

July 1, 2023

Bobbie Jones, WDB Chairperson
NWPA Job Connect
1174 Elk Street
PO Box 831
Franklin, PA 16323

Dear Mrs. Jones,

The Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry, or Department, has approved the Northwest Region Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Program Year (PY) 2021-2024 plan modification with conditions. Please see a copy of the “conditions” attached. A regional plan modification, and its associated local plan modifications, must be fully compliant with all federal and state statutes, regulations, policies, and grant agreements to receive full approval by the Department. Per WIOA, this conditional approval extends to the local plan modifications associated with the local workforce development areas that comprise the planning region. The Northwest Region is composed of the following local workforce development areas:

- Northwest Local Workforce Development Area
- West Central Local Workforce Development Area

Currently, the Department is coordinating with representatives of Northwest PA and West Central to finalize components of these local areas’ WIOA plan modifications. Conditional approval is effective through the end of the calendar year (i.e., December 31, 2023). Upon acceptance of all required items by the Department, the regional plan modification and its associated local plan modifications will be fully ratified and full approval will be extended through June 30, 2025.

Approval of this plan modification does not constitute approval of any practice that conflicts with federal and state statutes, regulations, or policies, nor does approval preclude the commonwealth from, at its discretion, readdressing any part of the plan if content is found that conflicts with such statutes, regulations, or policies.

You and your staff are to be commended for your successful efforts to develop the PY 2021-2024 plan modification in alignment with WIOA and the Commonwealth’s WIOA Combined State Plan Modification.

Please direct specific questions regarding your plan, the planning process and/or future requests for plan modification to Christopher Manlove at (717) 787-9804 or cmanlove@pa.gov.

Sincerely,



Brenda Dupstadt
Bureau of Workforce Development Administration Director

cc: Commissioner Robert Snyder Jr, Forrest County Commissioners Office, Chief Elected Official
Dr. Lisa Miller, Executive Director, Northwest Workforce Development Board
Susan Richmond, Compliance & Policy Specialist, Northwest Workforce Development Board

Keystone Edge Workforce Development Region



**Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Lawrence,
Mercer, Venango, and Warren Counties**

PY2021 – PY2024 WIOA Regional Plan Modification

Effective July 1, 2023



Appendix B: Regional Plan Instructions

WIOA requires a board strategic approach to planning focused on the overarching vision, goals, alignment and shared responsibilities within a designated region. Planning regions are required to provide a regional plan that incorporates each prompt listed in the appendix.

Regional plans are broader in scope than the plan developed for the respective local area(s) within a planning region. Regional plan drafters are encouraged to include data samples, streamlined graphics and tables to support any narrative instead of large volumes of data, tables and graphs.

The Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, or L&I, includes a sub-section labeled “Expectation” for most prompts. This sub-section provides planners with practical concepts for developing narrative and creating a basis for discussion. Concepts are not all-inclusive but provide a foundation for building narrative. L&I will use each prompt’s general contextual meaning and expectation to evaluate narrative when reviewing each submitted regional plan.

Note: The local board must cite the source(s) used to collect all or part of the regional labor market data (e.g. Center for Workforce Information and Analysis, or CWIA).

1.1 Identification of the region.

Factors being considered include, but are not limited to:

- A reference name for the region;
- Identification of the LWDA(s) that comprise the region;
- Identification of the key region committee members charged with drafting the regional plan to include organizational affiliation;
- A list of key region committee meeting dates; and
- The regional plan’s effective date.

(Revised) Note: When adding the initial reference of the local workforce development board into plan narrative, the legal name must be used at least once, before adding an alternative Doing Business As, or D.B.A., moniker.

The region is identified as the Keystone Edge Workforce Development Region (hereinafter referred to in this plan as “the region”). It is comprised of the Northwest Pennsylvania Workforce Development Area (NW 170) governed by the Northwest Pennsylvania Workforce Development Board (NW PA WDB) DBA NWPA Job Connect and the West Central Workforce Development Area (NW 145) governed by the West Central Pennsylvania Workforce Development Board (WC PA WDB) DBA West Central Job Partnership (WCJP). The local elected officials of each workforce area share governance authority with the workforce development boards that they appointed.

Counties in the region include:

- Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Venango, and Warren (NW 170)
- Lawrence and Mercer (NW 145)

Regional committee members charged with drafting the regional plan Modification are:

Northwest

Lisa Miller (NWPA Job Connect)

West Central

Gregg Dogan (West Central Job Partnership)

Deb O'Neil (NWPA Job Connect)	Rebecca Moder (West Central Job Partnership)
Susan Richmond (NWPA Job Connect)	Tim Jablon (Wheatland Steel Processing)
Jim Decker (Warren County Chamber)	Lisa Campbell (Butler County Community College)
Larry Fannie <i>and W. Central</i> (BWPO, Region)	John Greenwood (FirstEnergy)
Jill Foy (Northwest Commission)	

To develop the WIOA Plan for the region, the Planning Committee met virtually on December 3, 2020 and February 19, 2021. Regional staff met December 15, 2020 and February 5, 2021, and worked collaboratively throughout the planning period. Updates to the Keystone Edge Plan Modification were discussed at meetings between both Areas' staff on August 12, 2022 and October 7, 2022.

Staff from the Keystone Edge region regularly participated in meetings that have informed the Regional Plan in whole or in part. Some of these meetings are captured below:

- PA CareerLink® How We Serve Businesses (12/10/20)
- Next Gen Peer Calls (3/5/19, 9/26/19, 11/21/19, 11/18/20)
- Next Gen Community of Practice Meetings (9/23/20, 11/26/20, 12/16/20, 1/28/21, 4/21/22, 5/19/22, 6/16/22, 7/21/22, 8/18/22, 9/15/22, 10/20/22))
- Northwest PREP Meetings (9/13/19, 11/22/19, 3/27/20, 5/7/20, 10/8/20, 12/11/20, 3/18/21, 6/17/21, 9/16/21, 12/16/21, 3/31/22, 6/16/22, 9/29/22, 12/8/22))
- Northwest Engage! Meeting (6/26/20)
- Perkins Planning and Needs Assessment Meetings: Corry Area CTC (5/15/19, 12/5/19), Clarion CTE (11/14/19), Warren CTC (11/22/19, 12/12/19), Erie County Technical School (11/25/19, 12/9/19), Venango CTE (12/4/19), Erie County CTE (6/2/20), Central Tech (9/26/19), Mercer County and Lawrence County CTCs (9/14/19)
- Career Pathways Informational Sessions: Engineering & Industrial Technology 11/19/20; Science & Health 12/15/20; Business, Finance, & IT 1/26/21; Human Services 2/16/21; Arts & Communication 2/25/21
- Athena Powerlink Meetings: weekly from March 30 through July, 2021
- Erie County Level Workforce Development Team: monthly
- Erie Restart Workforce Committee: regularly meeting in 2020 and 2021
- Erie Together: Erie County Career Pathways Alliance and County Level Workforce Development Team: various Leadership Team Meetings, Steward Team Meetings, and Industry Advisory Groups
- Registered Apprenticeship and WIOA with ATO: 2/24/2022
- Kiwanis Statewide Meeting, Early Childhood Education: 8/12/2022

As a continuation of the original Regional Planning Committee, individuals from each of the local areas board staff, fiscal agents, Operators, and WIOA Title I providers had been meeting regularly to discuss regional issues and concerns. Meetings have incorporated topics such as: ABE Assessments; Transportation Summit, alignment of ITA funding throughout the region; PA Department of Education's Chapter 339 plan requirements; regional planning issues; pre-apprenticeship programs; and incumbent worker training. These meetings occurred on February 27, 2019; May 22, 2019; August 28, 2019; January 19, 2020; and March 26, 2020. These meetings were cancelled when the pandemic caused closures. The meetings are normally scheduled quarterly and will resume virtually soon.

1.2 Based on the analysis of the regional labor market and economic conditions, describe the region's workforce and economic development-oriented vision and goals. [WIOA Sec. 106(c)(1)(D); 20 CFR 679.510(a)(1)(vii)]

Expectation: The narrative must include a description of the region's vision and a set of goals that are cognizant of the regional economic conditions labor market data and are in alignment with the state plan.

Factors being considered include, but are not limited to:

- How the strategic goals consider both workforce and economic development priorities within the region;
- How the local board will expand the use of apprenticeships as part of the local board's business/employer engagement strategy;
- How the local board will demonstrate Engage! linkage between workforce and economic development throughout the LWDA;
- How the local board will work with local economic development organizations to achieve the strategic goals; and
- How the coordination of services with regional economic development services and providers will occur.

Keystone Edge Regional VISION: To prepare an educated and skilled workforce that meets the needs of regional employers now and in the future.

Workforce is a critical component of any economic development strategy. The Keystone Edge Region regularly collaborates with regional partners to ensure that workforce plans, and policies complement the economic strategy of the region.

Investments in workforce preparation, skill development, education, and training including work-based learning and apprenticeships, will be guided by market-based data as well as information derived from employer-driven industry partnerships focused on high priority and in-demand occupations to create innovative workforce development services. Our regional goals align with the five goals highlighted by the Governor. The Governor's goals strive to coordinate across all systems and partners, both within state agencies, and throughout the state and local system devoted to developing Pennsylvania's workforce and economy. Broad regional goals will complement the Governor's five focus areas to improve Pennsylvania's workforce: improving career pathways and apprenticeships, sector strategies and employer engagement, increasing opportunities for youth work-based learning experiences, continuous improvement of the Workforce Development System, and strengthening the one-stop delivery system. Through alignment with the Governor's goals and our desire to develop a demand-driven workforce development system, the Keystone Region identifies five key goals that cross various actionable areas within the greater strategic initiatives:

Regional Goal #1: Create and grow a competitive workforce by engaging knowledgeable, employer-focused leadership that promotes and advocates for business and industry to address the critical workforce challenges of the region.

- Aligns with the Governor's goals of increasing employer engagement and industry clusters through innovative strategies to improve responsiveness of workforce programs and services to labor market demand.

Regional Goal #2: Continually enhance the workforce development pipeline by promoting high-demand industry sectors, career pathways, registered apprenticeships, work-based learning, and targeted outreach.

- Aligns with the Governor’s goals of developing comprehensive career pathways and apprenticeship, increasing work-based learning opportunities for youth to experience work-based learning opportunities.

Regional Goal #3: Maintain a commitment to continuous improvement of the workforce development system by increasing data sharing across various WIOA and partner programs and enhancing partnerships.

- Aligns with the Governor’s goal to enact system changes and improvements that enhance collaboration and partnership between agencies and partners in the workforce development system.

Regional Goal #4: Increase the alignment of education and training programs including work-based learning with employer demand.

- Aligns with the Governor’s goals of improving career pathways, apprenticeships, work-based learning opportunities, and engaging employers and industry clusters to help close skills gaps.

How regional goals consider both workforce and economic development priorities:

In an effort to enhance economic and workforce development in the region, joint planning with regional and local organizations such as chambers of commerce, economic development, and industry-based coalitions have intensified to ensure the road to prosperity will be paved with relevant workforce, education, and training programs. Through this systematic engagement, both curricula and program design will be infused with the necessary knowledge to develop job seekers abilities to support current industry, grow the economy, advance incumbent worker skill sets, as well as facilitate the pipeline for Pennsylvanians’ seeking to locate or relocate themselves in jobs. A top priority for the Keystone Edge Region is to align education and training initiatives with current and future regional in demand occupations. Economic developers are often the lead with employers requiring a shared understanding of the benefits of registered apprenticeships and the benefits registering apprenticeships will help grow the traditional and non-traditional apprenticeships in the Keystone Edge region. Frontline staff working with employers will share the successes with the economic developers during Business Solutions meetings each month.

How the Region will demonstrate Engage! Linkage:

To promote coordination and collaboration among economic and community development partners, Pennsylvania’s Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) established Partnerships for Regional Economic Performance (PREP) regions, which in this region includes eight county economic development corporations, an incubator association, two industrial resource centers, three small business development centers, a local development district, a Pennsylvania Technical Assistance Program (PennTAP) office, one Benjamin Franklin Technology Partners (BFTP) office, and two Workforce Development Boards and a long history of collaboration among partners.

PREP partners are collaborating through an effective information and referral-sharing process facilitated by Executive Pulse and PA’s workforce development system of record. Executive Pulse is a cloud-based customer relation management (CRM) software platform designed to help manage and coordinate partner outreach with employers. Linking Executive Pulse and PA’s workforce development system of record allowed all partners to share demand-side insights and coordinate solutions to individual employers and sector-based needs. The region’s economic and workforce development agencies are also engaged in multiple collaborative projects that will provide better service to businesses looking to

expand operations or to relocate to Northwest Pennsylvania. Furthermore, the partnership has utilized social media promotion and virtual platforms to enhance customer services.

How the region will work with local economic development organizations to achieve the strategic goals:

In keeping with the commonwealth's goal of making Industry Partnerships and similar multi-employer partnerships the primary means of connecting the workforce development system to the needs of employers, DCED will collaborate with L&I to link the Workforce and Economic Development Network of Pennsylvania (WEDnetPA) more closely to those partnerships. This will be accomplished at the regional level by using the PREP partnership as the focal point for alignment of all resources and for planning and implementation of Industry Partnerships. In addition, the benefits of registered apprenticeships and success stories will be shared with the Industry Partnership members so that employers are telling other businesses about the success achieved.

How the region will expand the use of apprenticeships as part of the employer engagement strategy:

Work Based Learning plays a unique role in educating the workforce and is often overlooked as a viable alternative to post-secondary education. The population is shrinking causing the labor participation rate to decrease making it very difficult for employers to attract workers. This competitive situation causes the region to become very creative in outreach to unique populations that have chosen to remove themselves from the workforce. Work based learning and registered apprenticeships provide opportunities for disengaged individuals to find hope in participation by eliminating the need for post-secondary training while supplying skills and family sustaining wages. Staff, two from each board, had participated in the initial KDP Navigator Apprenticeship training and became apprentices of apprenticeship after a rigorous training to include classroom and actual work under a mentor. Staff will be enrolled in the KDP Navigator Apprenticeship training cohort starting in July 2023. These individuals, along with other frontline staff and the Business Service Team members, will continue to support employers with new and existing RA and Pre-RA programs via individual discussions, during events such as job fairs and open houses, along with providing them fliers and brochures created by ATO or from information provided by ATO. We have a local ATR who assists employers with their apprenticeship questions, as well as supporting frontline staff. The Keystone Edge Region apprentices and leadership will continue to initiate discussions with Industry Partnerships, Media, Educators (Intermediate Units, Career and Technical Centers, Guidance Counselors, Curriculum Directors), Non-profit organizations, Employers, Economic Developers, and the Public (parents and students) about the advantages of Registered Apprenticeships and Pre-Apprenticeships. The region prepares Op-Ed and Social Media releases to highlight Registered Apprenticeships to heighten the awareness of the benefits of work-based learning. Business Service Teams in the PA CareerLink® centers (including economic development partners) are provided tools by ATO to encourage Registered Apprenticeships and Pre-Apprenticeships with traditional and non-traditional employers. Local boards will continue to explore policy changes and additional funding that allocates resources to Apprenticeships based on the interest of employers. See local plans for additional information on local policy changes and additions to support apprenticeships.

Traditional Apprenticeship industries such as construction and manufacturing as well as Non-Traditional industries such as healthcare and social services will be targeted for exposure to the benefits of registered apprenticeship because of the strong demand for workers and overall growth as shown in the regional labor market data in section 1.3.

1.3 Describe the collection and analysis of regional labor market data (in conjunction with the Commonwealth). [WIOA Sec. 106(c)(1)(D); 20 CFR 679.510(a)(1)(iv); 20 CFR 679.560(a)(1)(i) and (ii)]

Expectation: Regional planner(s) must describe and analyze regional labor market data to articulate the region's economic conditions and employers' employment needs.

Factors being considered include, but are not limited to:

- Describing the state of the regional economy and key positive and negative economic conditions (e.g. on-going business cycle impact, business community vitality, unemployment trends; demographic information; key legal-political-social conditions; technological changes; natural forces);
- Identifying key industry cluster(s);
- Identifying existing and emerging in-demand industry sector(s);
- Identifying existing and emerging in-demand industry sector(s) occupations;
- (Revised) Providing data describing the industry location quotients (LQ) of the region and local area(s); and
- Describing the employment needs of employers in existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations.

The regional area may support the narrative by:

- Additional narrative may include similarities and differences of associated local areas: specifically, the economic conditions and competitive strengths and weaknesses of business market factors found in each local area.

The Keystone Edge Workforce Development Region has significant opportunities for family sustaining employment with the opportunity for skill growth combined with challenges in both the quantity and the skills of the workforce needed to seize the opportunities and to lay the foundation for the attraction of new, high-quality jobs to the region. Manufacturing remains a significant anchor sector in the region for both the number of jobs and wage levels but continues in decline as the sector transitions to advanced manufacturing and higher skill needs. Healthcare, Agriculture, Construction, Professional & Business Services, Financial Services, and Education are projected to provide increases in employment, with implications for career counseling and skills training programs in the region. The region has experienced overall population decline, which puts increased pressure on increasing the labor force participation rate and the skill levels of the population. With the largest increases in employment projected for jobs requiring long-term training, the region will need substantial increases in the percentage of the adult population with attainment of more than a high school diploma to align with employers' needs. Long-term training may include options such as Registered Apprenticeships in traditional and non-traditional industries.

This section presents pertinent data on industry clusters, industry sectors, and occupational projections, followed by demographic information for the workforce. Insights from the data provide the overlay for the action strategies that follow in subsequent sections. Industry partnership groups, including Industry Partnerships will continue to drive the collection of deeper information within key sectors, and the individual workforce boards will identify and address cross-sector foundational needs in the process.

OVERVIEW

The Keystone Edge Region is comprised of the Northwest and West Central Workforce Development Areas. It is comprised of eight counties: Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango, and Warren. Overall, it was home to 688,218 citizens in 2021¹. With a 2021 Average Annual labor force

¹ Population estimates per CWIA, WDA Profiles; : U.S. Census-2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates - DP05, B01001, and B15001

of 310,100 the largest sector is Health Care and Social Assistance, which employs 53,697 workers and represents 12% of the region's Gross Domestic Product. Manufacturing employs about 46,710 workers and represents 25% of the regions' GDP.

High location quotients (LQs) indicate industry clusters in which a region has high concentrations of employment compared to the national average. The sectors with the largest LQs in the Keystone Edge region include Healthcare (HC), Advanced Manufacturing (AM), Energy (ENGY), and Wood, Wood Products and Publishing (WWP).

Industry Cluster Statistics for the Northwest PA Region												
Combines Northwest and West Central WDAs: Includes Crawford, Clarion, Erie, Forest, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango, and Warren counties												
	AFP	AM	BC	BM	BSV	ED	ENGY	HC	HLE	LT	REFI	WWP
2021 Employment	8,765	37,996	16,041	879	14,924	24,003	4,895	53,697	26,321	6,757	11,609	4,092
Percent REgion Employment	3.43%	14.86%	6.27%	0.34%	5.84%	9.39%	1.91%	21.00%	10.29%	2.64%	4.54%	1.60%
Employment Growth (2016-2021)	633	-4,171	97	-56	-2,754	-2,126	-1,043	-1,378	-4,628	-456	-563	-712

Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages

POPULATION

The population in Keystone Edge Region is estimated to have declined from 721,580 in 2010 to 684,791 in the 2020 Census, resulting in a decline of 36,789 or 5%. Over the next five years, the population is projected to continue to decline by 1.1% or to 687,698. The population in Pennsylvania is estimated to have increased from 12,791,530 in 2019 to 13,002,700 in the 2020 Census, resulting in an increase of 1.6% and is expected to continue to grow over the next five years. The Regional population decrease creates a supply challenge for the current demand in the workforce. Individuals with barriers to employment must be identified and targeted through outreach so they may be trained to fill job vacancies being created by retirements and a skills gap.

Youth

In comparing the region's youth population (0-24 years) of 203,270² (pipeline) to the approaching retirement population (55-74 years) of 182,345 the region has more young people than needed to fill retirees' jobs by 20,925 over the next 20 years. Strategies to keep the youth in the area, as well as targeted education and training to include options such as registered apprenticeship, are critical to avoid a negative brain drain. Outreach to the youth and parents providing them with regional job opportunities will be an important step in the overall success in workforce. It will be important to engage economic development and education in the conversation of brain drain and how to keep our youth in the region and interested in jobs that are available in the region.

Race and Ethnicity

The region's current estimated population racial breakdown is 90.3% White Alone, 4.9% Black or African American Alone, 2.6% is Hispanic Origin (all races) and 4.7% is other race or more than one race. Pennsylvania's population is more diverse than the region: 79.4% are White Alone, 11.1% are Black or African American Alone, 7.6% are Hispanic Origin (all races) and 9.5% are other races or more than one race. Diversity in the workforce is of keen interest to the region. Connecting disengaged populations to training including registered apprenticeship and employment will be critical to meeting employer demand.

Education

² Population estimates per CWIA, WDA Profiles: U.S. Census-2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates - DP05, B01001, and B15001

More than 50% of the Working Age Population (Ages 25 – 64) in the Keystone Edge region hold a high school diploma or less as compared to the state which has 43.2%. Nearly one in four citizens (24.6%) have some college or associate degree like Pennsylvania at 24.5%. Another 24.6% of the population over the age of 18 earned a bachelor’s degree or higher as compared to 32.3% of Pennsylvanians.

Employment

The 2021 Annual Average labor force in the Keystone Edge Region is 310,100³. In the region there are 22,100 people not working but actively looking for work. In addition to the Unemployed counted in the Local Area Unemployment Statistics, there are additionally those who are not employed and not actively seeking work. This population may be early retirement, incarcerated, stay at home parents, on social security disability, etc. To fill open positions, it is important for the region to develop methods to help individuals overcome barriers to employment. An outreach campaign will be established to make the population aware of the needs of employers, including registered apprenticeship opportunities for training.

<i>Depth of Labor Pool</i>	Keystone Edge		Pennsylvania	
Population	695,347	%	12,791,530	%
<i><18, >65</i>	<i>278,528</i>	<i>40.1%</i>	<i>4,950,367</i>	<i>38.7%</i>
Available to Work	416,819	59.9%	7,841,163	61.3%
<i>Employed</i>	<i>280,600</i>	<i>67.3%</i>	<i>5,864,000</i>	<i>74.8%</i>
Not Employed	136,219	32.6%	1,977,163	25.2%
<i>On Unemployment</i>	<i>22,900</i>	<i>16.8%</i>	<i>420,000</i>	<i>21.2%</i>
Not Seeking Employment*	113,319	83.1%	1,557,163	79.8%

*includes stay at home parents, incarcerated, collecting social security, etc.

Source: Center for Workforce Information & Analysis, December 2020

In the region, the Long-Term Occupational Employment Projections (2020-30) show the most employment in Protective, Food, Building & Personal Service occupations with an annual demand of 7,569 employees and total anticipated 2030 employment of 49,110. The next highest is in Healthcare Practitioners, Technicians & Support with employment of 41,570 and 3,823 openings annually. Office & Administrative Support is the third highest 2030 employment at 30,680 and an annual demand of 3,235, but also a reduction of 8.3% in employment. Production projects 28,640 people employed in 2030, with annual openings of 2,999. The region will focus efforts on promotion of occupations in Healthcare and Production as the greatest need and highest paying positions in the region. For individuals with barriers or out of school youth a focus toward positions that provide the beginning of a career path in protective, food, building & personal service as well as office and administrative occupations on the High Priority Occupation list.

Populations with Barriers

Among the factors that often contribute to poverty are unemployment and underemployment. Many people live in poverty because they are unable to find a job that pays a living wage or to find a job at all. When looking at the Poverty and Labor Force Status (Ages 16 and older) in the region, 12.7% of families are living in poverty. There are portions of the region where poverty levels are greater than 20%. A targeted effort to outreach to these individuals will be undertaken to provide equity and inclusion and

³ Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS)

to offer alternative training such as work based learning including registered apprenticeships that provide family sustaining wages and meet the changing expectations of job seekers.

Labor Market Trends & Employer Demand

Unemployment Rate

The overall unemployment rate in the Keystone Edge region in 2021 was 7.1%, with a labor force of 310,100. When looking at 2022 the unemployment rate started at 5.9% and dipped below 5% in May and July. In August preliminary results show the unemployment rate is back to 5.1% for the region. Given that many women still have not returned to work due to childcare they have found it most difficult of all populations to return to work, making the current unemployment rate near full employment prior to the pandemic.

Annual Average Labor Force Statistics, Keystone Edge Region, 2021				
Annual Average	Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Unemployment Rate
2021	310,100	287,900	22,100	7.1%
Seasonally Adjusted Labor Force Statistics, Northwest WDA, 2022				
Month	Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Unemployment Rate
January	308,100	290,100	18,100	5.9%
February	305,400	289,500	15,900	5.2%
March	309,000	293,300	15,800	5.1%
April	308,500	291,800	16,700	5.4%
May	309,400	294,100	15,300	4.9%
June	306,200	290,800	15,500	5.1%
July	305,300	290,800	14,400	4.7%
August	306,000	290,400	15,600	5.1%

Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS)

Labor Market trends can be examined by looking at Long Term Industry Projections as well as other Labor Market information. Regarding Long Term Industry Projections from 2020-2030, the total employment in the Keystone Edge Region is projected to increase by 1.4% or 3,790 (which is at a rate lower than the state). Leisure & Hospitality, recovering from pandemic related shutdowns, is projected to experience the greatest volume increase (32.3%) while Agriculture, Mining & Logging is expected to experience the greatest decline at 3.3% or 240 jobs. Manufacturing is not the greatest decline but is predicted to decline by 1.3% or 140 jobs.

Looking at long term Occupational Projections provides insight into the employment needs and provides an opportunity to ensure qualified candidates are being trained to meet employment demand. Total Regional Employment is set to increase from 278,320 in 2020 to 282,110 by 2030. Occupations related to Computer, Engineering & Science are projected to experience the greatest growth (3,860), showcasing the future demand for increased technological aptitude and digital literacy. Education, Legal, Social Services, Arts & Media Occupations are projected to see the greatest decline, losing 2,790 jobs.

Long-Term Industry Projections for Keystone Edge Region (2020-30)				
Industry	Employment (2020)	Projected Employment (2030)	Employment	
			Volume	Percent
Total Jobs	278,320	282,110	3,790	1.4%
Goods Producing Industries	58,240	56,690	-1,550	-3.3%
Agriculture, Mining & Logging	5,760	5,520	-240	-3.3%
Construction	9,070	8,950	-120	0.1%
Manufacturing	10,930	10,790	-140	-1.3%
Services-Providing	203,060	208,640	5,580	6.4%
Trade, Transportation & Utilities	45,460	46,170	710	2.7%
Information	440	430	-10	-2.3%
Financial Activities	11,450	11,350	-100	-0.7%
Professional & Business Services	16,150	16,710	560	5.0%
Education & Health Services	74,220	74,550	330	4.3%
Leisure & Hospitality	22,130	25,830	3,700	32.3%
Other Services, Except Public Admin.	13,220	13,860	640	8.6%
Federal, State & Local Government	18,600	18,360	-240	-1.6%
Self-Employed Workers	17,030	16,790	-240	-3.9%

Source: Long-Term Industry Employment Projections (2020-30)

Long-Term Occupational Projections for Keystone Edge Region (2020-30)					
Occupational Title	Employment (2020)	Projected Employment (2030)	Employment		Annual Demand
			Volume	Percent	
Total, All Occupations	278,320	282,110	3,790	1.4%	31,593
Computer, Engineering & Science	45,250	49,110	3,860	8.5%	7,569
Construction & Extraction	39,830	41,570	1,740	4.4%	3,823
Education, Legal, Social Service, Arts & Media	24,210	30,680	-2,790	-11.5%	3,235
Farming, Fishing & Forestry	29,900	28,640	-1,260	-4.2%	2,999
Healthcare Practitioners, Technicians & Support	27,080	27,260	180	0.7%	2,440
Installation, Maintenance & Repair	25,670	25,190	-480	-1.9%	3,363
Management, Business & Finance	21,760	23,480	1,720	7.9%	2,977
Office & Administrative Support	21,220	21,490	270	1.3%	1,804
Production	11,350	11,670	320	2.8%	1,110
Protective, Food, Building & Personal Service	11,260	11,350	90	0.8%	1,128
Sales & Related	8,180	8,450	270	3.3%	647
Transportation & Material Moving	2,540	2,370	-170	-6.7%	365

Source: Long-Term Occupational Employment Projections (2020-30)

*Data may not add due confidentiality

Opportunity Occupations are employment opportunities that are generally considered accessible to someone without a bachelor's degree and that pay at least the national annual median wage, adjusted

for differences in local consumption prices. There are several in the region that only require a high school diploma; although most are part of an apprenticeship program or require on-the-job training and experience. There are many occupations in the region on the In Demand lists that meet the definition of opportunity occupations.

To assist in identifying skill gaps, it is useful to look at current educational attainment and compare that to the education needs of employers and the change or expected employment growth by education level. Employment opportunities that require an advanced degree are growing at the highest percentage, but with fewer overall jobs. The highest employment numbers are in on the job training but is growing at the slowest rate.

Supply:

In looking at the population education attainment, more than 50% of the population has their highest level of education as high school or less, 26% have some college or an associate degree, 14% have a bachelor's degree, and 7.6% have completed their graduate or professional degree. Regional outreach will be important to increase the number of high school completers and life-long learners in the areas where there is employment demand.

Based on the WDA profiles for West Central and Northwest the supply of workers by education is as follows:

Educational Attainment of Working Age Population (Ages 25 to 64) by County					
County	Total	Less than high school graduate:	High school graduate (incl. equivalency):	Some college or associate's degree:	Bachelor's degree or higher:
Clarion	26,503	2,501	12,188	5,723	6,091
Crawford	59,647	6,052	28,222	13,183	12,190
Erie	187,398	15,956	70,762	46,874	53,806
Forest	6,278	1,022	3,411	1,245	600
Lawrence	61,973	5,388	26,934	15,820	13,831
Mercer	78,388	7,953	32,772	19,858	17,805
Venango	37,890	3,404	18,195	8,985	7,306
Warren	29,084	1,979	13,158	8,300	5,647
Keystone Edge Total	487,161	44,255	205,642	119,988	117,276

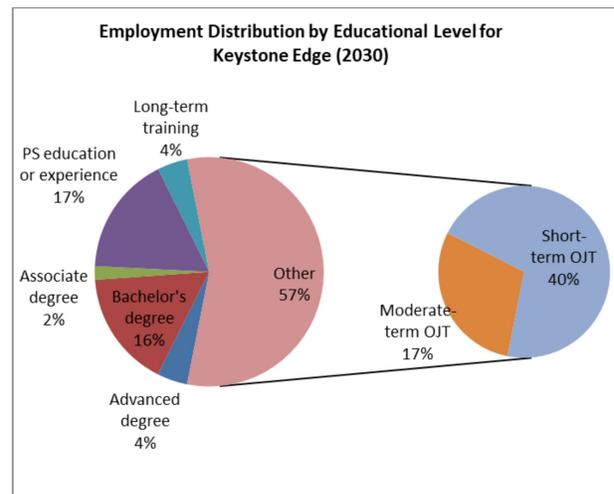
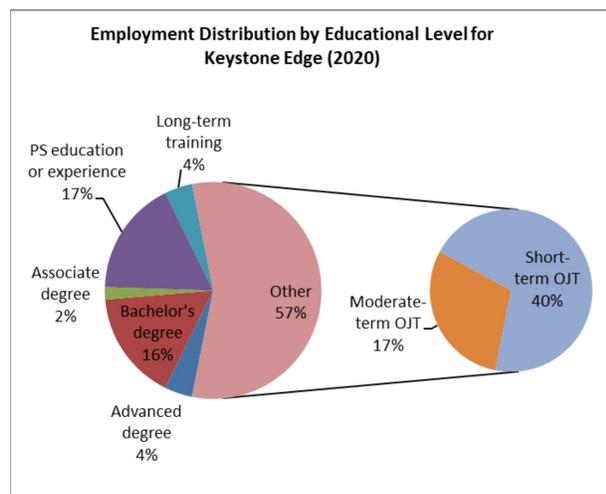
Source: American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates; 2016-2020

Demand:

When comparing the supply to the demand for educated and skilled workers there is a gap. More than 50% of the training need is On the Job Training. Most regional employers are looking for employees that have the right aptitude and attitude to learn while on the job with some post-secondary education in a technical skill. The workforce supply in the region does not align to the demand of employers calling for workforce, economic development, and education to develop the regional strategy define roles and responsibilities to meet the needs of regional employers.

Employment Growth Rates by Educational Attainment Level for Keystone Edge Region			
Educational Grouping	Employment (2020)	Projected Employment (2030)	Percent Change (2020-30)
On-the-job training	156,650	158,640	1.3%
Long-term training	11,510	11,950	3.8%
PS education or experience	47,960	47,520	-0.9%
Associate degree	5,110	5,410	5.9%
Bachelor's degree	45,600	46,490	2.0%
Advanced degree	11,490	12,110	5.4%

Source: Long-Term Occupational Employment Projections (2020-30)



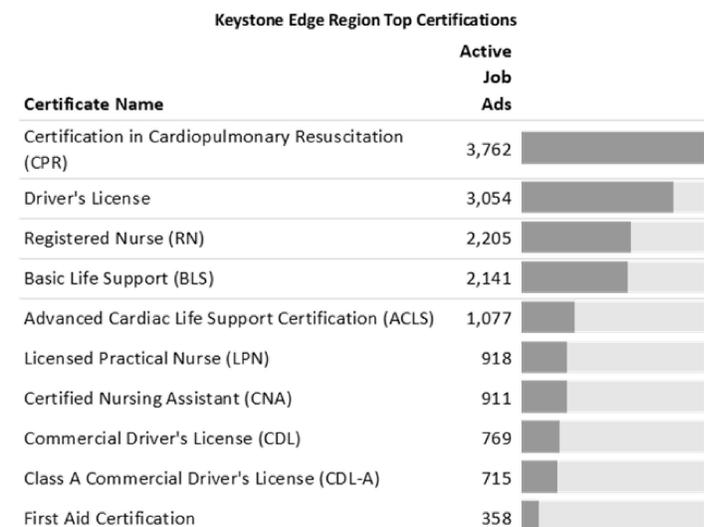
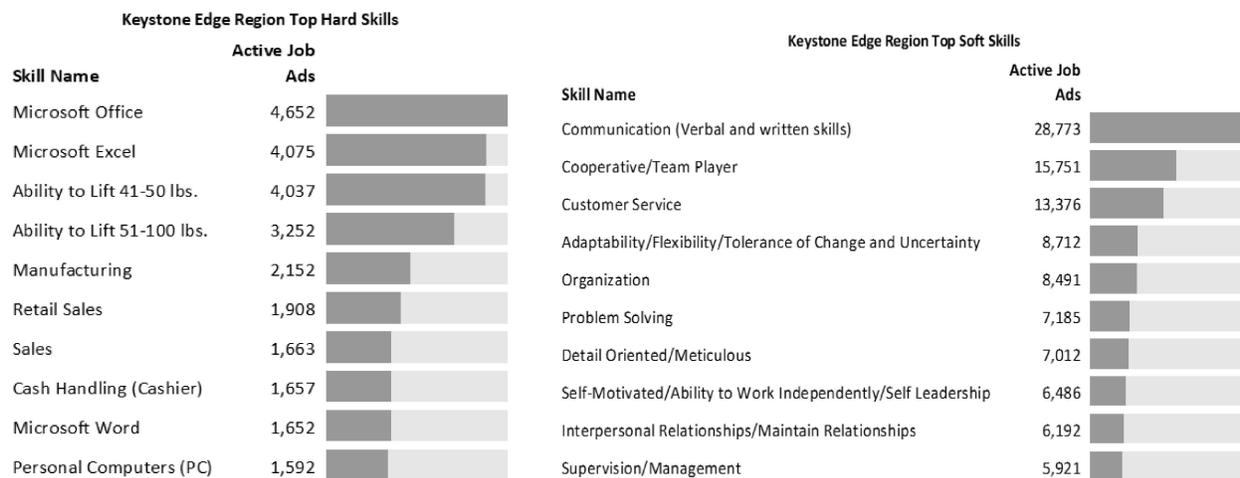
Educational Distribution by Educational Attainment Level for Keystone Edge Region		
Educational Grouping	Employment (2020)	Projected Employment (2030)
Advanced degree	11,490	12,110
Bachelor's degree	45,600	46,490
Associate degree	5,110	5,410
PS education or experience	47,960	47,520
Long-term training	11,510	11,950
Moderate-term OJT	46,640	46,530
Short-term OJT	110,010	112,100

Source: Long-Term Occupational Employment Projections (2020-30)

Growth rates in education are projected to be similar to the current needs of employers.

Analyzing employer real time job postings provides insight into the skills and certifications that regional employers are requesting most frequently. The most requested hard skills according to Jobs EQ for new jobs posted within the 12 month period ending 01/18/2023 are Microsoft Office, Microsoft Excel, and the Ability to lift 41-50 lbs. The top requested soft skills are Communication (Verbal and written skills), Cooperative/Team Player, and Customer Service. The most requested certifications are Certification in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), Driver’s License, and Registered Nurse. These certificates may show a the increased need for medical personnel as many changed employers or careers during the pandemic, and with workers returning to the office, there is a demand for driver's licenses. The demand for these certifications will need to be monitored in the region to ensure that we do not flood the market if there is a change.

When reviewing 2020 Employment Distribution by Educational Level in the region 57% require short and moderate term on-the-job training, 4% require Long-term training, 17% require post-secondary education or experience, 2% require an associate degree, 16% require a bachelor’s degree and 4% require advance degrees. These levels are expected to remain through 2030. Many of the jobs listed on the High Priority Occupation List require on the job training and provide further evidence of the training need of employers. The information leads the region to believe that there is opportunity for pre and registered apprenticeships.



KEY SECTORS

The following sectors account for the largest number of jobs with family -sustaining wages in the region.
Source: L-T Industry Projections for NW PA Region and L-T Occupational Projections

Health Services

- Accounts for 20% of the region’s workforce and is projected to continue to grow by 7.4 % by 2028
- One of the top employing industries; employs 34% above the national average; with continued growth projected
- Registered Practical Nurse, Nurse Assistant, Nurse Practitioner, and Registered Nurse are top certifications in the region
- Provides the highest paying occupations
- The Pandemic put pressure on healthcare systems to grow at a faster pace and training providers to provide shortened training schedules

Advanced Manufacturing

- Accounts for 15% of regional employment
- One of the top employing industries in the region and employs 94% above the national average
- Expected to show employment declines of 4.3% over the next 10 years about 2,000 jobs
- Most entry level occupations require a high school diploma or equivalent
- Manufacturing has the greatest economic impact on the region and accounts for the majority of the area’s exports

The labor market of the Keystone Edge Workforce Development Region offers opportunities for employment in a diverse economy where Health Care and Construction jobs are increasing over the next decade and Manufacturing employment while projected to decrease will remain a major industry in the area due to higher wages, retirements, and achievable education requirements with employer participation. The Leisure and Hospitality sectors continue to provide an adequate supply of jobs with expected growth for entry-level workers where work ethics and job experience can be acquired and combined with skills training to access higher-skilled jobs in multiple sectors. Work-based learning, emphasized in WIOA and the Governor’s goals, will be particularly useful in advancing workers in the region via apprenticeship-type strategies, incumbent worker training, and on-the-job training. Information technology skills are increasingly being desired across all sectors as automation becomes more prevalent in all industries. These skills will need to be incorporated in all sector-based training to prepare a workforce in the region. The pandemic has shown the strong need for workers to telework using digital skills to remain connected. Employers have also identified that customer service competency is needed across all sectors, making entry jobs in retail and hospitality a useful training ground for movement to other sectors.

1.4 Describe the regional service strategies aimed at achieving the vision and goals established for the region. [WIOA Sec. 106(c)(1)(B); 20 CFR 679.510(a)(1)(ii)]

Factors being considered include, but are not limited to:

- Broad-based, overarching sector and industry strategies, including an apprenticeship strategy;
- Coordination of services with regional economic development services and providers in the region;

- Any cooperative service delivery agreements that have been established for the region;
- How the region will connect targeted populations, especially youth and individuals with barriers to employment, to career services and training activities offered on a regional level, such as YouthBuild, Job Corps, and AmeriCorps programs. Data measuring the number of youth, and specifically opportunity youth, enrolled in these programs must be provided to support the narrative, as appropriate;
- How will regional business service strategies be employed, as well as, how coordination of these strategies will impact the operational level of services (i.e. local area Business Service Teams, or BST); and
- How the region will coordinate with secondary and post-secondary institutions (including programs authorized by the Perkins V Act) to align strategies, enhance services, and avoid duplication of services (include specific reference to adult education, community colleges and community education councils).

The Region identifies various strategies to help achieve each regional goal and ensure the Governor's goals are accomplished. Additionally, these strategies aim to maximize and leverage resources and increase coordination to develop a high-demand, skilled workforce which will support the needs of business and industry across the region. While some strategies may help achieve more than only one goal, the following breakdown helps identify how each goal will be met.

Regional Goal #1 Create and grow a competitive workforce by engaging knowledgeable, employer-focused leadership that promotes and advocates for business and industry to address the critical workforce challenges of the region.

- **Strategy 1.1:** Continue to build on employer-driven partnerships with industry in the region - This will be achieved by engaging employers to continuously analyze and identify the skills and occupational needs of targeted industry clusters and emerging industries as a focus toward developing a competitive workforce.
- **Strategy 1.2:** Develop a demand-driven implementation structure – Developing a cohesive and unified employer engagement strategy will bring industry and education, workforce, and economic development partners together and will build credibility over time. Demand-driven structures also tend to hold all partners accountable. The existing sector partnerships (described in Section F) can serve as a foundation and, with a concerted effort to engage and empower additional industry leaders, can realize greater impact. Industry partnerships of all types will work together on joint projects, identify opportunities to share information and best practices, and leverage resources as appropriate. Recommendations to re-energize and further evolve these existing partnerships include identifying and engaging industry champions, employing a peer-to-peer approach to elicit additional employer involvement, defining roles and responsibilities, drafting, and implementing a formalized action plan, adopting “strategic doing” practices, and replicating this approach with other industries.
- **Strategy 1.3:** Collapse and re-energize Education Advisory Committees – Educational providers can garner more effective and comprehensive feedback from employers by partnering with one another and forming regional sector oversight committees with one committee for each sector in each Local Workforce Area. This will allow the educational providers to obtain consistent feedback, exhibit its partnership to employers, and potentially engage additional employers because of the reduced time commitment. Furthermore, it will enhance coordination among educational partners along the educational spectrum (e.g., K-12, career and technical centers, community colleges, universities) to create more seamless career pathways. Additionally,

partners should focus on the most in-demand career pathways and identify opportunities to strengthen and streamline the pathways (e.g. merge competing but unfilled training programs).

- **Strategy 1.4:** Challenge employers to be specific about their needs for certifications, soft skills, hard skills, and other candidate qualities so the system may better match job seekers to jobs. Also, challenge them to consider diverse populations as an opportunity for employment.

Regional Goal #2 Continually enhance the workforce development pipeline by promoting high-demand industry sectors and occupations, career pathways, registered apprenticeships, work-based learning through targeted outreach.

- **Strategy 2.1:** Ensure workforce is a partner in career planning for every K-12 student – The region should aim to provide academic and career plans for all students by the 8th grade and update them on an annual basis in partnership with the regional school districts. Connect employers and education for the purpose of providing work-based learning and experiences for a more informed youth population of the regional job opportunities. This will enhance the spectrum of community-based, employer-based recruitment tool for local employers and youth including a mix of career understanding and core skills and technology in respective fields, industry connections, guest speakers, and site visits. The course could be designed in conjunction with local employers, providing opportunities for employer engagement.
- **Strategy 2.2:** Increase adult education and training opportunities – Expand the availability of short-term training on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) that will provide industry credentials toward employment in the region. This training will include increasing other training opportunities such as the High School Equivalency in partnership with the local Title II providers to increase the number of people that have achieved this milestone. Continue to support Perkins V and other Career and Technical Center (CTC) facilities for education and training as well as for remote lab space. Raise awareness of Registered Apprenticeship opportunities and benefits to students, dislocated workers, parents, educators, economic developers and the public. Explore and encourage short-term workforce training at local regional and community colleges that are based on the needs of regional employers. Apprenticeships are a priority focus area for our region. This is a component of the board’s goal of building more effective career pathways to targeted sector industries. Board staff regularly attend CTE Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment and Occupational Advisory Committee meetings along with LEAD team meetings with Economic Development and Business Representatives to provide details regarding services available through PA CareerLink® including pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship. Board staff and Title I staff have also presented to the Intermediate Units, as well as the principals and curriculum directors regarding services, including pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeships. Fliers and brochures created by ATO are being distributed at job fairs, open houses, and at various meetings held throughout the area.
- **Strategy 2.3:** Coordinate a regional career awareness campaign/outreach – Using the “High Priority Occupation List” as a starting point the region can engage employers in conversations about the most current industry trends and other career options such as registered apprenticeships for those hard to fill entry level positions. A regional awareness campaign should be developed and approved by each board to promote regional career opportunities widely, linking partner web sites, partner e-newsletters, and other publications. Furthermore, partners should organize professional development opportunities for teachers and guidance counselors to not only ensure they are aware of the HPO list, but also understand the jobs that are on it and the various career pathways for individuals to become prepared for those jobs. Additionally, cross-sector career development working groups could be created to coordinate career development activities among K-12, post-secondary education and training, workforce

system, and other community-based organizations including those that are serving diverse populations.

Regional Goal #3 Maintain a commitment to continuous improvement of the workforce development system by increasing data sharing across various WIOA and partner programs and enhancing partnerships.

- **Strategy 3.1:** Making informed decisions - This will be a basic principle at all levels of the system. PA CareerLink® staff, business and job seeker customers, program participants, one-stop operators, managers and mandated partners, Local Workforce Development Area (LWDA) administrators and staff, Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) board members, education and economic development agencies, local elected officials, contracted organizations, as well as other community partners, will be responsible for working toward the goal of responsible stewardship in their dealings related to the workforce development system.
- **Strategy 3.2:** Establishing aggressive communication - Communication is not a unidirectional movement but requires that all parties to engage respectfully in the interaction. The end product should be a result in the best interest of all parties involved although not necessarily the desired outcome of any one party of the interaction.
- **Strategy 3.3:** Promoting a culture of continuous quality improvement - Expediency, traditional bias toward a specific habitual approach or mere unwillingness to change in the face of diminished returns should not hinder the transformational processes undertaken to elevate the workforce system to higher levels of achievement. Keystone Edge Workforce Development Region will strive to meet or exceed all state-negotiated Common Measures performance standards.
- **Strategy 3.4:** Empower a convener – To address the region’s thirst for action, the region should identify, empower, and stand behind a convener to act as an intermediary among education and training providers, employers, and workforce and economic development partners. The role of the convener is paramount to the success of implementation of recommendations; the region is ready for a strong entity to lead the region to the next phase.
- **Strategy 3.5:** Select initial initiatives to build momentum – The initial action plan should prioritize a few key initiatives, allow partners to focus on initial small steps, and gain momentum. By focusing on a small set of initial priorities, the partners will be able to witness progress, gain credibility, and move forward to the next initiative. Funding streams from various resources should be explored to determine where alignment and braided funding is possible. Funds can be linked and leveraged for greater collective impact.
- **Strategy 3.6:** Leverage Youth campaigns like the *Industry Needs You* and Career Street – To Increase youth’s awareness of career pathways in manufacturing across the region using an online website. This campaign can also serve as a model to support non-manufacturing sector partnerships.
- **Strategy 3.7:** Embrace outreach as a theme for identifying Unemployment Compensation exhaustees, organizations with diverse and disengaged populations, and employers that are not engaged in the system. Proactive and personal outreach is what customers expect since the pandemic and is a model that is working.
- **Strategy 3.8:** Identify and implement virtual options for service delivery including e-signature options. Some vulnerable populations have a difficult time getting to the one-stop, virtual service delivery provides alternatives to serve customers efficiently and effectively. Provision of virtual platforms and equipment to partner staff and the utilization of supportive services for

the provision of devices to customers brings the two groups together for service delivery. Digital Literacy training is made available to those that need it.

- **Strategy 3.9:** Collaboratively develop a regional outreach campaign to engage those not currently working with the workforce system.

Regional Goal #4 Increase the alignment of education and training programs including various work-based learning options to meet employer demand.

- **Strategy 4.1:** Enhance workforce development services to meet employers' needs - This will be achieved through the implementation of innovative design and technology. This includes creating data-driven, innovative workforce strategies to: support regional economic competitiveness, engage employers, build career pathways, and increase work-based learning opportunities across the region.
- **Strategy 4.2:** Ensuring cooperative workforce development service delivery - This will be achieved via PA's workforce development system of record which serves as the primary database and system of record for numerous workforce development programs tracking and recording services, activities, and outcomes. The region uses data collected through PA's workforce development system of record to generate performance reports for programs. Regional efforts will be centered on aligning itself with statewide service delivery efforts.
- **Strategy 4.3:** Link and leverage resources – Build upon existing strengths and pockets of innovation by partnering with regional partners with similar goals and aligning existing services and resources. As partners begin planning together, they may identify gaps in services/resources, and pursue funding to support innovation. Linking the efforts could assist with grant funding requests, reflecting the unity of the region—minimizing competition within the region for similar funding opportunities and strengthening the competitiveness of those submitted.
- **Strategy 4.4:** Develop a strategy to support foundational skill development (basic skills and employability skills) - Many best practices exist in readiness, pre-apprenticeship, and contextualized remediation programs. Partners should explore additional ways to address this critical gap by leveraging existing partner resources, including Community Education Councils, Adult Basic Education, WIOA, and TANF funding. Particular focus should be given to those industries that provide the most opportunity for individuals to enter into and advance along career pathways. To help promote pre-apprenticeships, board staff and frontline staff continue discussions with the Career and Technical Centers, guidance counselors, and curriculum directors to provide detailed information and connections to ATO on how to utilize pre-apprenticeships as a career pathway and to help students graduate from high school. These meetings will continue into the new program year.
- **Strategy 4.5:** Implement an outreach campaign to education, parents, students, and diverse and disengaged populations about work-based learning, in-demand occupations, career pathways, the importance of education of all types including technical.

The two workforce development boards of the region embrace the ideas of collaboration and coordination of services in the region where possible. The framework presented in the Industry Partnerships model of the Commonwealth will be implemented as a means of achieving the regional goals related to employer engagement. The work begins with sharing employer contact information across all workforce development, economic development and educational partners so coordinated actions can be taken to address needs and opportunities that are identified. Employing the model in the broader region will help to facilitate economies of scale.

1.5 Describe the development and implementation of sector initiatives for in-demand industry sectors or occupations for the region. [WIOA Sec. 106(c)(1)(C); 20 CFR 679.510(a)(1)(iii)]

Expectation: The narrative response must capture any sector or industry initiatives, partnerships, next-generation sector partnerships and any other sector-based initiatives that support all or part of the region (including economic development partners).

Factors being considered include, but are not limited to:

- (Revised) The identity and description of key sector or industry initiatives, partnerships, next-generation sector partnerships, registered apprenticeship ecosystems, and any other sector-based initiatives that support all or part of the region;
- An explanation why the region targeted select sectors, partnerships and other initiatives; and
- A description of, and reasoning for, the current in-demand occupation(s) that are expected to change status as well as occupations that may change to become an in-demand occupation.

Manufacturing employers are participating in a few regional industry partnerships to maximize attraction to the industry:

The GR8T Manufacturing Industry Partnership in Northwest Pennsylvania is dedicated to bringing together employers from the Metals, Plastics, Electronics and Food Industries in order to improve our region’s manufacturing competitiveness. Through industry partnership, businesses fully understand that a better-educated workforce means a more competitive company and more competitive companies create a stronger economy. The industry partnership concept is not just about worker training; it is about constantly evaluating labor-market data and information to stay competitive on the local, state, national and global levels. It focuses on:

- Youth Development: Providing exposure of manufacturing careers to today’s youth
- Pipeline Development: Providing career pathways to today’s existing workforce
- Industry Advocacy: Providing a collective voice for regional manufacturers.

The action team focused on industry advocacy made great progress on their priority focus and announced at the beginning of 2021 the live date of their website initiative. This website focuses on connecting manufacturing companies in the 8 counties of the Keystone Edge Region for sourcing products and services, solving problems, and understanding capabilities available in the region.

The Erie Regional Manufacturer Partnership (ERMP) was self-formed in 2014 by a group of local manufacturers to develop and implement a plan that will result in the ability to identify, qualify, and recruit individuals for employment and training to meet the skilled workforce needs of regional manufacturers and to create greater opportunities for individuals in the community to enter into and advance along manufacturing career pathways. This grassroots effort is led by industry to collectively identify needs and champion solutions as it relates to developing a robust pipeline and producing a skilled workforce. The founding companies contributed \$6,000 each as seed funding to support the initial formation and coordination. The partnership continues to connect to additional supporters and envisions a more regional, demand-driven collaboration that also will include a variety of organizations—including other manufacturers, suppliers, education and training providers, workforce and economic development agencies, government and others interested in addressing manufacturing workforce issues.

The above initiatives point to some common occupational needs that include electrical/mechanical maintenance and machinists with mechanical and electrical knowledge. These skills are often acquired within career pathways where work-based learning approaches can move workers with production knowledge to higher skill levels within the sector. Thus, another identified need is attracting qualified production workers who can advance via on-the-job training and additional classroom training. This has led to the need to increase awareness of K-12 students and their parents about the opportunities available in manufacturing, including the pathways in career/technical education (CTE) that provide skills for immediate employment and for advanced training. WIOA, with its emphasis on work-based learning, provides an excellent opportunity to showcase advanced manufacturing and CTE programs as an affordable route to higher education and high-quality jobs.

Erie County Career Pathways Alliance hosted by Erie Together is three industry advisory groups that are working to develop career pathways and strategies to link youth to regional career opportunities. These groups started meeting with the Engineering and Industrial Technology group in 2018, Science and Health in 2019, and the Business Finance Insurance and Technology group in 2020. Erie Together is working with local school districts to share the information learned, incorporating Career Street to provide virtual and in-person tours and job shadow opportunities, and working with PA CareerLink® to identify out of school youth interested in a health-related field to support and train followed by interviews with ready to hire employers. This three-pronged approach links employers, educators, and workforce development with the ultimate goal of building the pipeline of workers for in demand occupations.

All groups are collaborating in a number of ways, including a focus on apprenticeships through the recently-completed American Apprenticeship Initiative (AAI) grant project as well as sharing best practices and exploring sustainability strategies. Additionally, the Advanced Materials and Diversified Manufacturing Industry Partnership (AMDMIP) of Mercer and Lawrence Counties continues to coordinate efforts across the state border with the Mahoning Valley Manufacturers Collaborative under the joint umbrella brand, Oh-Penn Manufacturing Collaborative. NWPA Job Connect was awarded the Apprenticeship Building America Grant opportunity that begins January 1, 2023 and ends March 31, 2026. National Tooling and Machining Association (NTMA) and Early Childhood Education will be providing the pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs during this timeframe.

Opportunities to build out sector partnership work is also being done. These initiatives provide the framework for skill and wage advancement within sector with employers as full partners in training curriculum and on-the-job training. The region's workforce development boards serve as focal points for cross-sector discussions with employers to identify common needs across all sectors and specific needs within sectors. In some cases, basic skills can be built in one sector with technical skills allowing for advancement in another sector.

1.6 Describe how the region will connect employer labor force requirements and occupational demands with the region's labor force, including individuals with barriers to employment.

Expectation: Regional plans must incorporate strategies that reflect local leaders and boards considering how to optimize the available opportunities and minimize the structural weakness presented by the current workforce system environment for the betterment of regional employers and the labor force.

The regional area may support the narrative by:

- (Revised) Including how the region will connect targeted populations, especially youth and individuals with barriers to employment, to in-demand occupations and Registered Apprenticeships;
- Including descriptions of when leaders, board members and stakeholders met and any subjects or resolutions that came to fruition; and
- Including summaries of any number of reports commissioned to research and determine recommended actions that are of concern to the local and regional workforce system leaders and stakeholders; examples include studies that indicate strategies and tactics that will increase the ability of employers to attract, hire and maintain regional labor force participants in gainful employment, or evaluations of best practices for serving the various classes of individuals with barriers to employment.

Note: While it is important that the drafters understand the data and connect the labor force requirements with occupational demands, it is also important to connect with actual employers who will verify that need.

Individuals with barriers to employment from targeted populations are connected to in-demand occupations throughout the region in various ways. Relationships with various community-based organizations (CBO) and agencies are fostered by the individual boards, Local Elected Officials, One-Stop Operator, and all partner staff. These relationships help the region to proactively identify individuals that need job services and work to enroll them into WIOA. The approach is to do proactive outreach to establish a relationship with the CBO and they make referrals. Some examples are referrals of individuals incarcerated in the County jail and prior to release individuals are enrolled in the Adult Literacy program to receive their high school equivalency if needed and in WIOA for services. Upon release the staff in the PA CareerLink® begins working to identify employment or training for this vulnerable population. In addition, the region is working with school districts and colleges to provide information to students that are failing or dropping out of school about the services of the PA CareerLink®. Another example is providing workstations that link individuals to staff virtually in the PA CareerLink® in locations where the disabled populations go for services such as Community Resources for Independence (CRI) or Voices for Independence (VFI).

Partners in the Keystone Edge Region have identified and formed innovative partnerships for multiple workforce development initiatives to connect targeted populations to in-demand occupations. The following, at a minimum, will form a solid base for continuing to expand the connections between job seekers and employers on a regional basis:

OUTREACH/PARTNERSHIP for Industry Sectors

- **Skills Gap Analysis** – Funded by the Northwest Commission, a regional economic development partner, this study is a good illustration of the strong collaboration that exists between workforce and economic development partners in the region. The analysis identified areas of economic opportunity and related industry and occupational demand as well as disconnects between skill needs and programming available. Much of this work is now being applied to inform the WIOA regional plan.
- **Oh-Penn Interstate Region** – Lawrence and Mercer Counties are part of the first interstate region in the nation, which was created in 2009. The designation of this region—and the relationships that were developed and strengthened as a result—created a platform that

continues to identify a common regional workforce and economic development agenda and successfully attract additional resources to support identified priorities and innovation. The Interstate Region most recently invited others to participate in what is now known as the Greater Oh-Penn Interstate Region (adding NW PA WDA and three additional counties in Ohio), to expand the footprint to a total of 14 counties through its American Apprenticeship Initiative Project and 11 counties through the recently-awarded Workforce Opportunities for Rural Communities (WORC) grant.

- **Strong Sector Partnerships** – As mentioned in section F below, the region boasts a number of sector partnerships in manufacturing and healthcare. The strong level of employer engagement in other formats has enabled the region to tackle workforce skills shortages on a number of fronts, including:
 - *Pipeline Development* – including IndustryNeedsYou.com, Industry Career Fairs, occupational videos as well as Guidance Counselor Boot Camps, Educator in the Workplace programs, etc. A recent Educational Partnership grant in Mercer and Lawrence Counties will support some of these activities moving forward.
 - *Career Pathways* – Through the Oh-Penn Workforce Innovation Fund grant, partners laid out a comprehensive career pathway model that depicts a progression of skill acquisition as related to wage progression and corresponding job titles. Grant staff worked with education and training providers to address programmatic gaps, incorporate industry-recognized credentials to validate skills, and improve curriculum. This work will continue under the American Apprenticeship Initiative grant, Workforce Opportunities for Rural Communities (WORC) grant, and continued efforts resulting from these investments.
- **American Apprenticeship Initiative (AAI)** – Through this six-year USDOL grant project, five sector partnerships worked with manufacturers to create new apprenticeship programs resulting in 300 apprentices across 14 counties. Continuation of Registered Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship promotion will continue through the Workforce Opportunities for Rural Communities (WORC) grant project as well as additional initiatives developed as a result of the work completed under this project.
- **Oh-Penn Manufacturing Readiness Program** – The Manufacturing Readiness Program (MRP) was designed to prepare individuals with the basic, fundamental competencies needed to enter into a manufacturing career pathway. The program combines “soft skills” training and contextualized remediation with four weeks of skill training, which includes OSHA-10 and Certified Production Technician critical production functions. Participants receive training in Safety, Manufacturing Processes and Production, Quality Practices and Measurement and Maintenance Awareness. In addition, each participant will also earn a WorkKeys National Career Readiness Credential. The program is now being updated and repurposed to act as a pre-apprenticeship program throughout the region as part of the AAI and WORC grants and additional partners are committed to leveraging funding to support the sustainability of the program.
- **Virtual/Mobile Service Delivery** – A strategy to increase outreach to targeted vulnerable populations by bringing services to customers through partnerships with community agencies. Services may be delivered in-person or virtually. Clients go to the location where they are most comfortable and meet with the virtual/mobile staff. This includes the implementation of new technology for electronic signatures, virtual meetings, and workshops to allow staff to connect with their clients. Community based agencies ensure the continued progress with a goal of gainful employment. Funding of mobile service delivery strategies is shared by WIOA Title I and the partnering service organizations. The transition to virtual service delivery was relatively easy

during the pandemic because of mobile service delivery. There were some additional software and hardware needs including VOIP, E-signature software, and supportive services to ensure the continuation of career services.

- **Career Street** – Career Street is a comprehensive program that helps Erie County youth consider their career interests, explore various careers, and understand what is necessary to pursue, obtain and maintain a career of interest. Manufacturers in the region found such value in the organized “speakers bureau” type approach that they included it as one of their initial three priorities and gained 100% participation by all 20 founding companies. The pandemic forced Career Street to go virtual. Services are available through virtual access provided to students at their school district. These services continue to be provided in Erie County and apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship are promoted as part of their general career pathways work. For the skilled trades unions they currently work with through the BEP grant, they promote the availability of apprenticeships through a directory they created, communications with school districts, and the experiences they are deploying for Erie County students and educators
- **Summer Youth Employment/Work Experience-** There are several initiatives that provide opportunities for youth to participate in the work world during the summer break. Collaboration among several groups is key to make this happen including, but not limited to Counties, Authorities, state, WDB, and supportive individuals who have recognized and are willing to address the lack of job readiness and employment opportunities for the disconnected youth population. The program connects youth with summer employment opportunities. Pre-apprenticeships are a type of work experience and will be discussed with youth participants. Connections have been made with the career and technical centers to discuss the career pathways from Pre-Apprenticeship to Apprenticeship. Discussions will continue throughout the new program year.
- **Erie Together** – Erie Together is a collaborative movement of hundreds of local individuals, organizations, and businesses working together in strategic ways to prevent and reduce poverty, elevate prosperity, and make the Erie region a community of opportunity where everyone can learn, work, and thrive. The collaborative effort includes Career Pathway development for 11 of the 13 school districts in Erie County. 3 Industry Advisory Roundtables that meet and discuss hard to fill positions and what skills they require. Finally, ET has been holding sessions with high school students and their parents to discuss local opportunities for employment. These sessions are live and recorded so that students may watch later. The sessions are industry specific, include career pathways that are being utilized by the school districts and include a panel of industry professionals to discuss how they got into their position. The board provides an overview of in-demand occupations and labor market information. There have been two Erie high school students who participated in a summer internship program, graduated from high school, and were then placed into a Registered Apprenticeship in the same industry, and have received WIOA funding for the apprenticeship training. The funding included ITA and OJT reimbursement along with supportive services for the participant.
- **The Tristate Energy and Advanced Manufacturing (TEAM) Consortium** – Partners in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, are committed to building a skilled workforce for the tri-state area to connect students and workers with education, training & in-demand jobs, to take advantage of the growing regional economy. Development projects such as Royal Dutch Shell’s \$6 billion ethane cracker plant in Monaca, PA, are taking shape, and bringing a surge of new investments to the region. TEAM was formed to respond to the need for a properly trained workforce for these industries and brings together partners from industry, higher education,

and workforce and economic development to build clear and accessible pathways to energy and manufacturing jobs in the region.

Board staff from the two boards meet on a regular basis to discuss opportunities to work together and connect individuals with barriers to employment to in demand occupations. This often occurs when there is a grant opportunity for individuals with barriers. A recent example is the submission and receipt of funding for the youth reentry grant which helps youth with a criminal record to train for skills to obtain high priority occupations.

Recent reports commissioned include a workforce needs assessment to identify ways to connect with individuals that are diverse, disadvantaged, or disabled and providing them the opportunity to connect with employers that have high priority occupations. The Americans with Disability Act and how to serve individuals with disabilities in public places.

In its WIOA state plan, Pennsylvania identified the goal of investing in talent and skills for targeted industries. The Commonwealth will use data and will work with employers to identify the skills and competencies necessary to attain family-sustaining employment and will offer high quality training to individuals to obtain those skills.

Career Pathways

A number of outreach efforts to educate the community regarding in-demand career pathways are being conducted throughout the Keystone Edge Region. The Youth Program and Youth Committee in Northwest Pennsylvania are increasing career awareness through efforts such as Industry Club, Industry Club Expo, and Career Camp as well as the development of a video for youth that highlights area industries, in an effort to educate youth on the various career opportunities available in the region. Through the Oh-Penn Workforce Innovation Fund grant, partners refreshed the Industry Needs You website, which includes a wealth of information regarding manufacturing career pathways to help guide career decisions. Additionally, there are multiple post-secondary efforts to align skills training with industry demand already underway across the region.

PA CareerLink®

The PA CareerLink® offices throughout the region maintain working relationships with organizations that provide services to individuals with barriers and targeted populations. Both local areas will designate points of contact within the PA CareerLink® Centers in their respective jurisdictions for specific targeted populations to facilitate and aggregate information regarding occupational demands and establish a network of advocates that may provide support to members of such targeted groups within the region. This may be a function of each board by way of a standing committee.

As with other regions of the state, as best regional practices are shared via the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association and with neighboring workforce areas in multiple directions, the Keystone Edge region is working diligently to maximize the collective impact of service partners for addressing the needs of both employers and job seekers. The identification of pockets of poverty in the region and of specific sub-populations with significant barriers to employment is leading to new levels of coordinated effort and new venues for coordination to occur. Several initiatives for joint action provide models for the region to build on, including the PREP collaboration called Engage! between the region and the neighboring area in Ohio and the Pittsburgh Works model for bringing service partners together to identify priority occupations and connect them with regional demand. The introduction of a new,

nationally-engaged, one-stop operator in the Northwest local area provides another opportunity to explore and implement best practices for service coordination.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship information is provided to job seekers through workshops, informational sessions, job fairs, and open houses. Specific RA job fairs have been held during the current program year and more are planned in the new program year. Employers and sponsors post open RA jobs on the PA CareerLink® website. The Title I provider utilizes OJT and ITA funding to reimburse the RA Sponsors, as well as provide supportive services to the apprentice. IWT and CJT funding is another avenue that can be pursued when applicable. See local plans for more specific information.

There are five (5) Registered Apprenticeships Sponsors in NWPA that are on the ETPL. Multiple employers are connected with each of these sponsors.

ATO has provided apprenticeship training to all staff, and they will be contacted for additional training as needed. Staff will attend training sessions and professional development days provided by ATO. The local ATR is beneficial for answering questions that arise from staff and/or employers/sponsors and will be included in the training sessions. Local Board staff reviews apprenticeship information on a regular basis and disseminates the information to the Title I provider and Title I Operator, who will then share with the Business Service Team.

Through the ABA Grant, which NWPA Job Connect was awarded, the following programs will be added or expanded over the next two-three years through NTMA and Early Childhood, which is connected to the sponsor 1199C. A new RAP for Robotics Tech/Mechatronics Tech through NTMA at Crawford County Career and Technical Center will start in January 2024. NTMA is looking to expand their Toolmaker/Mold Designer program as well as the Precisions Machining Pre-Apprenticeship program. The Drafting/Design Pre-Apprenticeship program is a new program that will be starting after January 2024. Venango Career and Technical Center provides a Machinist Pre-apprenticeship program through NTMA and they are looking to expand this program. Early Childhood is looking to start a CDA Apprenticeship program while expanding their Early Childhood Pre-Apprenticeship program.

1.7 Describe the coordination of transportation and other supportive services for the region. [WIOA Sec. 106(c)(1)(F); 20 CFR 679.510(a)(1)(vi)]

Expectation 1: The region must describe the role transportation plays in the relationship of the labor force and employment opportunities, display the commuting data such as inflow and outflow and other patterns, articulate available transportation modes' strengths and weaknesses, and indicate how the region may help bridge the transportation gap between labor force and employment locations. Describe transportation availability for workforce members who are unable to benefit from personal transportation.

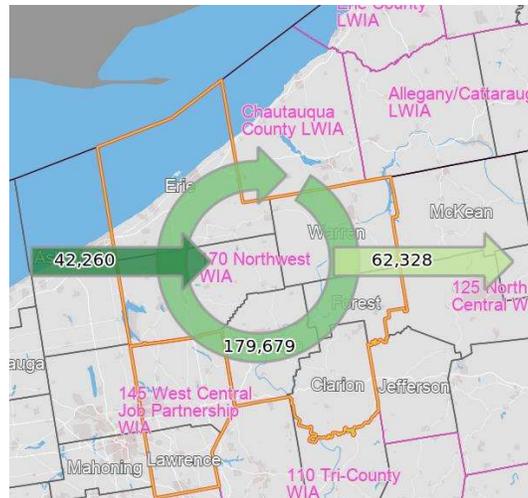
Expectation 2: The region must describe any regional and inter-governmental agreements that allows the coordination of identified regionwide supportive services and resources in such a manner as to permit customers to participate.

Workforce System guidance No. 02-2014 provided guidance to Pennsylvania’s local workforce development areas on how to evaluate their local areas. Capacity and access to public/private transportation resources was identified as a factor for consideration. Certain populations within the region are adversely affected due to transportation challenges. This has been identified as a barrier to employment for the poor, farmworkers, and youth workers, which limits their access to jobs, training, and supportive services. Public and mass transit options are minimal, and rarely cross county borders with very little funding to expand mass transit at this time. Currently there are few public transportation options to the east, west, and south in Erie County. Much of the region’s non-car transportation options provide access from the southern end of the region to and from Pittsburgh rather than to and from areas within the region. Supportive services are offered to job seekers working with the PA CareerLink® for bus passes and repair on personal transportation to get someone to and from work or training. Job seekers in the region most often need a driver’s license and access to a vehicle. In some cases, supportive services are utilized for preparation for a driver’s license.

The region includes Interstates 79, 80, 86, 90, and 376; however, gaps in transportation still exist for persons without reliable modes of personal transportation.

Improving the transportation system within the region is integral to improving the overall economic health and promoting both economic and workforce development opportunities. The two workforce boards along with the Local Development District which acts as the fiscal agent for the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) for the Northwest Partnerships for Regional Economic Performance (PREP) Region has convened a task group to address publicly funded mass transportation issues and to interact with transportation agencies throughout the eight counties—including PennDOT Districts 1, 10, and 11 —and other relevant parties. This group has begun to analyze and strategize on the problems and possible means for addressing linkage for both rural and high poverty areas with centers of mass employment such as retail outlets and concentrated industrial parks in order to facilitate transport bridging supply and demand. A consortium proposal for federal transportation funding from US Health and Human Services, Department of Transportation, and/or private foundations may be targeted to create busing route runs and schedules that are conducive to servicing individuals in entry level, first step pathway jobs.

The pandemic brought to light the need for additional regional coordination around provision of broadband connectivity, cellular coverage, and digital literacy resources to provide a pipeline of workers. Closures required new ways of providing education and training, job seeker services, and government programming to help the most vulnerable. The gaps in broadband service have and will continue to have a negative impact on the region, its businesses, and communities. The region continues to look at creative and efficient avenues to provide connectivity to as many parts of the region as possible.



(source US Bureau of Census, Center for Economic Studies, LEHD) CWIA, 1/26/21) for information above and the graphic)

The graphic above shows the net loss of talent on a daily basis for the region, including commuting both in and out of the bordering states of Ohio and New York. This provides an economic development opportunity, as a pool of talent exists that can be kept in the region if high-quality jobs are created or attracted. The recent pandemic has provided an opportunity for the attraction of remote work type jobs pushing people into more rural areas which may provide a new way to look for job growth in the region.

US Census estimates that of the 242,007 workers that live in the region, 179,679 also work in the region. The remaining 62,328 residents commute out of the region for work, normally toward Pittsburgh, but also across state borders toward Ohio/New York. NWPA is a net exporter of workers totaling 20,068. Workers that live in the region but work outside are employed primarily in Allegheny County (15,481, 6.4%), Butler County (7,844, 3.2%) and Beaver County (4,112, 1.7%). Of these commuters 27,589 or 44.3% earn more than \$3,333 per month. Many are working in Trade, Transportation, & Utilities (17,504, 28.1%) or Goods Producing (11,821, 19%) and the biggest category is “all other Services” with 33,003 (53%). Workers that live outside the Keystone Edge Region and commute in for work (42,260) are from Allegheny County (5,571, 2.5%), Butler County (4,250, 1.9%), and Trumbull County, Ohio (3,750, 1.9%). Over 221,939 workers are employed in the region. Reasons for the outflow must be studied but could be the lower cost of living and quality of life in the region attracts families to our areas while wages outside the area may remain higher for the same jobs. The pandemic may create more outbound commuters as employers consider options to have people work from home long-term.

1.8 Describe the region’s strategy to increase participation on the statewide eligible training provider list.

Expectation: Regional plans must articulate strategies to grow in number and improve the overall quality of eligible training provider participation in the statewide eligible training provider list.

The region has provided information sessions with training providers annually to help them navigate the ETPL process and reaches out to training providers when a job seeker is looking for training that is not on the ETPL with little result or change in the number of training providers on the list. In

addition, working with economic development, chambers of commerce, Erie Together, and other employer groups we have spread the word about the purpose of the ETPL and the need to engage in the process of adding valued training providers.

Going forward the region will establish a task force made up of board staff responsible for ETPL, front-line staff, board members, employers with hard to fill positions, and training providers to discuss the ETPL and how to increase the number of providers on the list. The feedback will be utilized to recruit appropriate courses to the list and to share with the state the reasons that providers do not put their training on the list.

1.9 Describe how the region established administrative cost arrangements, including the pooling of funds for administrative costs, as appropriate, for the region. [WIOA Sec. 106(c)(1)(E); 20 CFR 679.510(a)(1)(v)]

Expectation: The narrative must provide a description of the regional activities (e.g. regional planning), how much activities were determined and what funds will be used to pay for those activities. The narrative must include the entity that will serve as the fiscal agent. Finally, the description must include how such regional cost arrangements will be handled for the region, including administrative costs, as appropriate.

The region has created a process to define and establish administrative cost arrangements on a case-by-case basis as it relates to joint/shared grants or other initiatives. The Northwest and West Central Boards, in agreement with their respective Chief Elected Officials, will designate individuals to negotiate and obtain the required approvals to establish a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that defines cost arrangements for ongoing collaborative activities as well as ad hoc projects that will institute a framework based upon need, scope of work, and benefits received. This may include ongoing shared functions such as monitoring and/or planning, as well as provisions for emerging regional projects.

The two workforce boards of the region have a successful history of collaboration in joint planning and implementation, both within the region and with neighboring workforce areas outside the region when needed. This typically occurs as partnerships are developed for application and receipt of competitive grants that involve multiple local workforce areas. A fiscal agent is identified by mutual agreement of partnering workforce boards during the process, based on activities that will be supported by the funds. The West Central Job Partnership, Inc. currently serves as fiscal agent for the Youth Reentry Grant.

In all cases of joint work and/or pooling of funds, state and federal rules for cost allocation will be followed with allowable methods based on Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) of the Office of Management and Budget circulars and guidance.

1.10 Describe the agreement between the local boards that describes how the planning region will collectively negotiate and reach agreement with L&I on local levels of performance for, and report on, the performance accountability measures described in section 116(c), for each of the local areas within the planning region. [WIOA Sec. 106(c)(1)(H); 20 CFR 679.510(a)(1)(viii)]

Expectation: WIOA sec. 107(d)(9) requires that local areas negotiate performance and 20 CFR § 679.510(a)(1)(viii) requires an agreement between local boards and chief elected officials for how a planning region will collectively negotiate and reach agreement with the governor on local levels of

performance for, and report on, the performance accountability measures as required by WIOA sec. 116(c)(1)(H) and §679.510(a)(1)(viii). The representatives of each local area in a planning region are collectively responsible for the process. The narrative in the local area plan must provide a description similar to the agreement reached between the local boards and chief elected officials. The answer may simply be that each local area will negotiate individually with the state.

Each local area will negotiate individually with the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry for performance.