff provide individualized career services as well as intake, assessment, job search workshops, rapid response services, IEP and ISS development and case management for all WIOA eligible customers. Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations (BWPO) staff provide core services including intake, job screening and referrals, employer outreach services, job search workshops, rapid response activities and case management for job seekers. BWPO and Title I staff work together to match job seekers with employers in need of their skills by providing basic job search skills and information to entry level job seekers. When necessary, entry level workers are referred to Title I and other programs when they need more intensive services. Title I and BWPO staff work collaboratively to meet the vision and goals of Workforce Solutions.

Each of our PA CareerLink® centers have implemented Digital Intake process. The PA Department of Labor and Industry (DLI) and PA State Workforce Development Board in an effort to better understand the demographics and barriers of individuals (job seekers) that enter our PA CareerLink® offices or engage with their offices looking for career related support - regardless of if the individual enrolls in eligibility-based programs and receives services. Creating a common intake form was also a priority outlined in the 2020 WIOA Combined State Plan, the digital intake form standardizes and centralizes user data and creates a one-stop customer service experience.

Title II Adult Education is provided throughout the North Central region by various agencies. Adult Education staff provide services to job seekers referred to them by other agencies and PA CareerLink® partners and help to ensure the creation of a skilled workforce.

WIOA Title IV eligible OVR customers receive multiple services from qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors that may include but not be limited to; diagnostic, vocational counseling and guidance, vocational evaluation, restoration, training, job placement and pre-employment training services for eligible and potentially eligible high school students with disabilities.

With transportation as one of our largest barriers to employment, we will continue to review and assess opportunities to improve this throughout our region. These efforts include identifying faith and community based organizations that provide transportation, collaboration with public transportation and the use of mileage reimbursement or gas cards. Efforts to collaborate with our local transportation provider, Area Transportation Association (ATA) have presented further challenges as they do not provide transportation during evenings, weekends and have limited routes. This is common in rural areas throughout the state and nation. In addition, Manufacturing and Healthcare/Social Assistance are our largest industries and entry level employees often work on second and third shifts. ATA does not operate during this time frame. We have been partnering with other local

transportation providers including school bus organizations – these options are much expensive. For example, we implemented a training for participants with substance use disorders to become trained as Certified Recovery Specialists (CRS). The cost to transport these individuals was approximately 75% more than what the cost of public transportation would be (if available). While this is unfortunate, we are also exploring other options including the possibility of mobile units to provide services to the customer's location as well as Uber-like services as alternative transportation modes.

Workforce Solutions has secured funding for the acquisition of a Mobile Workforce Unit that will be equipped with the technology needed for job seekers to complete their job search, participate in workshops and register with the PA CareerLink®. The unit will be ADA accessible as well. The unit will take services throughout the region to facilities including but not limited county jails and prisons, housing authorities, domestic relations, drug and alcohol rehabilitation facilities and more.

Workforce Solutions recognizes the significant barriers that lack of affordable and accessible childcare presents for job seekers. To address this critical issue, a dedicated Childcare Committee was formed to develop targeted solutions and provide valuable resources for both employers and job seekers.

The committee's efforts include equipping employers with the Early Learning Investment Commission (ELIC) Employer Toolkit, enabling them to inform potential new hires about available childcare assistance programs. Additionally, PA CareerLink® staff have been trained to guide job seekers on these resources effectively.

The committee has also facilitated hiring and resource events at local PA CareerLink® centers, fostering connections between job seekers and opportunities. To ensure the most effective strategies are implemented, the committee has conducted extensive research into best practices from other regions.

Recognizing that childcare accessibility is a statewide and national challenge, Workforce Solutions is committed to driving innovative solutions and continuing to advocate for resources and support to address this pressing issue.

4.9 Nondiscrimination - How will entities within the one-stop service delivery system, including one-stop operators and the one-stop partners, comply with WIOA Sec. 188 (as applicable) and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101, et seq.) regarding the physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs and services, technology and materials for individuals with disabilities?

The PA CareerLink® system Operator and Workforce Solutions assures that WIOA section 188 compliance, including civil rights and equal opportunity, and Americans with Disabilities Act of 199O applicable provisions will be assured for those who avail themselves of our one stop delivery system services and resources (and that resources are at an appropriate reading level for the general population, including regional designated services locations and mobile one-stops). We assure this compliance in the following ways:

1. All PA CareerLink® staff, Operator, Workforce Solutions staff are trained in the WIOA Sec. 188 requirements as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act definitions. Additional training programs are provided on an ongoing basis for all staff with regular sessions held. The majority of these training sessions are added to the agendas of scheduled staff meetings. Different EO topics covered include: discrimination and harassment, corporate compliance and ethics and employee health and wellness.
2. Our regional OEO Officer identifies additional training options on these topics and ensures that all staff aware and can complete the additional training on their own.
3. A training log is maintained for all training that takes place.
4. Workforce Solutions reviews the accessibility of its facilities on an annual basis in collaboration with OVR and develops corrective action plans to address deficiencies where necessary. Site Administrators are also responsible for knowing the criteria and ensuring the site meet accessibility, as well as correction the deficiencies when possible.

5. Workforce Solutions requires all relevant posters to be displayed in our PA CareerLink® centers.
6. Workforce Solutions assures that state registered American Sign Language interpreters are available upon request.
7. Workforce Solutions, Workforce System Manager monitors ADA/EO compliance on an ongoing basis using the EEOC/ Office of Contract Compliance tools.
8. Workforce Solutions has appointed an Equal Opportunity Officer, Linda Franco, Workforce System Manager.
9. PA CareerLink® centers update their Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Plan as needed and submits it to the OEO annually for compliance review. Referrals start with the Title II provider who assess individuals for language needs and then, if needed, make referrals to appropriate agencies. The purpose of the LEP Plan is to demonstrate that customers of PA CareerLink® are being provided meaningful access to program information, benefits, and services, even though the customers may be limited in their English language proficiency.
10. The Equal Opportunity Law/Civil Rights Statement, including the process to file a complaint if the individual believes they have experienced discrimination, is provided to each individual as well as staff. Workforce Solutions' EO Policy is posted on our website and is distributed to our One Stop Operator, partners and staff at our PA CareerLink® centers.
11. All one-stop partner staff receive training to familiarize them with all of the programs and services provided through the one-stop delivery system upon hire. Staff also receives annual training on the Auxiliary Aides and Services (Universal Access) Policy and Procedures, LEP Plan and Disability Etiquette. On a regular basis, we also provide training on the application of WIOA Section 188.
12. Each PA CareerLink® center has in place the technology and materials needed for individuals with disabilities. The technology available includes: TTY number, Adapted Computers and accessories. The types of materials available include: Discussion of OVR and their many available services are included on the PA CareerLink® website as well as, pamphlets, virtual services, adaptive assessments and translation services that are also available. We work collaboratively with OVR to ensure that the centers have what they need for computer access as well as the TTY phone lines. We will customize other information as needed in collaboration with OVR. During the past year, Workforce Solutions applied for and received funding to purchase the following for each comprehensive center: new braille and TTY telephones, UbiDuo units, video magnifiers and new ADA compliant desks. Services under WIOA Title IV for individual with disabilities can be found in various sections of this plan.
13. We recently completed an EO compliance review for program year 2024 and minor issues were identified and being addressed.
14. We will continue to identify agencies, organizations, non-profits, and other community-based organizations that serve eligible populations and build key partnerships with those entities;
15. Providing outreach material, information, and programmatic access through these partnerships ensures that we better reach various populations through braille, large print, audio assist, and TTY. Ensuring that customers at each PA CareerLink® center have opportunities to share their experiences about ways Workforce Solutions can improve services.
16. Also, at each comprehensive location, representatives of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) are available to provide vocational rehabilitation services to individuals eligible for WIOA Title IV services, which in Pennsylvania means those with significant disabilities. Services of all partners are available to all persons with barriers to employment. All PA CareerLink® centers have TTY-TTD phones, and the staff has been trained on the system. To ensure accessibility to all customers, all delivery of all services complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
17. Workforce Solutions communicates with the One Stop Operator and One Stop Partners including our Title I providers to ensure that a targeted outreach plan and process is occurring. This includes distributing information regarding program services and activities to secondary and post-secondary schools (including Career and Technical Centers), community and faith-based agencies as well as other special interest groups that serve targeted populations. Workforce Solutions regularly meets with many of these groups through our Industry Partnerships, Workforce Development Board committees, special grants that we apply for and are awarded and other initiatives. This provides us the opportunity to ensure they are aware

of the programs, services and activities that can benefit their customers/clients. PA CareerLink® staff are included in these meetings with the intent that they will collaborate with each local entity on a regular basis to provide front line services and further create an ecosystem of partners working together in each county to ensure job seekers from all populations are being served.

5. COMPLIANCE

Compliance and Attestations.

5.1 MOU assessment(s) - *Describe the cooperative agreements that define how all local area service providers will carry out the requirements for integration of and access to the entire set of services available in the local area one-stop delivery system.*

A Memorandum of Understanding outlining the roles and responsibilities of each partner including Workforce Solutions/the North Central Workforce Development Board, the PA CareerLink® system partners, and the Chief Elected Official Board can be found on our website - https://www.workforcesolutionspa.com/categories/pa-careerlink/pages/careerlink-what-is?from=job-seekers#workforce-system-partners.

Additionally, with respect to the provision of services to individuals with disabilities, the Board will utilize the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation's (OVR) expertise regarding assessment, career pathway development, education training and placement services. OVR has a very effective professional development program that will assist in assuring proper cross training of staff, technical assistance and sharing information. The Board will encourage the sharing of PA CareerLink® information that can assist in serving mutual clients.

Workforce Solutions, and our PA CareerLink® partners ensure continued compliance with WIOA Section 188, applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and "The ADA Standard for Accessible Design." We are committed to following and adhering to all provisions of the U.S. Department of Labor Rule: "Implementation of the Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity provisions of the WIOA" and, the "State Nondiscrimination Plan." Dissemination of information related to those topics previously listed as well as compliance accordingly is under the charge of the LWDA's designated Equal Opportunity Officer. Our EO officer works with individuals appointed in each PA CareerLink® center, referred to Equal Opportunity Liaisons to ensure that customers are aware of their rights and to report any incidents related to potential discrimination or accessibility. Through mutual efforts those identified above utilize the PA Department of Labor and Industry, Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) "State Employment Security Agency (SESA) Technical Assistance (TA) Training Manual, which requires the use of the nondiscrimination and EO Self-Evaluation Guide." Training to support the liaisons and EO Officer as well as technical assistance is provided by the Office of Equal Opportunity. In addition, our Office of Vocational Rehabilitation has been a great partner providing accessibility walk-throughs of our PA CareerLink® centers.

5.2 Fiscal responsibility - *What is the process the local board uses to ensure the collection of the debts of lower-tier sub-recipients, because of audits?*

Workforce Solutions Audit Resolution Policies and Procedures outlines the local debt collection system and how the WDB will ensure the collection of debts established as a result of audits.
Procedures in Collecting Outstanding Debts Resulting from Audit Disallowance of Subrecipient Expenditures include the following:

The issuance of a final determination by Workforce Solutions the Chief Elected Official (CEO) signifies the completion of the audit resolution process. At this time, a debt is established when the final determination disallows any costs questioned in the audit. The final determination contains the first official demand for repayment of the debt and, therefore, initiates the following procedure:

1. Following receipt of the final determination, the audited entity will have ten (10) calendar days to submit an appeal (refer to Section B.6, which outlines this appeal process). The request is an appeal for a formal review of the determination, whether or not an appeal has been filed. Interest on the delinquent debt will begin to accrue at this time and will accrue during the entire time of the appeal process.

   The debt collection process will be stayed, pending a decision regarding the appeal. However, the debt does become delinquent on the 31st day following the receipt of the final determination, whether or not an appeal has been filed. Interest on the delinquent debt will begin to accrue at this time and will accrue during the entire time of the appeal process; and

2. If no appeal or the final determination is filed, repayment of the debt is due within thirty (30) days after receipt of that final determination. Upon repayment of the outstanding debt, a final letter will be issued to the audited entity by the Grant Recipient. This letter will:
   - Acknowledge the receipt of payment; and
   - End the debt collection process and audit process.

3. Should repayment not be received in the thirty (30) day period, a second notice will be transmitted by Certified Mail and regular mail, as documented by Certificate of Mailing, P.S. Form 3817. This notice will state the following:
   - Repayment must be submitted within twenty (20) calendar days of receipt of the letter; and
   - State that interest on the outstanding debt begins to accrue on the 31st day following receipt of the final determination by the audited entity.

4. Should repayment of the outstanding debt not be received within twenty (20) calendar days of receipt of the second notice, a final notice will be sent by Certificate of Mailing, P.S. Form 3817. The final notice will state that:
   - Repayment must be received by the Grant Recipient within ten (10) days of receipt;
   - List the amount of accrued interest due to date; and
   - State that should repayment of the debt and interest not be received, appropriate legal and/or programmatic sanctions will be initiated.

5. Additional Methods of Debt Repayment – Workforce Solutions has also established the following additional acceptable methods of debt repayment. While Workforce Solutions prefers cash repayment as described above, Workforce Solutions may accept stand-in costs and the provision of future program services. Acceptance of these methods is solely at the discretion of Workforce Solutions, with prior approval by the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry and/or the United States Department of Labor.
   a. Stand-in Costs (under-claimed costs) – Workforce Solutions may withhold, if possible, from current and future requests for cash by the SUBGRANTEE, sufficient amounts of money until the debt is collected.
   b. Services and/or Training – Repayment, in the form of program services and/or training, may be requested to Workforce Solutions. When Workforce Solutions accepts then a repayment plan must be developed as if this were an actual financial contract. These services must then be acceptable, provide for audit, and meet Workforce Solutions goals and objectives for WIOA Title I programming.

5.3 High-performing board attainment - *What action(s) is the local board taking (or will take) towards becoming or remaining a high-performing board?*

Workforce Solutions is currently functioning as a high-performing Board (according to the current guidelines) in that we consistently achieve the following:

- Aligns with the Governor's goals as described in the PA Combined Plan
- Meets the local area negotiated federal performance goals
- Sustains fiscal and administrative integrity

- Accountable to our mission and our stakeholders
- Our Strategies and Operational elements are articulated in applicable law, regulation, contracts and agreement
- Receives successful monitoring reports and other evaluations by federal and Commonwealth oversight staff
- Researches new and/or improved methods to assist individuals with barriers to employment
- Achieves training expenditure targets
- Develops sector initiatives

We understand that the new guidance pertaining to the action a local board must take toward becoming and remaining a high-performing board are currently being developed. Once the guidance is released, Workforce Solutions will implement the necessary action to become and remain a high-performing board.

We have identified in previous sections how our goals align with the Governor's goal. We are committed to accomplishing our goals and in doing so will assist the Governor in reaching the statewide goals.

We ensure we have in place a strong, strategic Title I provider in order that we meet the negotiated federal performance goals. These goals are their goals and even though the law recognizes that 80% of the negotiated measure is acceptable, our board expects at least 90% in order to be considered acceptable. We encourage creativity and help our provider with new and innovative ideas in order that these measures are met.

Workforce Solutions has had a clean audit each year since we were incorporated. Prior to this, the board always had a clean audit. Fiscal integrity is important not only to the board but also the staff. Every decision is based on its connection to our mission and if it fiscally makes sense. We hold all of our vendors and subrecipients to the same level of expectation.

Every new project or initiative that we consider is done so with our vision and mission in mind. If it doesn't relate to either one, then we won't consider it. We pride ourselves in being a local and regional collaborator. Every initiative that we pursue is done with our partners in mind. We will reach out to everyone that should be part of the collaboration and invite them to the table.

All of our strategies and operational elements are articulated in applicable law, regulation, contracts and agreement. All of our services, initiatives, and projects are provided following all applicable laws, regulations, contracts and agreements.

We strive for quality programs and services and ensure all of our processes meet the letter of the law. We pride ourselves in no significant findings over the years in any of our monitoring reports. We have quality checks in place to ensure we are meeting the requirements.

Our board believes in a customer centered design approach to serving individuals with barriers to employment. All of our staff participate in opportunities to continue to learn how we can improve our system and services. Staff participate in statewide workshops and conferences. Some staff participate at the national level as well. We want our rural region to be noticed and to have access to everything that the more urban areas have. We want to ensure our employers remain competitive and have a strong workforce.

Our board has always believed that a large portion of our funding should be dedicated to "dollars on the street." We have historically targeted 25-30% of our program funds to training activities. We work in partnerships with our Title I provider to ensure that customers receive the services and training that they need in order to become self-sufficient.

Our board has supported sector strategies even before Industry Partnerships, we had county employer consortia. We continue to manage and oversee our sector strategies, currently through the three Industry Partnerships we run, Healthcare and Social Assistance and Advanced Manufacturing.

5.4 Public Notice - *What is the process the local board uses to provide a 30-day public comment period prior to submission of the plan, and describe the opportunity for input into the development of the local area plan, particularly for representatives of business, education, labor organizations, program partners, public agencies, and community stakeholders?*

Workforce Solutions distributed surveys to gather input as well as held one virtual meeting via zoom to gain input on the contents of the plan. Surveys were sent to Employers, Secondary Schools including Career and Technical Centers, Job Seekers and other stakeholders from across the region beginning in November 2024. A virtual meeting was held on November with a variety of stakeholders participating including CEO, WDB Board Members WIOA Partners and Board staff and was facilitated by staff. Below is some feedback we received:

Job Seeker Survey Summary - 15 responses collected. Most job seekers preferred in person services vs using the website only. Likewise, most preferred in-person communication vs. other forms of communication. Some wanted the UC direct phone back and/or a UC staff person to assist.

Employer Survey Summary - 79 responses collected. Most comments were utilized for feedback to PA CareerLink® for continuous improvement purposes what PA CareerLink® can do to better serve employers, such as quality of referrals, lack of communication, lack of applicants, etc.

Secondary School Survey Summary (including CTCs) - 15 responses. Some of the services noted as important included: summer internships; mock interviews by PA CareerLink® staff; increased interactions with older aged students; career opportunities/pathways. Suggestions to provide workshops in the schools and tours of PA CareerLink®.

Other meetings during which the plan was discussed and ideas gathers include the following:
Workforce Development Board Meetings –

Manufacturing Industry Partnership Meeting – August 7, 2024 and November 6, 2024

Healthcare and Social Assistance Industry Partnership Meeting – August 14, 2024

Once this information was gathered and included in the draft plan it was submitted to the Workforce Development for review and approval. It was then submitted to the PA Department of Labor and Industry for feedback. Upon receipt of this feedback, necessary revisions were made and the final plan was released for the required 30-day public comment period.