

# Northwest PA Workforce Planning Region

## PY 2025-2028 WIOA Regional Plan

Effective July 1, 2025



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

## 1.1 Identification of the region

The region is identified as the Northwest PA Workforce Planning Region (hereinafter referred to in the plan as “the region”). It is comprised of the Northwest Pennsylvania Workforce Development Area (NW 170) governed by the Northwest Pennsylvania Workforce Development Board (NWPB WDB) d.b.a. NWPB Job Connect, and the West Central Workforce Development Area (NW 145) governed by the West Central Pennsylvania Workforce Development Board (WCPB WDB) d.b.a. West Central Job Partnership (WCJP). The local elected officials of each workforce area share governance authority with the workforce development boards they appoint.

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 for PY 2025-2028 are:

### Northwest

Lisa Miller (NWPB Job Connect)  
Susan Richmond (NWPB Job Connect)  
Deb O’Neil (NWPB Job Connect)  
Jill Foys (Northwest Commission)  
Jim Decker (Warren County Chamber)  
Kerri DeChurch (BWPO-Region)

### West Central

Gregg Dogan (West Central Job Partnership)  
Rebecca Moder (West Central Job Partnership)  
Tammy Barbati (West Central Job Partnership)  
Kristy DeJoy (First National Bank of PA)  
Chelle Fuss (Mercer County Adult Literacy)  
Lisa Campbell (Butler County Community College)

To develop the WIOA plan for the Region, the Planning Committee met virtually on December 10, 2024 and collaborated electronically throughout the planning process. Staff from the Northwest PA Workforce Planning region regularly participated in meetings that informed the Regional Plan in whole or in part. Further detail on the process for development and public comment period of the WIOA Regional Plan may be found in section 1.11. The effective date for the 2025 – 2028 Northwest PA Regional Workforce WIOA Plan and respective Northwest PA and West Central PA 2025 – 2028 WIOA Local Plans is July, 1 2025.

Some of these meetings are captured below:

- Northwest PREP Meetings (Monthly July 2022 – December 2024)
- What’s So Cool About Manufacturing Meetings
- Advisory Committee Meetings (October 4, 2024)
- Erie County Career Pathways Alliance Art & Communication Advisory Group (October 4<sup>th</sup>, November 13, 2024)
- NW Region ECE Apprenticeship & Spring HS/CTC Dual Enrollment (October 30, 2024)
- Perkins Stakeholder Meeting – CCCTC (July 18, 2024)

As a continuation of the Regional Planning Committee, individuals from each of the WDAs Board Staff, Fiscal Agents, Operators and WIOA Title I providers meet regularly to discuss regional matters. Topics include Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship models, Incumbent Worker Training, TANF and WIOA funding for Youth-focused Paid Work Experience and Internships, and other policies and procedures.

## 1.2 Regional Analysis - Based on the analysis of the regional labor market and economic conditions, describe the region's workforce and economic development-oriented vision and goals. Describe the collection and analysis of regional labor market data (in conjunction with the Commonwealth).

### Overview

The Northwest PA Workforce Planning 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 is home to 681,395 citizens based on 2022 data, with a 2023 Average Annual labor force of 307,500. Our largest industry cluster is Health Care with 53,690 employees with an average wage of \$52,770.50. The second largest industry cluster is Advanced Manufacturing with 39,542 employed with an average wage of \$65,502.00.

### DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

#### Population

The population in the Northwest Planning Region is estimated to have slightly decreased from 684,791 in 2020 to 684,293 in 2022. This is a decline of 498 people or .07% decrease. Pennsylvania's population is projected to grow by only 62,300 (0.5 percent) from 2022 to 2032. While the decrease in the region's population is not overly significant, we must continue to identify and target individuals with barriers to employment so they can be trained to fill job vacancies created by retirements and skill gaps.

#### Youth

The region's youth population (0-24 years) is 27.45% with 8.925% in the 18-24 age range, while the approaching retirement population (55-74 years) is 26.28%. 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 in racial breakdown is 89.5% White Alone, 4.69% Black or African American Alone, 2.55% Hispanic Origin and 5.8% is other. Pennsylvania's population is more diverse than the region: 77.1% White; 10.8% Black or African American; 8.1% Hispanic Origin; 12.1% other races. 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

Approximately 50% of the working age population (ages 18 and older) in the Northwest PA Workforce Planning Region hold a high school diploma or less as compared to the state which has 42.5%. Over one in four (27%) have some college or an associate's degree, which is slightly higher than the state

percentage of 26.1%. Approximately 23% of the population holds a bachelor's degree or higher, which is slightly less than PA's rate of 31%.

## Employment

The 2022 Annual Average Labor Force in the Northwest PA Workforce Planning Region is 307,500. In the region there are 7,000 people who are 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 nor actively seeking work. This population may include early retirees, individuals who are incarcerated, stay at home parents, and those receiving social security disability to name a few. To fill open positions, it is important for the region to develop methods to help individuals overcome barriers to employment. Efforts will continue to make the population aware of the needs of employers, including registered apprenticeship opportunities for training.

| Depth of Labor Pool    | NW PA Workforce Planning Region | Pennsylvania |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------|
| Population             | 684,293                         | 12,989,208   |
| <18, >65               | 279,930                         | 5,098,967    |
| Available to Work      | 404,363                         | 7,890,241    |
| Employed               | 288,400                         | 6,176,600    |
| Not employed           | 115,963                         | 1,713,641    |
| On Unemployment        | 13,300                          | 264,100      |
| Not seeking employment | 102,663                         | 1,449,541    |

*Source: Center for Workforce Information & Analysis*

In the region, the Long-Term Occupational Employment Projections (2022-2032) show the most employment in Protective, Food, Building & Personal Service occupations with employment of 48,310, an annual demand of 8,279, and an anticipated 2032 employment of 50,260. The next highest is in Healthcare Practitioners, Technicians & Support with employment of 36,660, an annual demand of 4,015, and projected employment of 39,000 in 2032. Office & Administrative Support is the third highest employment at 33,740 with an annual demand of 3,814 and an anticipated 2032 employment of 33,720. Production projects 28,410 people employed in 2032 with annual openings of 2,914. The region will focus efforts on promoting 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, efforts will be made to focus on positions that provide the beginning of a career path in protective, food, building and 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 find employment at all. When looking at the Poverty and Labor Force Data (Ages 16 and older) in the region, an average of 12.6% of families are living in poverty. Pennsylvania's average poverty rate is 10.7%. Some areas in our region are close to the commonwealth's rate, while other areas are above the average rate. We must continue outreach efforts to provide equity and inclusion along with offering alternative training options such as work based learning and registered apprenticeships. These options help 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 Northwest PA Planning Region in 2023 was 4.0%, with a labor force of 307,500. When looking at 2024, the unemployment rate started at 3.5%, went up to 4% in May, and then dropped below 4% through the end of August.

| Annual Average Labor Force Statistics, Keystone Edge Region, 2023      |             |          |            |                   |
|--|-------------|----------|------------|-------------------|
| Annual Average   | Labor Force | Employed | Unemployed | Unemployment Rate |
| 2023   | 307,500     | 295,500  | 12,000     | 4.0               |
| Seasonally Adjusted Labor Force Statistics, Keystone Edge Region, 2024 |             |          |            |                   |
| Month  | Labor Force | Employed | Unemployed | Unemployment Rate |
| January  | 307,900     | 297,000  | 10,900     | 3.5               |
| February   | 307,900     | 297,000  | 10,900     | 3.6               |
| March  | 309,500     | 299,100  | 10,300     | 3.4               |
| April  | 310,800     | 299,900  | 10,800     | 3.6               |
| May  | 309,800     | 297,600  | 12,100     | 4.0               |
| June   | 304,900     | 293,700  | 11,300     | 3.8               |
| July   | 306,300     | 295,300  | 10,800     | 3.7               |
| August   | 302,200     | 290,600  | 11,600     | 3.9               |

Source: Center for Workforce Information & Analysis, LUAS

### Key Industry Clusters

High location quotients (LQs) indicate industry clusters in which a region has high concentrations of employment compared to the national average. The industry clusters with the largest IQs in the Northwest PA Workforce Planning Region include Advanced Manufacturing, Health Care, Wood, Wood Products, and Publishing, and Agriculture Food Production.

| Industry Cluster Statistics for Northwest WDA   |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Combined Data for: Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango and Warren Counties |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
|   | AFP         | AM          | BC          | BM          | BSV         | ED          | ENG         | HC          | HLE         | LT          | REFI        | WWP         |
| 2023 Employment   | 9491        | 39542       | 16738       | 623         | 14283       | 24044       | 5207        | 53690       | 28804       | 6807        | 11231       | 4177        |
| Percent WDA Employment  | 3.85%       | 14.90%      | 6.85%       | 0.20%       | 5.45%       | 9.45%       | 1.90%       | 20.25%      | 11.00%      | 2.75%       | 4.25%       | 1.65%       |
| Employment Growth (2018-2023)   | 978         | -1608       | 611         | -312        | -2667       | -1339       | -1176       | -1760       | -1742       | -305        | -771        | -5543       |
| Percent Growth (2018-2023)  | 16.65%      | -4.25%      | 4.20%       | -23.25%     | -19.05%     | -4.25%      | -20.80%     | -5.05%      | -5.30%      | -6.20%      | -8.10%      | -10.85%     |
| 2023 Average Wage   | \$49,111.00 | \$65,502.00 | \$57,830.50 | \$76,500.50 | \$60,245.00 | \$51,136.00 | \$94,129.50 | \$52,770.50 | \$19,628.00 | \$60,367.50 | \$78,119.50 | \$47,193.00 |
| 2023 National Location Quotient   | 1.05        | 2.075       | 0.965       | 0.15        | 0.425       | 1.025       | 0.97        | 1.32        | 0.925       | 0.61        | 0.765       | 1.33        |

Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages

### Existing and Emerging In-demand Sectors and Occupations

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 2022-2032, the total employment in the Northwest PA Workforce Planning Region is projected to increase by 1.3% or 3, 660. The greatest volume increase is in Information at 12.8% while Manufacturing has the greatest decrease at 1.6% or 720 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. Regarding Long Term Industry Projections from 2022-2032, the total employment in the region is projected to increase by 1.25% or 3,660, which is a lower rate than the state. Information shows the highest projected increase at 12.8% with Professional and Business Services coming in second with a 7.2% projected increase. Manufacturing is still showing a decline by 1.6% or 720 jobs.

Looking at long-term Occupational Projections provide insight into employment needs and provides an opportunity to ensure qualified candidates are trained to meet employment demand. Total Regional Employment is set to increase from 285,460 in 2022 to 289,120 in 2032. Occupations related to Healthcare Practitioners; Technicians & Support are projected to experience the greatest growth (4,015). Production and Sales & Related are showing the greatest decreases in demand by 2032, losing 6,197 jobs in the region.

**Long-Term Industry Projections for Northwest PA Planning Region (2022-32)**

| Industry                             | Employment (2022) | Projected Employment (2032) | Employment Change (2022-32) |         |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------|
|                                      |                   |                             | Volume                      | Percent |
| Total Jobs                           | 285,460           | 289,120                     | 3,660                       | 1.3%    |
| Goods Producing Industries           | 60,400            | 56,550                      | -850                        | -6.4%   |
| Agriculture, Mining & Logging        | 6,110             | 6,040                       | -70                         | -1.2%   |
| Construction                         | 9,410             | 9,350                       | -60                         | -0.6%   |
| Manufacturing                        | 44,890            | 44,170                      | -720                        | -1.6%   |
| Services-Providing                   | 207,410           | 212,400                     | 4,990                       | 2.4%    |
| Trade, Transportation & Utilities    | 46,290            | 46,000                      | 290                         | 0.6%    |
| Information                          | 390               | 440                         | 50                          | 12.8%   |
| Financial Activities                 | 11,000            | 11,290                      | 290                         | 2.6%    |
| Professional & Business Services     | 16,730            | 17,930                      | 1,200                       | 7.2%    |
| Education & Health Services          | 72,680            | 75,660                      | 2,980                       | 4.1%    |
| Leisure & Hospitality                | 26,390            | 27,180                      | 790                         | 3.0%    |
| Other Services, Except Public Admin. | 14,150            | 14,150                      | 0                           | 0.0%    |
| Federal, State & Local Government    | 18,260            | 18,200                      | -60                         | -0.3%   |
| Self-Employed Workers                | 17,650            | 17,170                      | -480                        | -2.7%   |

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

### Long-Term Occupational Projections for Northwest Planning Region (2022-32)

| Occupational Title                              | Employment (2022) | Projected Employment (2032) | Employment Change (2022-32) |         | Annual Demand |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------|---------------|
|   |                   |                             | Volume                      | Percent |               |
| Total, All Occupations                          | 285,460           | 289,120                     | 3,660                       | 1.3%    | 32,917        |
| Management, Business & Finance                  | 26,550            | 27,050                      | 500                         | 1.9%    | 2,154         |
| Computer, Engineering & Science                 | 8,660             | 8,870                       | 210                         | 2.4%    | 608           |
| Education, Legal, Social Service, Arts & Media  | 27,950            | 28,270                      | 320                         | 1.1%    | 2,435         |
| Healthcare Practitioners, Technicians & Support | 36,660            | 39,000                      | 2,340                       | 6.4%    | 4,015         |
| Protective, Food, Building & Personal Service   | 49,310            | 50,260                      | 950                         | 1.9%    | 8,279         |
| Sales & Related                                 | 24,070            | 23,700                      | -370                        | -1.5%   | 3,283         |
| Office & Administrative Support                 | 33,830            | 33,720                      | -110                        | -0.3%   | 3,814         |
| Farming, Fishing & Forestry                     | 3,770             | 3,730                       | -40                         | -1.1%   | 543           |
| Construction & Extraction                       | 10,920            | 10,880                      | -40                         | -0.4%   | 921           |
| Installation, Maintenance & Repair              | 11,680            | 11,740                      | 110                         | 0.9%    | 1,018         |
| Production                                      | 29,050            | 28,410                      | -640                        | -2.2%   | 2,914         |
| Transportation & Material Moving                | 23,030            | 23,460                      | 430                         | 1.9%    | 2,938         |

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

| Educational Grouping       | Employment (2022) | Projected Employment (2032) | Percent Change (2022-32) |
|----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| On-the-job training        | 157,810           | 159,130                     | 0.8%                     |
| Long-term training         | 10,770            | 10,760                      | 0.9%                     |
| PS education or experience | 48,960            | 49,500                      | 1.1%                     |
| Associate degree           | 5,480             | 5,690                       | 3.8%                     |
| Bachelor's degree          | 51,210            | 52,320                      | 2.2%                     |
| Advanced degree            | 11,230            | 11,720                      | 4.4%                     |

Source: Employment Growth Rates by Educational Attainment Level, CWIA

| Employment Growth Rates by Educational Attainment Level for the Northwest Planning Region |                   |                             |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| Educational Grouping  | Employment (2022) | Projected Employment (2032) |
| Advanced degree   | 11,230            | 11,720                      |
| Bachelor's degree   | 51,210            | 52,320                      |

|                            |         |         |
|----------------------------|---------|---------|
| Associate degree           | 5,480   | 5,690   |
| PS education or experience | 48,960  | 49,500  |
| Long-term training         | 10,770  | 10,760  |
| Moderate-term OJT          | 47,830  | 47,770  |
| Short-term OJT             | 109,990 | 111,350 |

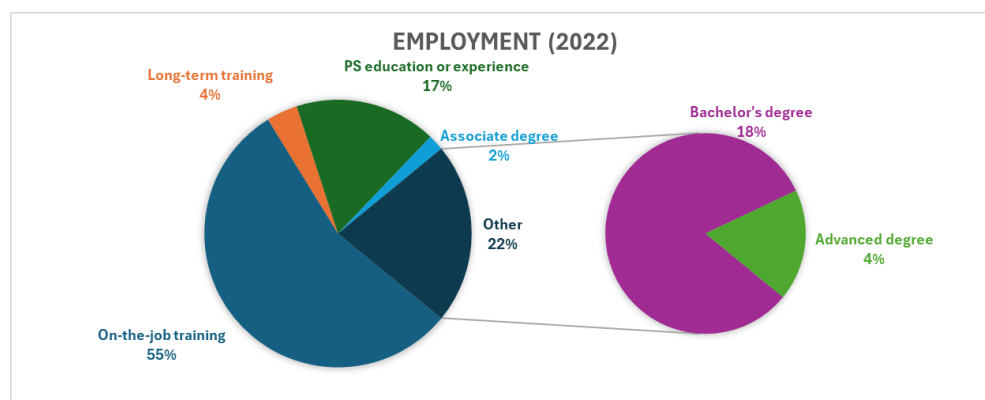
Source: Educational Distribution by Educational Attainment Level, CWIA

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 (IDOL) that meet the definition of Opportunity Occupations.

To assist in defining 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 rate (4.4%). The highest employment numbers are in on-the-job training but is growing at the lowest rate (.8%).

**Supply:** In looking at the population education attainment, more than 50% of the population have their highest level of education as high school or less; 25% have some college or associate's degree, 24% have a bachelor's degree or higher. Regional outreach is important to increase the number of high school completers and life-long learners in the areas where there is employment demand.

**Demand:** When comparing the supply to the demand for educated workers and skilled workers there is a gap. More than 50% of the training needed is on-the-job training. Most regional employers are looking for employees who 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 to define roles and responsibilities to meet the needs of regional employers.



Source: Educational Distribution by Educational Level, CWIA

In reviewing 2022 Employment Distribution by Educational Level in the region, 59% 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, 18% require a bachelor's degree, and 4% require an advanced degree.



### Educational Attainment Of Working Age Population (Ages 25 and older) by County

| County                                   | Total          | Less than High School Graduate | High School Graduate (incl Equivalency) | Some college of associate's degree | Bachelor's degree or higher |
|--|----------------|--------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Clarion                                  | 25,480         | 2,323                          | 11,833                                  | 5,528                              | 5,796                       |
| Crawford                                 | 58,926         | 5,515                          | 27,952                                  | 13,327                             | 12,132                      |
| Erie                                     | 186,684        | 13,972                         | 69,704                                  | 47,810                             | 55,198                      |
| Forest                                   | 5,716          | 812                            | 3,043                                   | 1,199                              | 662                         |
| Lawrence                                 | 61,794         | 4,966                          | 26,438                                  | 16,773                             | 13,617                      |
| Mercer                                   | 78,929         | 7,493                          | 32,261                                  | 20,154                             | 19,021                      |
| Venango                                  | 37,461         | 3,460                          | 17,364                                  | 9,374                              | 7,263                       |
| Warren                                   | 28,337         | 1,781                          | 13,108                                  | 8,078                              | 5,370                       |
| <b>Northwest Planning Region Totals:</b> | <b>483,327</b> | <b>40,322</b>                  | <b>201,703</b>                          | <b>122,243</b>                     | <b>119,059</b>              |

Source: Workforce Educational Attainment Levels, CWIA

According to the Online Job Postings Dashboard from CWIA, the top occupations by Job Postings in our region include Home Health & Personal Care Aides, Registered Nurses, Phlebotomists, Dieticians & Nutritionists, Food Service Managers, Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, & Mental Health Counselors, Maintenance and Repair Workers, Retail Salespersons, and Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Drivers. The top baseline skills include Quality Control, Customer Service, Communication, Problem Solving, Operations, and Management. The top certifications are Valid Driver's License, Registered Nurse, Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), Commercial Driver's License (CDL), Nurse Practitioner, and Advanced Cardiovascular Life Support (ACLS). These certificates show an increased need for medical personnel. The demand for these certificates will be monitored in the region to ensure we do not flood the market if there are any changes.

#### KEY SECTORS

The following sectors account for the largest number of jobs with family-sustaining wages in the region.

Source: L-T Industry and Occupational Projections for NW PA Region

#### Health Services

- Accounts for 20% of the region's workforce and it is projected to increase by 7% by 2032.
- Registered Practical Nurse, Nurse Assistant, Nurse Practitioner, and Registered Nurses are top certifications in the region.
- Provides higher paying occupations.
- Working on Registered Apprenticeship programs in the healthcare industry.

#### Advanced Manufacturing

- Accounts for 15% of regional employment.
- Expected to show employment declines equating to approximately 720 jobs.
- Most entry level occupations require a high school diploma or equivalent.
- Registered Apprenticeships are part of the advanced manufacturing industry.

- Manufacturing has a great economic impact on the region and accounts for the majority of the area's exports.

The labor market of the Northwest Planning Region offers opportunities for employment in a diverse economy where Health Care, Professional & Business Services, and Leisure & Hospitality are increasing over the next decade. While Manufacturing is projected to decrease, it remains a major industry in the area due to higher wages, retirements, and achievable education requirements with employer participation. Leisure & Hospitality sectors provide an adequate supply of jobs with expected growth for entry-level workers where work ethic and job experiences 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, is useful in advancing workers in the region via apprenticeship type strategies, incumbent worker training, and on-the-job training. Information technology skills are desired across all sectors as automation is prevalent in all industries. These skills will need to be incorporated in all sector-based training to prepare the region's workforce. Customer service competency is also needed across all sectors, making entry jobs in retail and hospitality a useful training ground for movement to other sectors.

### 1.3 Regional Strategy- Based on the analysis of regional labor market and economic conditions, describe the regional service delivery strategies for addressing the identified conditions through the coordination of appropriate services in the region.

Northwest PA Workforce Planning Region 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 Northwest PA Workforce Planning Region regularly collaborates with regional partners to ensure workforce plans and policies complement the economic strategy of the region.

Investments in workforce preparation, skills 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 six 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 six focus areas to improve Pennsylvania's workforce; improve 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 Northwest PA Workforce Planning Region identifies four 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 Sector Strategies and Employer Engagement by engaging employers and industry clusters through innovative strategies to improve the connection and responsiveness of workforce programs and services to labor market demand, including recruiting, training, and retaining talent. Also, it aligns with the goal of Addressing Workforce Shortages in Critical Industries by prioritizing investment in industries that are critical to economic prosperity in the region.

**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 Apprenticeship and Technical Education and Youth by developing comprehensive career pathways and apprenticeship, increasing work-based learning opportunities for youth, and coordinating these efforts with Career and Technical Education centers.

**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 identify and 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 various work-based learning options to meet employer demands**

- Aligns with the Governor’s goals of improving career pathways, apprenticeships, work-based learning opportunities, and engaging employers and industry clusters to help close skill gaps, including addressing workforce shortages in critical industries.

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, and facilitate the pipeline for Pennsylvanians seeking to locate or relocate themselves in jobs. A top priority for the Northwest PA Workforce Planning 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 of apprenticeships helping to grow the traditional and non-traditional apprenticeships in the Northwest PA Workforce Planning Region. Frontline staff working with employers will share their successes with the economic developers during Business Services meetings each month.

The Northwest PA Workforce Planning 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 sector in the region for both the number of jobs and wage levels, but the growth is declining. The other two industry sectors that are showing growth in our region are Agriculture, Food Production, and Building and Construction. The

region is experiencing overall population decline, which adds pressure on increasing the labor force participation rate and the skill levels of the population. Long-term training options may include Registered Apprenticeships in traditional and non-traditional industries; incumbent worker training; and other options.

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 (8) 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 relations 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 allows 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 relocate to this region. Furthermore, the partnership has utilized social media promotion and virtual platforms to enhance customer services.

## 1.4 Describe the regional service strategies aimed at achieving the vision and goals established for the region.

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 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 allows 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, and 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 8<sup>th</sup> 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 enhances 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. This 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 provides industry credentials towards employment in our region. This training includes increasing other training opportunities such as High School Equivalency in partnership with Title II providers to increase the number of people who achieve 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 apprenticeships. 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 apprenticeship. Fliers and brochures created by ATO are distributed at job fairs, open houses, and at various meetings held throughout the area.
- **Strategy 2.3:** Coordinate a regional career awareness initiative/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 the hard to fill entry level positions. Continue to promote career opportunities, link partner websites, partner e-newsletters, and other publications. Continue discussions with teachers and school counselors to ensure their awareness of the HPO list and how those jobs connect to the various career pathways.

**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 is 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, are responsible for working towards the goal of responsible stewardship in their dealings related to the workforce development system.
- **Strategy 3.2:** Establishing proactive communication is not a unidirectional movement but requires all parties to engage respectfully during interactions. 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. Northwest PA Workforce Planning Region strives to meet or exceed all state-negotiated Common Measures Performance standards.
- **Strategy 3.4:** Select initial initiatives to build momentum- The initial action plan will prioritize a few key initiatives, allow partners to focus on initial small steps, and gain momentum. Focusing on a small set of initial priorities allows the partners to witness progress, gain credibility, and move forward to the next initiative. Funding streams from various resources are explored to determine alignments and braiding of funds if possible. Funds can be linked and leveraged for greater collective impact.
- **Strategy 3.5:** Leverage Youth Campaigns to serve as models to increase youth’s awareness of career pathways for manufacturing and non-manufacturing industries.
- **Strategy 3.6:** Embrace outreach as a theme for identifying Unemployment Compensation exhaustees, organizations with diverse and disengaged populations, and employers who are not engaged in the system. Customers expect proactive and personal outreach.
- **Strategy 3.7:** Identify and implement virtual options for service delivery to include e-signature options. Some vulnerable populations have difficulty in getting to a one-stop.

Virtual service delivery provides alternatives to serve customers efficiently and effectively. The 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. Continue to provide digital literacy training.

- **Strategy 3.8:** Continue sharing information throughout the region about PA CareerLink® services to appeal to hard-to-engage populations, such as re-entrants, immigrants, veterans, older individuals, and youth. Promote virtual and mobile service delivery to meet these individuals where it is optimal and appropriate for them.

**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 is 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 is 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 are centered on aligning itself with statewide service delivery efforts.
- **Strategy 4.3:** Link and leverage resources- Partner with regional partners with similar goals to align existing services and resources. 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 and minimizing competition within the region for similar funding opportunities and strengthening the competitiveness of the submitted requests.
- **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, including Community Education Councils, Adult Basic Education, WIOA, and TANF, need to continue collaborating to explore ways to address the critical gaps, leverage resources, and focus on industries that provide the most opportunity for individuals to enter and advance along career pathways. Career and Technical Centers, school counselors, and curriculum directors are helping to promote pre-apprenticeships as this is a career pathway that can help students graduate from high school.
- **Strategy 4.5:** Continue to outreach to education, parents, students, and diverse and disengaged populations about work-based learning, in-demand occupations, career pathways, and the importance of all types of education including technical education.

The two workforce development boards of the region embrace collaboration and coordination of services where possible. The framework presented in the Industry Partnerships model of the Commonwealth was implemented as a means of achieving the regional goals related to employer engagement. Employer contact information was shared across all workforce development, economic development, and educational partners to better coordinate actions to address identified needs and opportunities.

## 1.5 Describe the development and implementation of sector initiatives for in-demand industry sectors or occupations for the region.

As the Region's second largest industry sector, 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, Plastic, Electronics, and Food Industries to improve our region's manufacturing competitiveness. Through industry partnership, businesses fully understand that a better-educated workforce means a more competitive company. More competitive companies create a stronger economy. The industry partnership concept includes worker training and constant evaluation of labor market data and information to stay competitive at the local, state, national, and global levels. It focuses on:

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

The website that went live in 2021 focuses on connecting manufacturing companies in the eight counties of the Northwest PA Workforce Planning Region for sourcing products and services, problem solving, and understanding capabilities available in the region.

**The Lawrence Mercer Manufacturers Coalition (LMMC)** in the West Central WDA is a collaborative of local Manufacturers seeking to establish a coalition to effectively identify challenges and opportunities, share ideas and collectively develop solutions to address priority needs, particularly in workforce development. The group's goals include: 1) support the launch of the LMMC, 2) initiate its main priority - informing individuals of the rewarding and appealing jobs and career pathways in manufacturing, and 3) equip future workers with skills necessary to enter and advance their manufacturing career. Specific emphasis on Youth (up to age 24) as the talent pool with greatest potential (and longevity) to attract into manufacturing.

**The Erie Regional Manufacturing Partnership (ERMP)** serves small and mid-sized manufacturers throughout 13 counties in northwest and north central Pennsylvania. They have implemented the WorkAdvance Program. This program addresses the gap of finding talent, especially for entry-level positions by coupling short-term foundational workplace and technical skills training with employment, career coaching, and on-the-job training.

**Erie County Career Pathways Alliance** hosted by Erie Together convenes five industry advisory groups to advise a collection of Erie County school districts, post-secondary providers and workforce developers on expected skills and knowledge in the industry, employment trends, making programmatic improvements to meet workforce needs, building relationships within the industry, and connecting students in the workplace.

### Expanding Apprenticeship in Key Sectors

All groups are collaborating in a number of ways, including a focus on apprenticeships. NWP Job Connect was awarded the Apprenticeship Building America Grant opportunity that began January 1, 2023 and ends March 31, 2026. National Tooling and Machining Association (NTMA) and Early Connections (Childcare Education) are providing pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs for this grant.



Opportunities to build out sector partnership work are also being considered. These initiatives provide the framework for skill and wage advancement within sectors 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.

Other in-demand industry sector partnerships, outside of manufacturing, are actively encouraged by the workforce development partners, with a strong emphasis on grassroots, employer-driven models. Employers are positioned at the forefront to identify workforce needs, set strategic priorities, and drive partnership activities. In turn, workforce development entities provide support by convening relevant stakeholders, offering technical assistance, and facilitating access to funding. This bottom-up approach ensures that the partnerships remain tightly aligned with actual industry requirements, leading to more sustainable and responsive solutions that benefit both businesses and the broader community.

## 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.

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 proactively identify individuals who need job services and work to enroll them into WIOA. The approach is to proactively establish relationships with the CBO and they, in turn, make the referrals. Some examples are referrals of individuals incarcerated in the county jail and prior to release are enrolled in the Adult Literacy program to receive their high school equivalency, if needed, and may also be enrolled in WIOA for services. Upon release, the staff in the PA CareerLink® begin working to identify employment or training opportunities for this vulnerable population. Also, the region works with school districts and colleges to provide PA CareerLink® services information to all students, but especially those who are failing or dropping out of school. ADA accessible workstations have been placed in locations where individuals with disabilities can be virtually linked to staff to receive services. Some locations include Community Resources for Independence (CRI) and Voices for Independence (VFI).

Partners in the Northwest PA Workforce Planning 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, has formed a solid base for continuous expansion of connecting job seekers and employers at a regional level:

### **Outreach & Collaboration for Industry Sectors**

- **Skills Gap Analysis** -Funded by the Northwest Commission, a regional economic development partner, this study illustrates the strong collaboration 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.

- **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 attracts additional resources to support identified priorities and innovation. The Interstate Region recently expanded the footprint to a total of 14 counties through its American Apprenticeship Initiative Project and 11 counties through the Workforce Opportunities for Rural Communities (WORC) grant.
- **Strong Sector Partnerships-** 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. The Educational Partnership grant in Lawrence and Mercer Counties is supporting some of these activities.
  - **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 continues under the American Apprenticeship Initiative Grant, Workforce Opportunities for Rural Communities (WORC) grant.
- **Virtual/Mobile Service Delivery-** A strategy to increase outreach to targeted vulnerable populations by bringing services to customers through partnerships with community agencies. Services are delivered in-person and virtually. Clients choose the location where they are most comfortable to meet with the virtual/mobile staff. New technology was implemented for electronic signatures, virtual meetings, and workshops to allow staff to better connect with their clients. Community based agencies ensure 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. Mobile service delivery allowed for an easier transition to virtual service delivery during the pandemic. Additional software and hardware needs included VOIP, E-signature software, and supportive services to ensure the continuation of career services.
- **Career Street-** Career Street facilitates and helps execute career exploration experiences and provides informational resources for K-12 students aligned with PA Career Education and Work Standards and Future Ready PA and informed by High Priority Occupation and PA In-Demand Occupation data and local employer input. Experiences include classroom speakers, worksite tours, employer panels, career days and fairs, job shadows, and more. Career Street has facilitated more than 52,000 student experiences since its launch in 2014.
- **Summer Youth Employment/Work Experiences-** There are several initiatives that provide opportunities for youth to participate in the work world during summer break. Collaboration with counties, authorities, state, WDB, other local agencies, school districts, and CTEs, is vital to better connect students to employment opportunities along with the job readiness training. Pre-apprenticeships, as a type of work experience, continue to be discussed and showcased.
- **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 for 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. Three (3) Industry Advisory Roundtables are held to discuss the skills required for hard to fill positions. Erie Together also holds sessions with high school students and their parents to discuss local employment opportunities. These sessions are live and recorded. The sessions are industry specific, include career pathways and are utilized by the school districts. Industry professionals discuss how they got into their positions. The workforce boards provide an overview of in-demand occupations and labor market information. There were two Erie high school students who participated in a summer internship program, graduated from high school, and then went into the Registered Apprenticeship in that field. WIOA funding was utilized through ITA and OJT funding.

Board staff from the two boards meet regularly to discuss opportunities to work together and connect individuals with barriers to employment to in-demand occupations. When grant opportunities arise to serve individuals with barriers, discussions are held.

In its WIOA state plan, Pennsylvania identified a goal of addressing workforce shortages in critical industries. The Commonwealth aims to promote employer engagement, enhance access to career-focused education and training programs, and establish robust partnerships between employers, educational institutions, and community organizations. This includes connecting with veterans and underrepresented populations, increasing the number of apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship opportunities, and providing targeted outreach in the different industries.

### **Career Pathways**

Many outreach efforts to educate the community regarding in-demand career pathways were conducted throughout the Northwest PA Workforce Planning Region. The Youth Program and Youth Committee in Northwest Pennsylvania continue to increase career awareness through efforts such as Industry Club, Industry Club Expo, and Career Camp as well as the videos highlighting area industries. 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 have designated points of contact with 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 who may provide support to members of such targeted groups within the region.

As with other regions of the state, as best practices are shared via the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association (PWDA) and with neighboring workforce areas in multiple directions, the Northwest PA Workforce Planning Region is working diligently to maximize the collective impact of service partners for addressing both employers and job seekers' needs. 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 efforts 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 Pittsburgh Works model for bringing service partners together to identify priority occupations and connect them with regional demand. With a

nationally engaged one-stop Operator in the Northwest area, there is more 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 in the past and are still an option. Employers and sponsors post open RA jobs on the PA CareerLink® website. The Title I provider utilizes OJT and ITA funding to reimburse RA Sponsors, as well as provide supportive services to the apprentice. Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) and Customized Job Training (CWT) funding are other avenues to pursue when applicable. See local plans for more specific information.

There are numerous Registered Apprenticeship Sponsors in the Northwest PA Workforce Planning Region that are on the ETPL. Multiple employers are connected to these sponsors. ATO provides training to all staff as needed. Staff have attended training sessions and professional development days provided by ATO. The local ATR answers questions that arise from staff, employers, and sponsors. Local Board staff reviews apprenticeship information on a regular basis and disseminate the information to the Title I provider and Operator, who then shares it with the Business Services Team.

Through the ABA grant, which NWPA Job Connect was awarded, the following programs were added or will be expanded between now and March 2026. NTMA added a Registered Apprenticeship for Robotics Tech/Mechatronics Tech through Crawford County Tech in January 2024. They want to expand their Toolmaker/Mold Designer program as well as the Precisions Machining Pre-Apprenticeship program. Drafting/Design Pre-Apprenticeship, which is a new program, started in 2024. Venango Career and Technical Center provides a Machinist Pre-apprenticeship program through NTMA, and this program is also expanding. Early Connections, which is connected to the sponsor 1199C, started a CDA Apprenticeship program while expanding their Early Childhood Pre-Apprenticeship program. This program is on the ETPL.

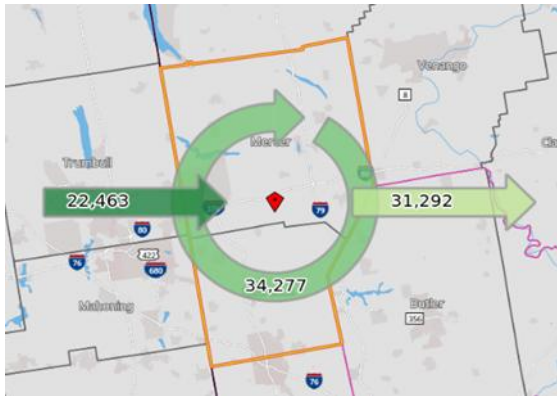
## **1.7 Describe the coordination of transportation and other supportive services for the region.**

Certain populations within the region are adversely affected due to transportation challenges. This identified barrier to employment impacts 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. There are a few public transportation options to the east, west, and south in Erie County. Most 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 repairs 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. Supportive services are also used to prepare for a driver's license.

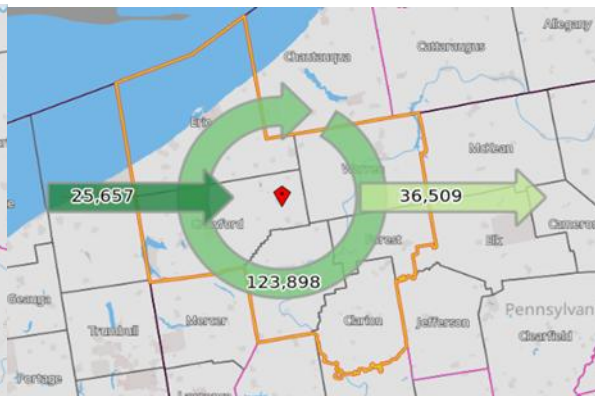
The region includes Interstates 79, 80, 86, 90 and 376. However, gaps in transportation still exist for persons without reliable modes of personal transportation. Improving the transportation system within the region is integral to improving the overall economic health and promoting both economic and workforce development opportunities.

The region continues its work on the provision of broadband connectivity, cellular coverage, and digital literacy resources to provide a pipeline of workers, which came to light during the pandemic. We had to find new ways to provide education and training, job seeker services, and government programming to help the most vulnerable. Gaps in broadband service negatively impact the businesses and communities in our region.

West Central

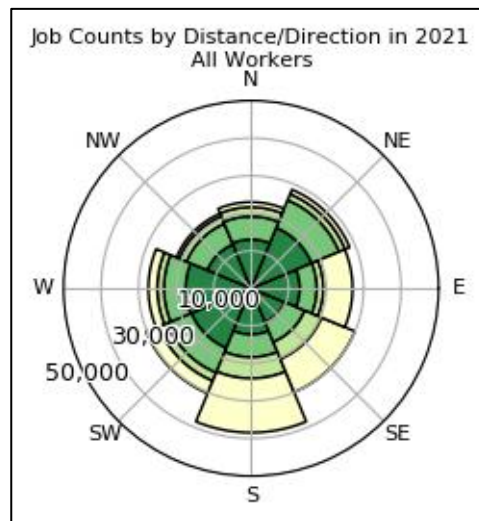
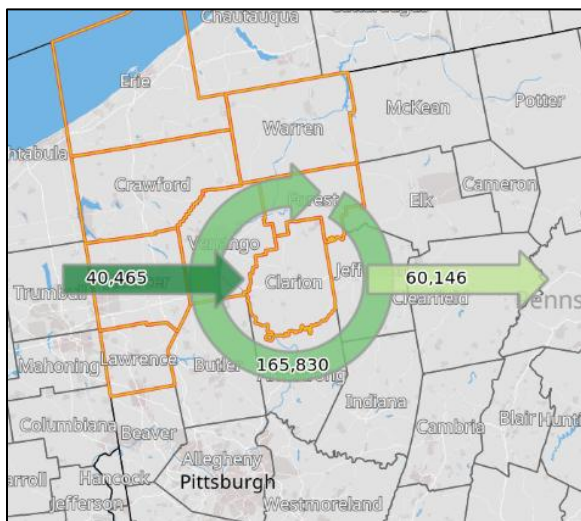


Northwest WDA

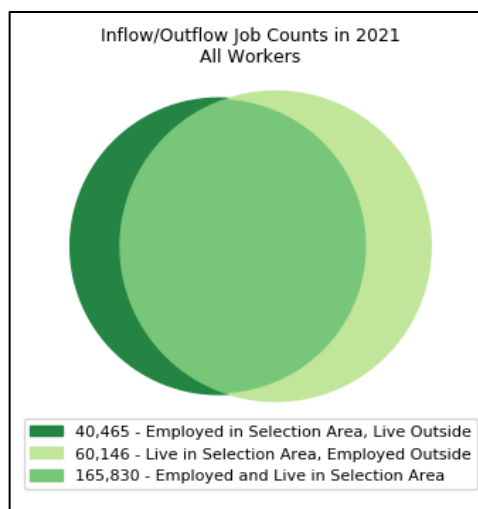
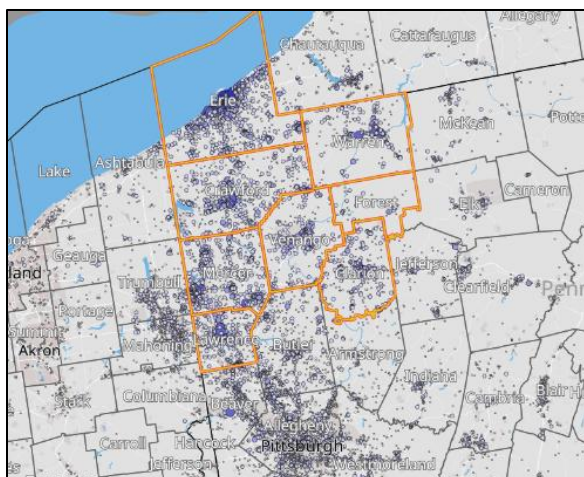


Source: Inflow/Outflow, CWIA

The graphics below show the Inflow/Outflow of Private Primary Jobs in the Region in 2021. The net loss of talent for the region includes those commuting both in and out of the bordering states of Ohio and New York. This provides an economic opportunity, as a pool of talent exists that can be kept in the region if high-quality jobs are created or attracted.



Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, Center for Economic Studie, LEHD, CWIA



Source: U.S. Bureau of Census

U.S. Census estimates that of the 225,976 workers who live in the region, 165,830 (73.4%) also work in the region. The remaining 60,146 (26.6%) commute out of the region for work, normally toward Pittsburgh and also across state borders to Ohio and New York.

There are 40,465 workers who live outside the Northwest PA Workforce Planning Region and commute in for work. Reasons for the outflow must be studied but it could be the lower cost of living and quality of life in the region that attracts families to our area while wages outside the area may remain higher for the same jobs. Both bordering states have minimum wage standards that are significantly higher than Pennsylvania's \$7.25 an hour, with Ohio at \$10.45 and New York at \$15.00. Every state contiguous to Pennsylvania has adopted a minimum wage higher than the federal minimum, which has not been raised since July 2009.

## 1.8 Describe the region's strategy to increase engagement on 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 continue the discussions about ETPL and how to increase the number of providers and/or programs 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.

Annually, the Draft High Priority Occupation (HPO) lists are finalized and distributed to the Workforce Development Boards. The taskforce staff will review the lists for the Northwest and West Central Workforce Development Areas. This review will include analysis of New Additions and Drop-offs, as



well as current programs on the ETPL. Informed by year-round, ongoing discussions and meetings with Employers, Education & Training Providers, and Economic Development and other community-based partners, taskforce members will discuss any gaps in evolving training needs in the Region related to changing occupations and employer needs (e.g., participating in Economic Development meetings with new and prospective businesses). This will include a focus on career pathways that provide high ROI, like stackable credentials, pre-Apprenticeship and Apprenticeship related, and short-term credentials with minimal time between achievement and employment. To that end, each area individually maintains a process for monitoring provider rate of placement, performance and quality, ensuring that ETPL programs and workforce investments are aligned with local and regional labor market needs.

## 1.9 Describe how the region established administrative cost arrangements, including the pooling of funds for administrative costs, as appropriate, for the region.

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 and 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.

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 seton 116(c), for each of the local areas within the planning region.

Each local area will negotiate performance individually with the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry in accordance with established procedures. However, all local areas also recognize the value of collaboration and regularly share data, best practices, and labor market information to foster consistency and enhance outcomes across the region. This approach respects each local area's unique circumstances

and workforce needs while leveraging the benefits of collective learning and coordinated problem-solving.

### 1.11 Describe the region’s process to ensure the public (including representatives of business, labor organizations, and education) had 30 days to review and comment on the contents of the proposed Regional Plan, and subsequent modifications, if applicable, prior to Commonwealth submission.

The 2025-2028 Northwest PA Workforce Regional WIOA Plan and Northwest PA and West Central PA Local WIOA Plans were developed in collaboration with the Regional committee members identified in 1.1.

The 2025-2028 Northwest PA Workforce Planning Region WIOA Regional Plan was posted on WCJP’s website at [www.wcjp.org](http://www.wcjp.org) on May 23, 2025. Notification was sent to BWPO, LEOs, WDWDB members, standing Youth Committee members, current contractors, PA CareerLink® partners and stakeholders, and WCJP staff as notice the plan was posted to the website for review and comment. Comments will be accepted electronically to [rmoder@wcjp.org](mailto:rmoder@wcjp.org) until 4:30 PM EST on June 23, 2025.

Feedback from the public comment period is carefully reviewed by the WCWDB Training, Performance & Planning Committee. Particular attention is given to comments from representatives of businesses, education institutions, and labor organizations, in accordance with WIOA requirements, but input from all stakeholders is equally valued. This inclusive approach ensures that the final plan is comprehensive, addressing workforce challenges and opportunities across all sectors.

#### ***Public Comments and Responses***

**[SECTION RESERVED FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS AND RESPONSES]**