

**PY2025-2028**

**NORTHWEST PENNSYLVANIA**

**WIOA LOCAL PLAN**

*Effective July 1, 2025*



## INTRODUCTION

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires local workforce development boards (LWDBs) to develop and submit, in partnership with the Chief Local Elected Officials (CLEOs), a comprehensive four-year Regional and Local Plan to the Governor. These plans support the vision, goals, and strategy described in the Governor's Combined WIOA State Plan.

The Regional and Local Plans are effective July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2029 (Program Years 2025-2028). This local plan is submitted by the Northwest Workforce Development Area (NW 170), governed by the Northwest Pennsylvania Workforce Development Board (d.b.a. NWPA Job Connect). This plan seeks to focus on current and future strategies that address workforce shifts, developing new skills, and upskilling current employees. These strategies will help fill the gaps of those who are retiring while creating avenues for new hires. The plan emphasizes the increased use of technology to connect individuals with barriers to employment to services. Focus continues on creating a more customer-centered system where the needs of business and jobseekers drive workforce solutions. The plan centers around supporting strong regional economies and aligning local initiatives with state priorities. This plan is based on the current and projected needs of jobseekers, youth, and businesses.

WIOA strengthened the alignment of the workforce development system's six (6) core programs with unified strategic planning requirements, common performance accountability measures, and requirements governing the one stop delivery system. This placed increased emphasis on the coordination and collaboration at the federal, state, and local levels to ensure a streamlined and coordinated service delivery system.

To accomplish the WIOA objectives and the Local Plan guidance, NWPA Job Connect, in consultation with the CLEOs, has incorporated input from a variety of partners and stakeholders. This Local Plan is designed to ensure that a comprehensive, aligned, and integrated workforce development system is in place to ensure the opportunities to develop an increasingly skilled workforce to meet employers' demands, workers' career goals, and the needs of the evolving economy, along with providing targeted services to those with barriers to employment.

### 1. STRATEGIC PLANNING: Local Area Workforce and Economic Analysis

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

*Expectation: Provide a full workforce analysis of the region. Narrative must include a reference name for the region and the local area plan's effective date. Data must be provided to support narrative as appropriate.*

*The analysis must include:*

- *A focus on the local area's population, age distribution, educational attainment levels, and skill levels of the workforce.*



- *The identification of individuals with barriers to employment based upon WIOA Sec. 3(24) and employment status; the identification of labor market trends in each of these areas, and explain why some groups are harder or easier to serve;*
- *Current labor force employment and unemployment data*
- *Include an analysis of the commuting inflow-outflow patterns of the area's population and workforce.*

The Northwest Workforce Development Area is comprised of Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Venango, and Warren counties in Northwest Pennsylvania. Overall, it is home to 487,786 citizens with a labor force of 220,500. According to the Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS), the Northwest WDA's average (2023) employment numbers equal 212, 000 with 8,500 unemployed. The following five sectors have the highest number of employed workers with a majority showing a decrease in growth.

Sector	# Employed Workers	Average Wage	Percentage Growth
Health Care	39,929	\$54,466	-.9%
Advanced Manufacturing	29,454	\$62,639	-3.5%
Hospitality, Leisure, Entertainment	21,161	\$19,661	-6.1%
Education	17,392	\$51,570	-6.1%
Building & Construction	11,250	\$54,435	+3%

*Source: Industry Cluster Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, CWIA*

Of the twelve (12) industry clusters, only two (2) show increased growth in our area – Agriculture & Food Production and Building & Construction. All others show a decrease with the biggest decrease in Biomedical (36%) followed by Energy (16%).

The Northwest continues to see an aging workforce as the 65 year and older age category has steadily increased in all six (6) counties, while there is a decrease in the 35–49-year-old category. The 50–64-year-old category is approximately the same in all six (6) counties. The 20–34-year-old category shows increases in Warren and Forest Counties and decreases in Clarion and Crawford Counties. In Venango and Erie counties, that age demographic is holding steady. In 2023, the median age in the Northwest was 44.65.

Regarding race and ethnicity, most of the Northwest's current year estimated population is White Alone (89.3%), Black or African American Alone (4.7%), Hispanic (2.9%), and other (6.1%). The number of households in the Northwest has decreased from 202,430 in 2020 to 196,849 in 2022. The average household income has also decreased from \$49,856 to \$45,229.

For individuals ages five (5) years and older in the region, 1.5% speak English less than “very well.” In Crawford County, this percentage is 2.2% and Erie County has the largest percentage at 2.4%. This barrier is discussed later in the plan.

The educational status of the region is 50% of the population has a high school diploma or less. Approximately 23% of the area's adult population has a bachelor's degree or higher and 27% of the adult population possesses an associate degree.

The Northwest LWDA shows a high rate of residents commuting outside of the area for employment. In 2021, 36,509 residents (22.8%) commuted out of the area for work while 25,657 individuals (17.2%) traveled into the region for work. Both the inflow and outflow of commuters have slightly increased since 2019.

One of the larger barriers we need to address is providing services to individuals with a disability. In the Northwest area, 40.4% of those employed have a disability, while 11.4% of those unemployed have a disability. There is a slight increase in the number employed who have a disability and a slight decrease in the unemployed who have a disability.

Poverty is another barrier that impacts individuals in the region. Unemployment and underemployment are often two of the contributing factors to poverty. In the Northwest local area, 49,506 (13.3%) of individuals ages 16 and older are living in poverty. The status of employment for these residents is that 15,042 of them are employed, 3,704 are unemployed, and 30,760 do not participate in the labor force. This equals a 16.2% unemployment rate and a 35% labor force participation rate for those 16 years and older who are below the poverty level. The number of single-family households in the region decreased from 37% to 33.6%.

To address these challenges, the LWDB continues to explore ways to integrate basic education and expand occupational skills training and work-based learning to provide more opportunities for individuals, especially those with barriers to employment, to enhance their skills and find long-term employment with family-sustaining wages. The LWDB also continues to focus on career pathways development in schools.

*How are some groups easier or harder to serve?*

Having the right resources makes it easier to serve job seekers, especially those with barriers. Mobile and Virtual Service Delivery models used in the local area make it easier to serve many of the individuals with barriers to access employment and/or education and receive other services. Each PA CareerLink® site is equipped to be ADA compliant for those with mobility and dexterity limitations. Ubiduo and Propio resources are available to assist those with barriers related to communication.

Transportation is a barrier for those living in rural communities. Supportive service funding is available for eligible individuals to assist with transportation for work and educational reasons, along with referrals to community partners who may be able to assist with this and other barriers. NWPA Job Connect has been engaged in Erie Together stakeholder engagement sessions about addressing workforce transportation needs in the region. This group continues to meet to explore options. In July

2023, CATA Go began in Titusville (Crawford County). This is an on-demand service that offers flexibility, convenience, and more pick-up/drop-off locations closer to your destination. Discussions are occurring with CATA (Crawford Area Transportation Authority) to replicate this pilot program in downtown Meadville.

Childcare is another barrier the LWDB is addressing. Through the Apprenticeship Building America (ABA) grant, NWPA Job Connect has been focusing on increasing the number of childcare providers and workers in the region. The LWDB staff, Early Connections, Title I and the Apprenticeship and Training Office (ATO) continue to collaborate on creating and expanding Registered Apprenticeship (RA) and Pre-Apprenticeship (Pre-RA) opportunities centered around earning childcare credentials in addition to recruiting participants for careers in childcare. Work on this initiative is expected to continue through June 30, 2026, and supply the local workforce ecosystem with additional childcare providers to meet the needs of local employees.

Efforts like the stakeholder meetings and training program expansion efforts are used to help address barriers that impact all industries and those individuals with barriers to employment.

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

*Expectation: Narrative must describe and analyze labor market data to articulate the local area's economic conditions and employers' employment needs. The response should highlight any existing or planned industry initiatives, partnerships, and other sector-based initiatives that support all or part of the area.*

*Factors being considered, but are not limited to:*

- *Identifying existing and emerging in-demand industry sector(s)*
- *Recognizing existing and emerging in-demand occupations*
- *Providing data describing the industry location quotients (LQ) of the local area*
- *Describing employer' needs in in-demand industry sectors and occupations*
- *Highlighting key local industry initiatives, partnerships, registered apprenticeships, and any other sector-based initiatives; and*
- *Explaining factors the area considered when targeting select sectors, partnerships, and other initiatives.*

The in-demand industry sectors for the Northwest workforce development area showing growth between 2022-2032 include Financial Activities (3.5%); Professional and Business Services (7.2%); Education & Health Services (4.0%); and Leisure & Hospitality (3.1%).

As of 2023, Advanced Manufacturing occupations show the highest location quotient (2.00). The Northwest has a high concentration of individuals employed in this field, but a higher percentage are employed in healthcare. The second highest location quotient is in Wood and Wood Production at 1.39. Healthcare comes in third with its location quotient at 1.28. All three (3) of these industries show decreased growth from 2018-2023. It is imperative for the workforce board to stay engaged with employers to ensure a skilled workforce is in place while helping them manage these declines.

To better understand the local area's emerging workforce needs, it is important to consider information from different angles, which include employment growth by volume, percent, and the largest annual demand. Employment growth by volume includes traditional occupations with a large employment base and a consistent need for employees. Employment growth by percent change are emerging occupations. The occupations with the largest annual demand are primarily entry-level jobs requiring regular replacement of workers and do not pay family-sustaining wages.

Fastest Growing Occupations in Northwest WDA (2022-32)		
By Volume Change:	By Percent Change: (min. employment of 500)	By Annual Demand:
Occupational Title	Occupational Title	Occupational Title
Home Health & Personal Care Aides	Bus Drivers, School	Home Health & Personal Care Aides
Fast Food & Counter Workers	Medical Secretaries	Fast Food & Counter Workers
Registered Nurses	Subst. Abuse, Behavioral Disorder & MH Counselors	Cashiers
Bus Drivers, School	Medical & Health Services Managers	Retail Salespersons
Nursing Assistants	Packaging & Filling Machine Operators	Waiters & Waitresses
Subst. Abuse, Behavioral Disorder & MH Counselors	Electrical, Electronic, & Electromechanical Assemblers	Office Clerks, General
Janitors & Cleaners	Home Health & Personal Care Aides	Janitors & Cleaners
Office Clerks, General	Receptionists & Information Clerks	Customer Service Representatives
Waiters & Waitresses	Insurance Claims & Policy Processing Clerks	Laborers & Freight, Stock & Material Movers
Licensed Practical & Licensed Vocational Nurses	Medical Assistants	Stockers & Order Fillers
Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	Packers & Packagers, Hand	Nursing Assistants
Receptionists & Information Clerks	Social & Human Service Assistants	Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers
Medical Secretaries	Child, Family & School Social Workers	General & Operations Managers
Laborers & Freight, Stock & Material Movers	Licensed Practical & Licensed Vocational Nurses	Misc. Assemblers & Fabricators
Farmworkers & Laborers, Crop, Nursery & Greenhouse	Software Developers	Secretaries
Physical Therapists	Computer User Support Specialists	Cooks, Restaurant
Landscaping & Groundskeeping Workers	Cooks, Fast Food	Bartenders
Social & Human Service Assistants	Hosts & Hostesses: Restaurant, Lounge & Coffee Shop	Registered Nurses
Electrical, Electronic, & Electromechanical Assemblers	Registered Nurses	Childcare Workers
Supervisors - Office & Admin Support Workers	Nursing Assistants	Bookkeeping, Accounting & Auditing Clerks

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

Refer to section 1.3 for more information regarding the top common skills by projected employment and demand.

The LWDB uses this data when reviewing the High Priority Occupation (HPO) lists and training programs for the local ETPL. Both Title I and the Business Service Team (BST) will focus on the data when developing future workshops and programming for customers, including work experience and transitional job opportunities for youth and adults.

Locally, employers have a challenging time attracting competent workers. This situation has forced the region to find creative ways to connect to those who have removed themselves from the workforce. Work based learning and Registered Apprenticeships (RAs) provide opportunities for disengaged individuals to participate in employment that offers family sustaining wages by eliminating the need for post-secondary education while developing skills. The LWDB has expanded the use of registered apprenticeships as part of the board's business/employer engagement strategy.

The ABA grant supports the expansion and creation of Pre-apprenticeship and registered apprenticeship programs in manufacturing and early childhood. Currently, two (2) Title I staff are Registered Apprenticeship (RA) Navigators. These individuals, along with other Title I staff and BST members, continue to support employers with new and existing RA and Pre-RA programs via discussions, events, job fairs and open houses, along with information and guidance provided by the Apprenticeship Training Office (ATO). Members of the LWDB staff are members of the Pennsylvania Workforce Board Apprenticeship & Career and Technical Education Committee.

The LWDB plays the convening role around RAs and Pre-RAs through regular communication at board and committee meetings and continued discussions with Industry Partnerships, Media, Educators (Intermediate Units, CTCs, School counselors, Curriculum Directors), non-profit organizations, employers, economic developers, and the public (parents and students) about the advantages of RAs and pre-RAs. The region prepares Op-Ed and social media releases to highlight RAs to raise awareness of the benefits of work-based learning. The LWDB celebrated National Apprenticeship Week with special events, press releases, and social media blasts.

The LWDB continues to collaborate with key sector, industry initiatives and partnerships in the region including industry groups such as National Tooling and Manufacturing Association (NTMA), Early Connections (childcare), NWIRC, the Clarion Regional Healthcare Consortium, UPMC, and the Career and Technology Centers (CTCs) who actively promote in-demand occupations, high schools who are pursuing pre-apprenticeships as a recognized pathway to graduation, and the Keystone Community Education Council who convenes industry partners to design and execute on new apprenticeships in the region. Additional information on Keystone Community Education Council is noted in section 2.1.

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

*Expectation: Narrative must provide a skill gap analysis by identifying skills gaps existing between local area's employers' needs and existing local area workforce qualifications.*

*The local area may support the narrative by:*

- *Highlighting specific local skill gap challenges or factors unique to your local area (e.g., outdated skills or skills exceed job demand, lack of training programs for in-demand skills) while focusing on specific talent (knowledge or skills) believed to be needed by employers in the local area.*
- *Speaking to employability skills, as well as hard skills- while considering the focus on serving individuals with a barrier (or multiple barriers) to employment, and*
- *Identifying the certifications, degrees, or fields of study most in-demand in the local area.*

An analysis of skills gaps begins with a look at current and projected skills demanded by employers in the region and the local workforce development area. Labor Market trends were examined by looking at Long-Term Industry Projections along with other Labor Market Information. The Long-Term Industry Projections from 2022-2032 employment in the region are projected to increase by 1.4%. The industries showing increases fall under the Services-Provider Industry and include Financial Activities (3.5%), Professional & Business Services (7.2%), Education and Health Services (4.0%), Leisure & Hospitality (3.1%), and Other Services, Except Public Administration (.3%). Goods Producing Industries are showing a decrease of 1.0%. Agriculture, Mining & Logging shows a decrease of 2.0%. Construction shows a

decrease of .6%, and Manufacturing shows a decrease of 1.0%. With these long-term projections, it is vital for the board to stay engaged with employers to discuss the needs for filling positions and maintaining current capacity.

The top five (5) baseline skills showing growth in our area are customer service, communication, management, sales, and detail oriented. The top five (5) specialized skills showing growth include merchandising, data entry, workflow management, housekeeping, and HIPAA compliance. The top four (4) certifications needed are valid driver's license, Commercial Driver's License (CDL), Certified Nurse Practitioner (CNP) certification, and Advanced Cardiovascular Life Support (ACLS) certification. Our area is showing a decline with the following certifications, Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) certification, Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN), Certified Dialysis Nurse (CDN), and Certified Nephology Nurse (CNN)

*Source: CWIA: The Conference Board-Lightcast-Help Wanted Online™*

WIOA Title I funding is available for qualified individuals to help with obtaining certifications through Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) and supportive services funding. Baseline and specialized skills can be learned through Work Experience, Transitional Jobs, and On-the-job Training. These programs help individuals with barriers to employment obtain the needed skills and certifications to obtain employment and upskill their employment.

The LWDB uses several resources to collect data including U.S. Census, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the PA Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (CWIA).

Data will continue to be reviewed by the LWDB, committee members, local board staff, and Title I to determine new and continued partnerships with local educational providers and businesses, including RAs. This data will be used to increase understanding of the local area's needs and trends and ensure continued alignment with workforce development strategies to meet the needs of local and regional employers.

NWPA Job Connect will be seeking a facilitator through an RFQ to assist with our community/stakeholder groups during PY 2025. There are three (3) groups which consist of 1) Skilled Workforce of NWPA. This group includes CTE/CTCs, colleges, Registered Apprenticeship (RA) and Pre Registered Apprenticeship (Pre RA) employers, Chambers of Commerce, NWPA Job Connect Board Members/staff and CLEOs. Their feedback should focus on sector strategies, RA and Pre RA, and training needs of the area. 2) Barriers to Workforce in NWPA. This group includes Out of School Youth providers, Health & Human Services (HHS) providers, apprenticeship participant representatives, NWPA Job Connect Board Members/staff and CLEOs. Their feedback should focus on barrier identification, barrier remediation, connecting providers to each other, and connecting people to providers. 3) Grants, PA CareerLink® Critical Industries and Shortages in Critical Industries. This group includes Chambers of Commerce, Rapid Response staff, NWPA Job Connect Board Members/staff and CLEOs. Their feedback should focus on grant priorities for the board, PA CareerLink® continuous improvement, and Critical Industry Shortages.

The information discussed at the community/stakeholder meetings will be shared with the NWPA Job Connect Board Committees and Board Members so ideas regarding skill gap challenges and factors, employability skills, hard skills, and in-demand certifications can be initiated and expanded upon in our local area.

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

***Expectation:** Narrative must present and describe the local area's vision and a set of goals that are cognizant of the local economic conditions. Narrative must include an analysis of workforce development activities in the region, and how apprenticeship programs can be leveraged to address these needs when it comes to individuals with barriers to employment, individuals in underserved communities, diversity of individuals and employers' needs.*

*The strengths and weaknesses of workforce development activities, including education and training; Capacity to provide workforce development activities to address education and skill needs of the workforce, including individuals with barriers to employment and employers' needs;*

NWPA Job Connect's mission for the workforce is to connect people with jobs through collaborative workforce development efforts and strong partnerships with the economic development, business, education, and government sectors in the region with a vision that Northwest Pennsylvania will have a skilled workforce that is responsive to the current and future needs of the region.

NWPA Job Connect, the local workforce development board, has awarded the WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth program services to Educational Data Systems, Inc. (EDSI) for Program Year 2025 for the six-county local workforce development area. EDSI was founded in 1979 in Dearborn, MI. They are a Certified B Corporation and ISO 9001 certified. Through coordinated training and supportive services for Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth customers, they help to deliver a pipeline of talented workforce professionals to local businesses. Collaboration continues with our community partnerships who help to connect job seekers to the business community (i.e., the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), adult education and literacy agencies, housing authorities, Veterans counselors, Job Corps, community service agencies, employer on-the-job training programs, and RAs). Program service providers in the community are active partners in the workforce development system in the region. Data analysis is conducted to ensure continuous improvement and to assist the local workforce board in strategic decision making. Methods of referrals exist to ensure access to the services needed. Where possible, the Next Generation Industry Partnership or similar methods are used to support the local workforce development system to gather input from private sector employers to identify and meet the local businesses' needs.

Our focus on off-site outreach and virtual services is a strength. Customers, especially those with barriers to employment, are provided with more opportunities to collaborate and coordinate with local community agencies. There is also improved access to workforce development services through virtual and mobile services for our customers, including targeted populations such as individuals transitioning into the community from the criminal justice system and disengaged, out-of-school youth.

As we continue to utilize the experience and skillsets of our local economic development partners, we can more effectively engage with employers in key, high-demand industries. This allows us to better coordinate on-the-job training programs to provide training in these high priority and in-demand occupations and offer apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships. The LWDB Committees regularly discuss employer needs for both the current and future workforce. Incumbent worker training is another option that provides a benefit to the community, local businesses, and industry through supporting the skill

development of existing employees and, in many cases, providing a career ladder within an industry that promotes current employees. This opens opportunities to hire additional entry-level workers, which can be supported by using On-The-Job Training funds.

The LWDB staff map the active RA and Pre-RA programs in the region to identify existing partners engaged with apprenticeship in addition to targeting apprentices. Mapping is also used to identify specific sectors with established apprenticeships or those primed for growth and training providers and community partners poised to help enable growth. The list provided by the ATO office is used to identify current RAs and Pre-RAs sponsors and occupations within the region, as well as the training providers connected to the RAs and Pre-RAs. The list is distributed to Title I, the One-Stop Operator, and the local apprenticeship stakeholders. Notices of Funding Availability related to RA and Pre-RA opportunities are disseminated via email to existing and potential partners.

The NWPA Job Connect Youth Committee supports the WIOA Title I program services contractor to expand outreach and recruitment of out-of-school youth. The NWPA Job Connect Board continues to strengthen its partnership with adult literacy and education providers so eligible individuals may receive job readiness and life skills training to transition them into post-secondary education and/or employment.

*How the strategic goals consider both workforce and economic development priorities;*

The strategic goals of the LWDB focus on both workforce and economic development priorities. The NWPA Job Connect Board continues to receive information and training on the requirements of changing legislation and how those changes impact service delivery. The LWDB continues working on improving the virtual service delivery model, which allows us to serve more individuals, especially those with barriers to employment. Continued work will be done on building and retaining partnerships, which allows the leveraging of resources for multiple opportunities including occupational training, On-the-Job Training, Incumbent Worker Training, Customized Job Training, Supportive Services, Work Experiences, and RAs/Pre-Apprenticeships. Notices of Funding Availability related to workforce and economic development are distributed through the LWDB email groups to strengthen existing partnerships and encourage the development of new collaborations.

*How the local board may expand the use of apprenticeships to address populations with multiple barriers to employment as well as the local boards' business/employer engagement strategy*

The LWDB will expand the use of apprenticeships to address populations with multiple barriers to employment as well as the business/employer engagement strategy. In July 2024, two (2) Title I Business Solutions staff completed the RA Navigator Training through the Keystone Development Program. RA Navigators conduct outreach and present information and assistance to local businesses along with connecting individuals to these opportunities. During National Apprenticeship week, various activities were held along with media blasts to expand knowledge of available RA and Pre-RA opportunities. NWPA Job Connect works with Early Connections and NTMA to expand the use of RAs and Pre RAs. Through the ABA grant, increased opportunities are being offered in RAs and Pre-RAs in early education and manufacturing. The ABA highly focuses on including underserved populations in RA and Pre-RA programming.



NWPA Job Connect continues discussions with local Career and Technical Centers, Intermediate Units, and school Counselors to discuss Pre-RAs and Career Pathways opportunities for students. Pre-RAs help students graduating from high school move into an RA to enhance their knowledge and skills. Through the ABA grant, NTMA has created a new Pre-RA program for Drafting and Design at Crawford Tech; expanded two (2) pre-apprenticeship programs for the Precision Machining Program at Crawford Tech; and the Machinist Program at Venango Technology Center. Early Connections has expanded the Pre-RA for the Childcare Development Center. Erie Together, through the BEP grant, has developed apprenticeship videos for schools to use for discussions between schools, students, and employers. The project reached over 300 students in several Erie and Crawford County School Districts. Collaboration was done with 10 local labor unions to create and execute career exploration experiences. The Career Street website, which was originally enhanced with workforce grant funding, allows employers to register on the website to connect with students to provide industry expert speakers and facility tours to help students learn about the different industries.

Title I staff will update the Workforce & Business Solutions Committee of the NWPA Job Connect Board held quarterly on apprenticeship activity in the six-county region. RA Navigators assist businesses with completing Registered Apprenticeship applications, develop materials to be used at presentations, and provide information on how to execute an apprenticeship plan.

The local area partners with seven (7) Career and Technical Centers in our region. Local workforce board staff attend comprehensive needs assessment meetings, occupational advisory committee meetings, share information about the High Priority Occupation (HPO) and In-Demand Occupations (IDOL), and vote on programs and expenditures. Board staff are invited to planning meetings. This helps ensure the connection to local jobs and family sustaining wages.

*How the local board will demonstrate Engage! linkage between workforce and economic development throughout the LWDA;*

The Engage! Grant was awarded to the Northwest Commission, an economic development organization, to support a systematic business retention and expansion program to assist in identifying and targeting PA companies and assisting the companies through referrals and direct technical assistance. The local board partners with the Northwest Commission to provide support as the workforce intermediary in the local area.

*How the local board will work with local economic development organizations;*

The Executive Director of Northwest Commission is one of our board and committee members. Economic development organizations are included in the Local Management Committee (LMC) and partner meetings, which are held quarterly and monthly, respectively. Notices of Funding Availability are distributed to County Economic Development Directors. The LWDB members and Title I submit information to and attend local Chamber of Commerce events.

*How the coordination of services with economic development services and providers will occur.*

Executive Pulse is used as a local referral tool. It is connected to CWDS and is used by economic development entities including the chambers and Northwest Commission, state staff such as OVR and Rapid Response, Title I staff, and board staff to coordinate service delivery to businesses in the region. The system is implemented by the Northwest Commission as part of the PREP! Region. The referral process and case note features in the system are enhanced by warm handoffs and regularly scheduled PREP! meetings to coordinate services and opportunities across the region.

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

**Expectation:** *Local area 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. Narrative must also include incumbent worker training and how the local workforce delivery system will work with local area employers to fill the entry-level positions created by upskilling incumbent workers.*

**The local area may support the narrative by:**

- *Including descriptions of when leaders, board members and stakeholders met and any subjects or resolutions that came to fruition; and*
- *Summarizing any number of reports commissioned to research and determine recommended actions that are of concern to local area workforce system leaders and stakeholders. Examples include studies indicating strategies and tactics that will increase employers' ability to attract, hire and maintain local area labor force participants in gainful employment, or evaluating best practices for serving individuals with barriers to employment.*

The Northwest workforce area faces the following challenges in aligning existing labor force skills, education, and training activities with the needs of regional employers.

#### Declining and Aging Population

The local workforce development area has seen a very minimal increase in population (.14%- 2022 data) and continues to see larger numbers of individuals over the age of 60 residing in the six-county region. Many of these individuals who are currently in the workforce are/will soon be shifting out of the workforce. Employers are challenged to find new solutions to filling skill gaps by training current staff and advancing their skill sets while hiring new people. Incumbent worker training is a service that has been utilized in the Northwest Region in the past. Conversations around incumbent worker training are held with the Title I provider to ensure this service is available.

#### Addressing Barriers to Employment

Job seekers with barriers to employment face challenges in accessing services that address their needs. Virtual services have been in place since early 2020 and continue to be utilized to better serve those who lack transportation and/or other barriers. Mobile services have been in place since July 2017 and continue to be provided in the Northwest area. The Board and One-Stop Operator continue to expand partnerships of service providers to allow for more mobile sites to serve individuals. Conversations about braiding funds amongst the multiple collaborating organizations continue.

The Erie region has a growing number of immigrants and new Americans. Meetings with the federally funded service providers working with these groups revealed a need for online language skills training. The workforce board has supported this effort through support of a digital literacy effort that is helping to upskill the Afghan community in the region. The grant funding is used to offer online language skills training to the Afghan community so they can use their ESL education to enter the workforce.

This past year, significant focus was spent on providing services to those who are reentering the community post incarceration. Some of these WIOA eligible participants have received training dollars through ITAs for CDL training, OJTs, Youth Work Experiences, and Transitional Jobs for Adults, along with supportive services when applicable. Information has been provided regarding the Project Clean Slate/Pardon Project to help those who want to have their records sealed.

As mentioned in Section 1.3, the NWPB Job Connect WDB will be initiating the Barriers to Workforce Stakeholder group that will focus on barrier identification, barrier remediation, connecting providers to each other, and connecting people to providers. The information gathered at these meetings will be presented to the appropriate NWPB Job Connect WDB committees and the board meeting for execution.

#### Engaging Employers

With the backdrop of declining population levels and the increase in older workers, employers must engage directly with educators and others to find creative solutions to fill key skill gaps. Educators need to promote high quality job opportunities along with affordable pathways to acquire skills. Career exploration needs to start with K-12 schools. Employers need to expand work-based training partnerships to include internships, on-the-job training, incumbent worker training, apprenticeships to name a few. These work and learn programs provide opportunities for job seekers to gain work skills while earning an income. Employers fill gaps while building a stronger workforce.

As mentioned in Section 1.3, the NWPB Job Connect WDB will be initiating a Skilled Workforce of NWPB Stakeholder/Community Engagement group. This group will focus on sector strategies, RA, and Pre-RA opportunities, and training needs. The information gathered at these meetings will be presented to the appropriate NWPB Job Connect WDB committees and the board meeting for execution.

#### Promoting Multiple Career Pathways

High quality jobs can be accessed by a wide array of Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs available at Career and Technical Centers (CTCs) in the local area. NWPB Job Connect Board collaborated with Erie Together to evaluate and implement strategies and career pathways to employment in in-demand occupations and post-secondary education. Erie Together, through the Business Education Partnership (BEP) grant, has created videos for young adults on the different Registered Apprenticeship avenues, such as: Construction, Electrical, Plumbing, and Welding.

Local board staff participate in the weekly Business Solutions Team meetings, PREP meetings with the local development district office, Northwest Commission, and the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership.

The workforce board also refers educators to the PA Department of Labor and Industry's CWIA site for career posters, which are updated annually. These pathways, along with Erie Together career pathways, offer examples to youth and adults about the ways to enter and advance in the local workforce.

## **2. STRATEGIC PLANNING: Vision and Goals**

### **2.1 Local Board's Strategic Vision-What are the local board's strategic vision and goals for preparing its workforce and its strategy for achieving the vision and goals? How will the local board's vision and goals align with, support, and contribute to the governor's vision and goals for the state's workforce development system, as well as any of the goals and strategies articulated in the regional plan?**

**Expectation:** Narrative will address how this strategy assists in aligning all available resources to achieve the local area's strategic vision and goals.

**Factors being considered include, but are not limited to:**

*The local board's strategic vision and goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce, including youth and individuals with barriers to employment;*

*If the local area is part of a Planning Region, with consideration of their respective regional plan goals and strategies, the narrative must also list appropriate goals and strategies to maintain alignment.*

The NWPB Job Connect Board, appointed by the local elected officials of the six (6) counties of Northwest Pennsylvania, is charged with strategic planning, policy development, oversight of the workforce system, and establishing priorities for serving employers and job seekers in the local area. The shared vision of NWPB Job Connect and the local elected officials is:

*Vision:* Northwest Pennsylvania will have a skilled workforce that is responsive to the current and future needs of the region.

To achieve the vision, NWPB Job Connect maintains a strategic plan with multiple goals including:

#### *Goal 1: Visionary Leadership*

- Educate NWPB Job Connect members and stakeholders as to the changes in the legislation while implementing a structure for ongoing education.
- Identify types of convening sessions (workforce discussions and forums) among stakeholders that should occur. Then be the convener/hold the sessions.
- Ensure the administrative office has adequate resources, has knowledgeable staff, is visible, and is held to results-oriented performance measures for policy development.

#### *Goal 2: Establish Identity as Workforce Experts*

- Review service delivery to ensure the one-stop centers become the flagship product.
- Participate in partner events related to workforce development.
- Comply with all WIOA requirements aligned with state, regional, and local plans.

### *Goal 3: Partnership Development*

- Board development- provide training to board members so they can advocate for NWPA Job Connect and its future and make informed decisions.
- Committee structure- to have board members serve on a minimum of two committees.
- Connect to and collaborate with community agencies to help individuals with barriers to employment.
- Connect to and collaborate with community agencies who specialize in youth services to provide more opportunities to youth under WIOA.

### *Goal 4: PA CareerLink® Improvement*

- Review and reassess labor market needs (e.g., employment services)- eliminate old, unnecessary ones.
- Clean up, update, redact outdated policies/procedures.
- Enhance efficiency of services for jobseekers (improved customer service), especially individuals with barriers to employment.
- Strengthen collaboration between local boards in the region and state, even across state borders whenever possible.

### *Goal 5: Sector Strategies*

- Provide purposeful education and training to develop meaningful career paths in coordination with employers.
- Provide baseline cognitive assessments for all jobseekers.
- Identify acceptable attainment levels for targeted industries in conjunction with employers in those industries.

*Identifying any additional local board goals and strategies that carry out core programs (also including required and additional partner programs) and how the alignment of resources available to the local area occurs, thus achieving the strategic vision and goals; and*

### *Additional goals include:*

- Continue to enhance virtual and mobile services to better accommodate individuals, especially those with barriers to employment.
- Identify and meet the demand for adapting existing occupations, as well as emerging occupations recognized as important.
- Continue to provide support to the Northwest PA CareerLink® Lean Governance Council. This committee meets monthly to work on service improvements.

One of the most important business services the local workforce development system provides is connecting employers to qualified candidates. Staff are knowledgeable and responsive to the business and workforce needs of the local area. The services provided align to local board strategies and goals. The needs of businesses and workers drive workforce solutions. Businesses inform and guide the local workforce system through their leadership and participation in developing and improving education and training, work-based learning, career pathways, and sector partnerships. The local board embraces local

employers through their strategies to ensure the local workforce system is job-driven and matches employers with skilled individuals.

Job placement and recruitment activities include a feedback mechanism between the local workforce system and the employers. Employer surveys are used to solicit feedback on validating the readiness and quality of referrals for job openings. The local board uses this data to monitor employer satisfaction outcomes and adjust local career and training services based on the feedback received.

Due to the changing work environment from the pandemic to post-pandemic, the board was able to expand outreach and service provision into the communities we serve. Technologies such as Ring Central and Formstack were implemented and are still in use to better support the transportation challenges and the lack of technology accessibility across the local area. The board has supported the work of PA BEAD (Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program) in coordinating stakeholders in preparation for a funding award to Pennsylvania to help those in rural areas benefit from more and better internet access. The board has also committed time and funds towards putting ADA accessible workstations across the six-county region to help individuals with disabilities access internet resources for job seeking, career development, and connecting to PA CareerLink® services.

*Describe how these goals relate to performance accountability measures based on primary indicators of performance outlined in section 116 (b)(2)(a)*

The key to meeting the performance accountability measures based on primary indicators of performance is keeping people employed at median wages that are at the family-sustaining level. Training both before and during employment is vital to upskill workers to replace those who retire while bringing in new employees to learn the trade. Youth may need additional education prior to entering the workforce, and those who are enrolled in education are counted in the employment measures. Education also aligns with measurable skills gains and credential performance measures.

**Governor and State Board Alignment- How will the local board's vision and goals align with, support, and contribute to the governor's vision and goals for the state's workforce development system, as well as any of the goals and strategies articulated in the regional plan?**

***Expectation:*** Narrative must indicate that the local board adopted the governor's vision and all goals as articulated in the WIOA Combined State Plan; it is expected that local board's goals and strategies are reasonably aligned with the WIOA Combined State Plan, as well as any appropriate regional plan goals and strategies (if the local area is part of a planning region).

***Factors being considered include, but are not limited to:***

*How the local area will connect adults, dislocated workers and other targeted populations, especially youth and individuals with barriers to employment, to in-demand occupations and Registered Apprenticeships*

The governor's workforce goals are presented to the local board committees. The goals are reinforced with required Title I plans, the addition of regional people to the state WDB committees, and the inclusion of the governor's workforce goals in materials. Board staff attend recurring meetings with the state workforce board director and other local workforce board directors where the goals and challenges

are regularly discussed and ideas shared. Board staff provide this information to the local board and its committee members.

To better connect adults, dislocated workers, youth, individuals with barriers to employment, and other targeted individuals to employment in in-demand industries and Registered Apprenticeships, the local board is teaming up with NWIRC, NTMA, Early Connections, Career and Technical Centers, OVR, and local manufacturers to increase the awareness of training opportunities. NWPA Job Connect was awarded the Apprenticeship Building America Grant (ABA) that began January 1, 2023 and ends March 31, 2026. NTMA and Early Connections provide pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs during this timeframe. The ABA grant funds are used to provide supportive services to apprentices and pre-apprentices across the region. The local board staff regularly attend CTE Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (CLNAs) and Occupational Advisory Committee (OAC) meetings to provide details regarding services available through the PA CareerLink®, including pre-Apprenticeship and Apprenticeships. Local Board staff and Title I Staff also present information regarding services to the Intermediate Units, principals, and curriculum directors.

*How the skill gaps (addressed in the narrative to prompt 1.3 above) will be eliminated or narrowed*

Skill gaps are addressed through Career Pathways, WIOA funded programs for ITAs, OJTs, Work Experience, Transitional Jobs, and Supportive Service funding. These programs address baseline skill sets, specialized skill sets, and required certifications. Referrals to community partners also help individuals, especially those with barriers to employment, obtain the necessary guidance and assistance to obtain employment.

*How the local board will target services efficiently to educate and increase its workforce's knowledge and skill sets*

The local board works collectively with all partners as a one stop system to increase the efficiency and effectiveness in serving local participants in increasing their education and skill sets. This allows more opportunities for self-sustaining employment in in-demand occupations. This includes working closely with secondary and post-secondary education institutions in the local area through established relationships with the Career and Technical Education Advisory Committees, local board committees, and other local initiatives. Apprenticeships provide focused training leading to self-sustaining employment, long-term employment, and credentials. NWPA Job Connect Board staff continue to discuss apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs with the local advisory committees and other partners.

*How the local board will develop and implement a comprehensive Career Pathways plan (including both employment and education components, as well as adult education) throughout the local area;*

The local board's efforts in developing a career pathways model for the local area in conjunction with local experts will better prepare individuals for the required skills needed for local occupations and employers. We built off the successful in-school initiative created by the Career Pathways Alliance in Erie County (ECCPA) to expand these opportunities to the other counties in our local workforce development area. The career pathways initiative is also strengthened by increased collaboration with the adult education partners in the local workforce development system. The one Adult Education partner provides comprehensive assessment services to support the local one-stop system. In working through

the BEP grant, Erie Together and Career Street connect the general career pathways to both apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships.

A few of the ECCPA and Career Street's recent successes include a "Skilled Trades Project" supported through Business-Education Partnership funds, that has engaged over 300 students, nine (9) construction trades unions, and several educators through employer panels, a Skilled Trades Day for educators, six (6) skilled trades training center tours, more than 10 skilled trades videos, and a comprehensive Skilled Trades Directory. This project has informed teachers' professional practices, helped students better understand skilled trades job opportunities and how to pursue them, and helped at least one (1) student during the 23/24 school year secure a skilled construction trades apprenticeship.

Other recent success stories include the launch of a "Multi-District Industry Club" for senior high school students that includes a career pathways overview, job shadows, employer tours, and a 40-hour internship; an annual "Job Fair For Seniors" for students who plan to enter the workforce directly after high school resulting in interviews and hires; and the development and launch of the Profile of a Graduate, a resource that expresses the knowledge, skills and abilities that make a young person ready for life after high school. The Profile of a Graduate is now being used by school districts across Erie County, and will be introduced to employers, organizations, and parents/caregivers beginning in the 2024/25 school year with the support of Business-Education Partnership Funds. The Profile of a Graduate can be found here: [www.erietogether.org/grad](http://www.erietogether.org/grad)

Venango County implemented VenangoREADY, a career readiness program, in 2020. There is an extension program in Forest County called ForestREADY. The program certifies students as career ready when six (6) essential skills are met (communication, work ethic, teamwork, tactfulness & manners, critical thinking & problem solving, and understanding supervision & world of work). These six (6) skills were named as essential for fueling a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce by Venango area employers. Students are connected to employers as needed. The program also works with connecting educators and employers.

*How the local area 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 (including specific reference to adult education, community colleges and community education councils);*

A representative of Pennsylvania Western University is a member of the local board. The local area does not currently have any post-secondary institutions that are funded under the Perkins V Act grant awards. The Northwest Local Development Area currently has two (2) Title II providers, with one (1) of the providers represented on the local board. Both providers partner in the local one-stop system assisting with implementing the local board's strategies and providing comprehensive assessment services. The one Title II provider manages the assessment process and both providers focus on high school equivalency training, testing programs, digital literacy, and services for limited English speaking and reading populations, which reduces duplication of services. Keystone Community Education Council participates on the Local Management Committee for Department of Human Services programs and works with the local board to increase apprenticeship and training opportunities in the local area. NWPA



Job Connect Board Staff attend Occupational Advisory Committee (OAC) meetings. These meetings provide a vital link between the CTCs and the local and regional businesses and industry community.

*How the system will improve access to services and to activities that lead to a recognized postsecondary credential including Registered Apprenticeships;*

Apprenticeship programs are implemented to train individuals to become skilled in a trade through required technical instruction and on-the-job learning. These skills lead to a career pathway to career advancement. Post-secondary certifications and Registered Apprenticeship services are entered into CWDS, the state system of record. The Title I Provider, EDSI will report out monthly to the NWPA Job Connect Board staff with data pertaining to post-secondary certifications and Registered Apprenticeships. Discussions continue to ensure timely and appropriate services and activities are provided. Technology enhancements have increased the ability to connect with potential apprentices in our eight-county region, along with other neighboring areas. Program offerings such as SkillUp™ PA and Metrix Advanced Certifications, which are connected to the PA CareerLink® website, are providing job seekers, participants, and employers with soft skills and industry relevant courses. Title I uses CWDS Ad Hoc reports to monitor and track credential attainment.

*How the local area will expand upon work-based training goals and strategies such as transitional jobs and leveraging existing apprenticeship programs or working with employers in the local area to develop new programs;*

The local area received the BEP grant to implement the Uniquely Abled Academy (UAA). LWDB staff collaborated with NWIRC to provide a CNC training program for individuals on the Autism spectrum. There are two (2) cohorts in our area, one (1) in Crawford County and one (1) in Erie County. For PY 2024, three (3) individuals graduated from the Crawford County program and two (2) of them are employed in manufacturing. There were three (3) graduates from Erie County with two (2) of them employed in manufacturing. The UAA program is looking to expand by revising the UAA acceptance requirements and adding a virtual option for the classroom portion of training to allow participants to self-pace.

Through the BEP grant, Erie Together created videos discussing Registered Apprenticeship trades, such as Electricians, Plumbers, and Construction fields. PA CareerLink® staff, NWPA Job Connect board members, CLEOs, Erie County School Districts, CTCs, and other partner agencies use these videos to spread the word about RA programs and employers in the region.

The following entities are sponsors for Registered Apprenticeships in our six-county region: Keystone Education Community Council, NTMA (both have multiple employers associated with them), National Association of Insurance Professionals, Inc. (General Insurance Associate program was recently approved), Micro Mild Company (mold makers, die cast, and plastic programs), Viking Tool and Gage (electromechanical technology program), and 1099C (Early Childhood Education). The Building Maintenance Repairer Apprenticeship program connected with the Keystone Community Education Council began the first cohort in the summer of 2024 in Erie County. A second cohort began in the fall of 2024. The program is expanding into Venango and Mercer Counties for the third cohort which begins in February 2025.

Clarion University of Pennsylvania in collaboration with the Keystone Community Education Council was awarded a POWER grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission. This project covers Clarion, Crawford, Forest, and Venango Counties. POWER stands for Partnerships for Opportunity and

Workforce and Economic Revitalization. Members of this collaborative group include Keystone Community Education Council, Clarion University, Venango Technology Center, Community College of Allegheny County, the Northwest PA Oil & Gas Hub, and the Steel Valley Authority. The first objective is to prepare students for post-secondary education and the workforce, which will be accomplished through pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs in conjunction with area businesses. The second objective is to develop and support career-specific education and skills training for students and workers. A Plastics Process Technician apprenticeship is being developed to help meet the demands of the growing plastics industry. The third objective is to identify new market opportunities and the growth of businesses, especially in the advanced manufacturing and energy sectors.

There are two (2) Title I Business Solutions Consultants who are Registered Apprenticeship Navigators. They are trained to assist new and current apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs in our local area.

OJT, ITA, and Supportive Services are the most utilized funding streams provided to WIOA eligible Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth who are enrolled in Registered Apprenticeships. Local policy allows for the use of Incumbent Worker and Customized Job Training funds, when applicable. WEDnetPA and GI Bill are two (2) other funding opportunities to use when applicable. Fliers and brochures are distributed at community events, job fairs, meetings, as well as the “Learn About Apprenticeship” on-line workshop. The LWDB requires an “Apprenticeship Participant Expansion Plan” from the Title I contractor. This plan is updated regularly in reports to the board committees and board. The LWDB will seek out other funding sources to support RAs and help braid funds.

*How will local area business service strategies be employed (i.e., Business Service Teams (BST));*

Through the Business Solutions Committee of the local board, business services to employers are prioritized and opportunities for increasing employer engagement and satisfaction are discussed and implemented. Business services are analyzed at weekly meetings with the BST and includes discussions with partners to identify employer needs. Title I staff participate on the local board’s Business Solutions Committee to increase awareness of employer needs and to assist in achieving the goals and strategies of the local board. The statement of work, included with the Title I program services contract, includes tracking of employer engagement, utilization of services, and outcomes related to services, and this data must be presented for board committee and board meetings.

The RA Navigators will provide support on all aspects of Registered Apprenticeships and Pre-Apprenticeships from program design and registration to managing programs and supporting apprentices. Support will be offered to both new and existing programs, help connect employers and apprentices and assist with connecting employers to ATO as needed for additional guidance.

*How the goals support economic growth and economic self-sufficiency for the local area.*

The Governor has prioritized six (6) broad goals for the workforce development system as defined in Pennsylvania’s Combined State Plan. NWPA Job Connect staff, Title I staff, and Operator staff are connected to the PA Workforce Development Board Committees. Experiences and discussions are shared as part of ongoing efforts associated with workforce goals.

- Goal 1: Apprenticeship and Career & Technical Education: Expand opportunities for individuals to enter Registered Apprenticeship and Registered Pre-Apprenticeship programs, assist employers in building Registered Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship programs, and increase the coordination with Career & Technical Education in these efforts.
- Goal 2: Sector Strategies and Employer Engagement: Engage employers and industry clusters through innovative strategies to improve the connection and responsiveness of workforce programs and services to labor market demand, including recruiting, training, and retaining talent.
- Goal 3: Youth: Increase opportunities for all youth to experience work-based learning through summer employment, pre-apprenticeship, Registered Apprenticeship, internships, job shadowing, mentoring, and other experiences in the workplace, including developing employability skills.
- Goal 4: Continuous Improvement of the PA CareerLink®: Identify and enact system changes and improvements that enhance the collaboration and partnership between agencies and partners in the workforce development system.
- Goal 5: Barrier Remediation: Develop strategies to ensure the workforce development system is equipped to support individuals with barriers to employment in finding and maintaining self-and family-sustaining employment.
- Goal 6: Addressing Worker Shortages in Critical Industries: Prioritizing investment in industries that are critical to the economic prosperity of the Commonwealth.

**Goal 1:** NWPA Job Connect continues work with the Apprenticeship Expansion Grant, Pre-Apprenticeship grant, and the federal WORC grant with our regional partner, West Central Job Partnership. The Early Childhood Education Pre-Apprenticeship/Apprenticeship program is connected to a Career and Technical Education Center. NWPA Job Connect will continue to prioritize educating customers about career pathways and continue to increase opportunities for these programs through grant applications and program service delivery. Apprenticeships are effective models that expose young people to career pathways, prepare youth for success in the workplace, and further their education after high school. Apprenticeships combine on-the-job training with related instruction to progressively increase workers' skill levels and wages. NWPA Job Connect supports the leveraging of apprenticeships for WIOA Youth Program participants to maximize youth opportunities and their outcomes. Through Apprenticeships, Employment 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quarter after exit, Median wages 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter after exit, Measurable Skills Gains, and Credentials performance measures can be met. NWPA Job Connect Board Staff attend Occupational Advisory Committee (OAC) meetings. OACs provide a vital link between the CTCs and the local and regional business and industry community.

**Goal 2:** NWPA Job Connect continues to work closely with the local business community to determine their employment needs and then assist them with programs and resources, such as Registered Apprenticeship, On-the-job training, and Incumbent Worker Training, to accommodate their needs.

NWPA Job Connect collaborates with the local development district agency, Northwest Commission, with the Engage! Program and PREP activities. The Executive Director of Northwest Commission sits on the local board and participates in multiple committees of NWPA Job Connect.

Through the Business Solutions Committee of the local board, business services to employers are prioritized and opportunities for increasing employer engagement and satisfaction are discussed and

enacted. Business services are analyzed and discussed at the committee meetings, resulting in focus on priorities and goal progress. The Business Satisfaction Survey was revised with the help of the Business Solutions Committee members.

NWPA Job Connect requires a statement of work for its WIOA Title I program service contractor annually that includes benchmarks for achieving expected outcomes in business services to employers.

**Goal 3:** NWPA Job Connect prioritizes Youth Program services for out-of-school youth including support for youth with barriers to employment. These services include but are not limited to work experience opportunities, skills training, Registered Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship, and supportive services. Youth are co-enrolled in core and partner programs as appropriate. Partnerships with Job Corps and AmeriCorps provide additional referral options for youth. Locally, the WIOA Title I Youth Programs promote awareness of the 14 required WIOA youth program elements.

**Goal 4:** NWPA Job Connect understands the importance of continuous improvement and evaluating and adapting to new and changing priorities and needs. The implementation of Ring Central technology that allows for safe and secure virtual communication and transfer of required documentation provides access to those individuals with barriers, such as transportation. The use of social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, provides a broad and aggressive communication avenue for local workforce system events and services.

**Goal 5:** NWPA Job Connect is prioritizing support for those individuals who face obstacles in securing and maintaining employment. The Uniquely Abled Academy continues to provide classroom and on-the-job learning to individuals who are on the Autism spectrum. The NDWG Opioid Grant has been awarded to NWPA Job Connect to provide onsite career services to individuals with substance use disorders.

Connections are being made between Title I and EARN to serve refugees now residing in our local area. NWPA Job Connect Board staff are part of the Reducing Administrative Barriers Committee through the Commonwealth. Discussions focus on how best to serve individuals who may not have the required documentation initially so services can be provided in a timely manner to help the individual make strides towards their employment and/or education goals. There is also a strong relationship with our Intermediate Units and Literacy Councils to serve those individuals who are English Language Learners and those who want to obtain their GEDs. Many of these individuals are dual enrolled with WIOA.

**Goal 6:** NWPA Job Connect will address worker shortages in critical industries at the Workforce Solutions and Business Solutions Committee meetings. Discussions will be regularly held during the Business Service Teams meetings. The industries listed in the WIOA State Plan are connected to our local HPO list, as well as Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship opportunities in our local area.

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

***Expectation:*** Narrative must describe how the local board's goals will assist in achieving the negotiated performance levels, and to what extent the local board's goals are impacted by such levels. Narrative must address how performance levels are used to measure local area performance.

The current negotiated performance levels are included in Attachment 1 Local Area WIOA Title I Programs Performance Accountability Tables.

NWPA Job Connect's goals support the achievement of federal performance accountability measures, which include Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth measures for employment, median earnings, credential attainment, and measurable skill gains. Effectiveness in Serving Employers is a new goal starting in PY 24. This goal measures retention with the same employer in the second and fourth quarters following a participant's exit from a WIOA core program. Improving customer service and strengthening collaboration among partner agencies enhances participant training and opportunities for placement into employment, especially for individuals with barriers to employment. The Career Pathways that were implemented in July 2021 provide valuable information to those seeking employment.

NWPA Job Connect Board staff and Title I staff meet regularly to discuss the performance measures with a focus on credential attainment and measurable skills gains. Also discussed with Title I staff is the importance of entering outcomes into CWDS in a timely manner. This helps to ensure that performance goals are met. The local workforce development area is experiencing a few challenges with the credential attainment rate for both Dislocated Workers and Youth, but discussions are being held with the NWPA Job Connect Board and Title I on how to work through the challenges. All other measures are and will continue to be met and/or exceeded.

### **3. OPERATIONAL PLANNING: Local Area Workforce System and Investment Strategies**

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

***Expectation:** Narrative must include a description of how local elected officials, advocacy groups, LWDB, and other key stakeholders interact within the local workforce system. This description must include the respective roles and functional relationships of the following entities, as well as other entities, that compose the local workforce system.*

*The role of the LWDB as the governing body responsible for the governance, strategic planning; and the day-to-day operations, fiscal and oversight of the local workforce system*

In the Northwest Pennsylvania local workforce development area, each of the six (6) counties (Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Venango, and Warren) is represented by a Chief Local Elected Official (CLEO). The CLEOs are the grant recipient for WIOA Title I funds. The role of the CLEOs includes but is not limited to establishing a local workforce development board (LWDB); entering into a written agreement with NWPA Job Connect that details the partnership of the two entities for governance and oversight of the workforce development system; authorizing the establishment of a standing Youth Committee of NWPA Job Connect; and the designation and/or certification of PA CareerLink® operators in collaboration with NWPA Job Connect. The CLEOs work in cooperation with NWPA Job Connect to develop and approve the Regional Plan, Local Plan, and the local workforce area budget. The chairperson of the CLEOs is elected by a majority vote of the six members of the CLEOs. Officers serve a one-year term. Four members constitute a quorum. Each member has one vote with no proxy. Matters before the CLEOs can be resolved by a simple majority of the total votes present at each meeting.

*The fiscal agent's identity and how this entity is responsible for the disbursement of grant funds as determined by the chief elected official(s)*

The Chief Local Elected Officials (CLEOs) have designated the Venango County Commissioners as the fiscal agent for the LWDB area. The fiscal agent is responsible for the disbursement of grant funds including accounting, budgeting, financial management, procurement, property management, contracting, and audit functions. The fiscal agent works with the committee of the LWDB and the CLEOs to develop the budget, which is reviewed and approved by the full board. Fiscal reporting is a standing agenda item on the regular board meeting agenda for the fiscal agent to provide financial reports on funding streams, PA CareerLink® expenses and revenues, as well as overall funding expenditures and balances.

*The administrative entity's identity and how this entity is responsible for providing staff to the local board*

Partners for Performance (PFP) is an entity created and governed by the CLEOs as the administrative support agency to NWPA Job Connect. PFP provides staff support for the board responsibilities of development and submission of the Regional and Local Plans, RFP of one-stop operator, RFP for Title I provider, identification of eligible providers of training services (ETPL), program monitoring, negotiation of local performance measures, assists the Governor in developing the statewide employment statistics system, provides employer linkages, promotes the participation of private sector employers, grant writing, Letters of Support on behalf of the Board, and staff management and human resource functions. NWPA Job Connect contracts out the provision of all program services via a competitive bid process. No program services are provided by PFP or its staff.

NWPA Job Connect guides policy, establishes a budget, and provides oversight to the LWDB system. NWPA Job Connect acts as an intermediary to bring the various components of the workforce system together for collaborative and innovative purposes. NWPA Job Connect plays a vital role, working with private industry, public and non-profit sectors, to create a positive economic environment that is conducive to economic growth that ensures a skilled workforce to meet the needs of business and industry.

*Each committee within the LWDB (including the executive committee, if applicable, and each standing committee (required and ad hoc)). Provide a brief description of the function of each committee*

The current LWDB structure allows for no less than 19 member representatives on the NWPA Job Connect board (aka Northwest Workforce Development Board). Appropriate groups in the local area nominate representatives from central labor councils, community-based organizations, economic development agencies, education entities, and others as appropriate per Commonwealth guidance. Private sector business members are nominated by organizations such as the local Chambers of Commerce for consideration of appointment by the Chief Local Elected Officials. Board appointment terms are from two to four years and are staggered.

NWPA Job Connect conducts business through the below listed committees. Policy decisions are first reviewed by the appropriate committee followed by the Executive Committee; policy recommendations of the committees are then presented to the full board for approval. All board members are encouraged to serve on at least one committee. The current standing committee structure which includes non-board members is listed below:

#### Executive

The Executive Committee acts on behalf of the full NWPA Job Connect board (when necessary) with ratification of approvals by the full NWPA Job Connect board at the next meeting. The Executive

Committee recommends priorities, goals, objectives, projects, and strategies to address local workforce development needs. Other duties of the Executive Committee include NWP Job Connect committee oversight, liaison to the CLEOs, and board development.

#### Business Solutions

The Business Solutions Committee engages private sector employers to identify and address skill gaps, education and credential needs, and workforce requirements to recommend strategies to meet labor market demands; aligns with economic development, education, and community stakeholders; coordinates industry partnerships; reviews Eligible Training Provider List and analyzes training outcomes; enhances participant and business experience and satisfaction with PA CareerLink® services.

#### Communications

The Communications Committee assists in the development of an outreach and communications plan that includes promoting engagement with job seekers, employers and partners, the local website, branding, public relations, and overseeing community outreach.

#### Fiscal/Monitoring

The Fiscal/Monitoring Committee ensures system accountability and transparency through fiscal oversight, audit, and program system monitoring, including performance measures, and certification of one-stop centers; develops and recommends the workforce budget, negotiates with the Commonwealth on local performance measures; conducts oversight of the program contractor(s); conducts oversight of Equal Opportunity Compliance; oversees industry partnership resources and other grants.

#### Governance

The Governance Committee ensures compliance to NWP Job Connect Bylaws and other governing documents; makes recommendations to Executive Committee and NWP Job Connect for policy changes as needed; and makes recommendations for appointments, removals, and nominations of NWP Job Connect members and partners to the CLEOs.

#### Workforce Solutions

The Workforce Solutions Committee continuously reviews and improves the one-stop system to eliminate barriers that inhibit job seekers from obtaining the education and training needed to gain family sustaining wages; establishes program goals; and promotes career pathways for adults.

#### Youth Committee

The Youth Committee assists NWP Job Connect with developing, implementing, and oversight of a comprehensive plan for at-risk youth, both in-school and out-of-school, that coordinates services, training, and work-based learning; provides policy input for youth services; promotes career pathways for youth; develops innovative ideas for pipeline development.

The NWP Job Connect Chair also has the authority to create ad hoc committees, as needed or required.

*The PA CareerLink® Operator(s) identity and key roles. Narrative must also include a summary of the competitive process used (or will be used) to procure the Operator.*

The LWDB uses a competitive bid process to procure a one stop operator who will implement the strategies of the board to integrate all partners to deliver a comprehensive array of services and reach the outcomes of employment, education, skills gains, and earnings. Regardless of the platform used in serving customers, each partner remains vested in the development and implementation of an integrated service delivery aligned to connect customers to available resources. The one stop operator is charged with promoting and accomplishing service alignment among the partners and provides regular reports to the local board.

On November 18, 2024, a Request for Proposal for the One Stop Operator was released. In concurrence with the CLEOs, NWPA Job Connect competitively procured a PA CareerLink® one stop operator for the local area. The NWPA Job Connect Ad Hoc RFP Committee, which included NWPA Job Connect members, ranked the proposals, and made a recommendation for the contract award for the successful bidder to NWPA Job Connect. The selected one stop operator, EDSI, will coordinate the services and resources in the MOU and the Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA) among, at a minimum, the core programs identified in WIOA. The one stop operator is responsible for focusing resources on individuals with barriers to employment and ensuring that the minimum funding requirements and performance goals are on track in the local workforce system. The overall goal for the system is to provide excellent service consistently to customers of the system, both jobseekers and businesses. This will be accomplished through better coordination, increased communication, leveraging resources, and reducing duplication. Some examples will include, but not be limited to, monthly partner meetings, functional alignment of area teams with regularly held meetings, staff training, and standard processes/procedures and forms. The use of technology such as Ring Central, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc. will enable these meetings to occur across the six counties, ensuring the same message and efficient use of staff time.

Since EDSI was selected as both the WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth program services contractor and the One Stop Operator for PY 2025, a Memorandum of Understanding between NWPA Job Connect, the CLEOs, and EDSI will be executed that clarifies how EDSI will carry out its responsibilities to perform the functions of both the One Stop Operator as well as the WIOA Title I program services contractor to ensure that the appropriate firewalls are in place and that no conflict of interest, real or perceived, exists in the performance of the contracted services. The one stop operator will work to ensure alignment and integration of partner programs and services into the local workforce development system through the following:

1. EDSI shall develop, implement, and ensure compliance with proper internal controls and firewalls to maintain transparency and integrity to ensure that no conflict of interest exists in its performance of the duties as WIOA Title I Program Services Contractor and WIOA One Stop Operator. This information is submitted to and monitored by NWPA Job Connect.
2. EDSI shall develop, implement, and ensure compliance with a separate reporting structure within the organization which meets the requirements for separation of functions under WIOA. This information is submitted to and monitored by NWPA Job Connect.
3. EDSI shall be responsible to render impartial decisions and perform the duties of the WIOA Title I Program Services Contractor and One Stop Operator in an objective way.
4. EDSI shall not convene system stakeholders to assist NWPA Job Connect in the development, preparation, and submission of Local Plans, competitive processes for selecting one stop operators, terminating one stop operators, career services providers, or youth providers.
5. EDSI shall not be responsible for the oversight of itself or other operators.
6. EDSI shall not negotiate local and/or regional performance accountability measures.



7. EDSI shall not develop or submit budgets for activities of NWP Job Connect.

NWP Job Connect and the CLEOs agree on the following expectations (regarding the responsibilities of the One Stop Operator) to include, but not necessarily be limited to:

- Serve as an intermediary with all the one stop partners.
- Know and understand the parameters under which the partners provide services.
- Know and understand each partner's performance measurement goals.
- Ensure an effective partner referral mechanism is in place for the benefit of individuals and the partner's performance.
- Facilitate and participate in one stop partner meetings.
- Possess knowledge of community events and ensure all appropriate partners are made aware of upcoming and/or relevant events in which they may wish to participate.
- Act as an ambassador for the one stop system within the community.
- Provide a bridge with the Commonwealth's and NWP Job Connect's one stop center certification which is essential for receipt of infrastructure funding.
- Ensure the Commonwealth's "Non-Discrimination Plan" is enacted and maintained.
- Ensure compliance with all relevant equal opportunity and civil rights measures.
- Recommend, maintain, and retire technological equipment and related IT services necessary for the one stop operations, and
- Track and implement the negotiated one stop partner Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

NWP Job Connect evaluates the One Stop Operator annually. The evaluation includes, but is not limited to, contract provisions, participating partner surveys, performance measures developed by NWP Job Connect, and any applicable PA CareerLink® certification requirements.

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

***Factors being considered include, but are not limited to:***

- *Describing each local area workforce systems required and additional partner programs;*
  - *Narrative must identify the entity/entities selected to provide WIOA Title I programs and activities in the local area, and include a summary of the competitive process used (or will be used) to award the subgrants and contracts;*
  - *Narrative must also include the entity/entities that provide (1) WIOA Title II (Adult Education and Literacy), (2) WIOA Title III (Wagner-Peyser), and (3) WIOA Title IV (Vocational Rehabilitation) programs and activities in the local area.*
- *Describing each required and additional partner program's resource contributions to the local workforce delivery system. Resource contributions may include, but are not limited to, in-kind and programmatic contributions.*
- *How will the local board collaborate with each required and additional partner in the PA CareerLink® service delivery system promoting service alignment; and*
- *How will operational alignment of such programs support the strategy identified in the state plan, the regional plan (if applicable), and the local area's strategies?*

On November 18, 2024 the WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Services RFP was released. An Ad Hoc RFP Committee consisting of NWPA Job Connect board members, reviewed and scored the proposals received. In concurrence with the CLEOs, NWPA Job Connect competitively procured a WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Services provider. EDSI was awarded the Title I contract for Program Year 2025 that will cover the six-county local workforce development area (LWDA). Since EDSI was also selected as the One Stop Operator, a firewall agreement will be in place. See the previous section for more information on the firewall.

The local workforce development area, as previously described, includes the six core programs mandated under WIOA. Program service delivery covers Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Venango, and Warren Counties and includes partnerships with many community agencies. Workforce development services provided to the public through the service delivery network are funded by a combination of WIOA funds and other discretionary grants received by NWPA Job Connect and/or its partners. The purpose of each PA CareerLink® is to create a seamless system of service delivery that enhances access to the individual program services while improving long-term success. The core program partners (Adult, Dislocated Workers, Youth, Adult Education and Literacy, Wagner-Peyser, and Vocational Rehabilitation) work together to effectively serve job seekers and employers. Although each program has defined activities and responsibilities by law, they work to leverage services and reduce duplication for optimum outcomes. Our LWDA has two (2) comprehensive centers located in Erie County and Oil Region.

The local one-stop also conducts mobile and virtual service delivery. The mobile service delivery model is proactive and meets the needs of individuals with barriers to employment that are engaged with social service providers, educational institutions, and employers that would otherwise not engage with PA CareerLink®. The mobile service delivery model also allows partnerships with community organizations who provide access to their clients, gratis use of their facility to deliver individual and group-level workforce programming to provide a wrap-around holistic counseling to shared or dual enrolled clients. Virtual service delivery eliminates the need for clients to meet in-person with a representative of PA CareerLink® for workforce services, if they have an internet-capable device and connectivity to a mobile network. If a client is not equipped to work with PA CareerLink® in a virtual manner, supportive services may be used to procure a smartphone (or similar device) and service for the purposes of interfacing with the partners of PA CareerLink® for workforce services. The use of Ring Central technology for the secure transmission of documents and electronic signatures on documents has created a positive transition from the traditional brick-and-mortar models to a navigable digital model for participants, especially those with barriers to employment.

The service delivery network is coordinated by the PA CareerLink® Operator and includes both mandated and voluntary partners. The PA CareerLink® centers also maintain working relationships with various community-based and other organizations including St. Benedict Education Center and the Steel Valley Authority in Erie. These relationships enhance the services provided to job seekers and employers. NWPA Job Connect will continue to evaluate and develop strategies for high-quality career services, training and education, as well as the supportive services needed to assist customers with placement into family-sustaining employment, along with help for employers in finding skilled workers and access to training for their current workforce. The NWPA Job Connect Board, as well as its committee membership composition, includes career and technical center directors and Title II adult education supervisors. The Title II providers who collaborate with NWPA Job Connect WDB include IU5 and Titusville Literacy Regional Council (TLRC).

The PA CareerLink® centers also have partnerships and work collaboratively with their local Chambers of Commerce, economic development, the Senior Community Service Employment Program under Title V of the Older Americans Act (SCSEP), County Assistance Offices, County Office of Drug and Alcohol, OEO, Erie Together, local training providers, local career and technical centers, local high schools and colleges, as well as Community Education Councils to name a few. Local Community Service Block Grant agencies participate in the delivery of workforce development services in multiple ways including: participation in local and regional planning groups; engaging in business service delivery; distribution of materials in the PA CareerLink® centers; providing computer links to partner organizations; holding meetings at PA CareerLink® centers as needed; participating in sessions for employers with partner agencies; and working with partners to leverage grant funding opportunities.

Customers requiring individualized services are evaluated and recommendations are made based on the initial assessment of knowledge, skills, and abilities. Based on this initial assessment, the customer begins job search activities or moves into a more individualized service process, as appropriate. If a customer cannot obtain employment through these services, they are evaluated for training services. Training services may include skill training or on-the-job training. Referrals between partnering agencies are provided to ensure that the services needed are made available. When a customer secures suitable employment or chooses to no longer participate in PA CareerLink® services, the person is exited from the program. Follow-up services are conducted for no less than twelve (12) months. PA CareerLink® staff members are trained to assist employer customers with employment needs such as recruitment assistance, assessment and testing, and labor market information.

For more information regarding how the local board collaborates with the required and additional partners to maintain service integration, refer to Section 3.6. A completed partner-provider list is included (Attachment 3 Local Workforce Development System Program Partner-Provider list) as an attachment to this local plan.

The alignment of local goals and strategic planning with the Governor's goals, as outlined in Pennsylvania's WIOA Combined State Plan, is detailed in Section 2.1, including specifics on how they align with the region and local vision and objectives.

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

***Expectation:*** Narrative must describe **all WIOA title I adult (A) and dislocated worker (DW)** employment and training activities in the local area, including those involving basic literacy skills, and how activities are assessed. Additionally, the narrative must reflect how the local board selects and determines availability of A and DW activities for the benefit of participants, including individuals with barriers to employment.

***Factors being considered include, but are not limited to:***

*Describing how the local board identifies and then determines the types of A and DW employment and training activities that will be needed in the future;*

In 2018, a value stream analysis resulted in the development of a Lean Governance Council that meets monthly to identify opportunities for continuous improvement for service delivery to customers. The Econovue Access we have been granted through the Department of Labor & Industry provides information on local and regional employers, job openings, and other relevant data based on specific job titles/industries. This information will be shared with board committee members, Business Services

Team members, and other relevant partners to help determine the types of employment and training activities that will be needed in our local workforce development area.

The local board, through its committees, works toward understanding, analyzing, and implementing workforce development policy and planning that identifies key growth industries and promotes high-quality employment and family sustaining wages for workers, families, and communities. The local board considers the impact of technology on work, workers, employers, jobs, and society and strives to promote improvements through technology to prepare the workforce for the jobs of the future through lifelong learning. Through this process, Adult and DW activities are evaluated for gaps in existing program activities that will be needed in the future. The local board remains open to the emergent nature of employer-voiced skill needs and how the local workforce system can adapt to fill those needs.

*Describing how the local board will streamline and facilitate co-enrollment and braiding of funds between A and DW programs, and DHS employment and training services. Explain how this process will enhance, and not supplant, employment and training services for A/DW and DHS co-enrolled individuals;*

DHS, Title I, and NWPA Job Connect board staff attend the LMC and partner meetings. The LMC provides a venue for open and effective discussions with PA CareerLink® partners, County Assistance Offices, Title I, EARN, IU5, and other partner agencies to optimize and mitigate challenges with participant co-enrollment and referral processes. It also provides an opportunity to increase awareness of the rollout of new partner initiatives. Pertinent information is shared with NWPA Job Connect committee and board members, which allows for continued conversations pertaining to this key collaboration. The EARN program leadership regularly attends the NWPA Job Connect Board meetings.

DHS staff are housed in the PA CareerLink® comprehensive centers, which allows for easier collaboration with Title I staff for the purpose of co-enrolling individuals to provide training, employment, and supportive services. To enhance coordination, NWPA Job Connect has established a reverse referral process from WIOA Title I programs to EARN. When Title I participants verify eligibility using food stamps or family income, Title I staff will connect them with in-house DHS staff to explore the EARN program and other available supports, such as KEYS, SNAP JETS, and ELECT. These supports can be accessed concurrently with Title I services based on the participant's eligibility and needs. Currently, referrals occur between Title I and EARN, allowing funding to flow to Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) and supportive services.

To further enhance collaboration and ensure efficient communication, NWPA Job Connect prioritizes strengthening communication among partners not only during the LMC but also through One-Stop Partner meetings and leadership meetings. These meetings ensure that all partner staff are informed and updated on program offerings and changes. It is essential to review and update processes regularly during these meetings to maintain alignment and effectiveness.

Partner program information, including eligibility criteria, available services, and updates, is disseminated to staff through training sessions, staff meetings, and internal communications. This approach ensures that program staff are well-informed and equipped to make accurate referrals and provide comprehensive support to participants. These trainings also enhance staff understanding of how

to effectively utilize resources available through partner programs, fostering a more integrated approach to service delivery.

*Identifying the local board's key assessment criteria and processes used to select A and DW employment and training activities (include key procurement steps that lead toward a complete assessment of the activities);*

The local board recently received access to Econovue Access, which provides data on local and regional employers, job openings, and other relevant data. Without divulging protected information to the committees and board, this information will aid the conversations held at NWPA Job Connect board committees, such as Workforce Solutions and Business Solutions, to help determine what types of employment and training activities are needed. As the board staff become more familiar with the Econovue tool, the use of this information to aid in OJT, Apprenticeship, and IWT initiatives will improve. In addition, CWDS data is pulled into monthly and quarterly data that is shared with the board and committee members and includes information not limited to, types of training, number of graduates in each field, number employed in fields of study, and wages.

*Explaining the local board's consideration of future revisions and adoption of A and DW activity assessment criteria and processes;*

The local board embraces the importance of evaluating program services. With information provided through Econovue Access, CWDS (state system of record), data from CWIA, Workforce GPS trainings and information, Harvard Design Lab, and Department of Labor Sector Strategies, the local board will be able to more easily assess the programs offered in our local area. The local HPO process is more engaging and Economic Development groups and other businesses are providing feedback in these processes. OAC meetings for the CTCs include business representatives as well as local board staff. Ideas from these meetings are further discussed at the board and committee level meetings to see what needs to be revised and adopted moving forward.

*Describing the board's effort to attract a greater quantity and/or ensure the quality of Title I A and DW training providers including online providers*

The local board works to solicit training providers to fill specific gaps in current training offerings identified by the local area's employers. The local board promotes the addition of training providers to the ETPL through publicizing the process for training provider approval through the Commonwealth's system of record; soliciting training providers for specific needs related to industry, occupation, or location; and accepting applications from training providers throughout the program year for career training for occupations on the high priority occupations list. Board committees review and discuss the eligible training provider list to ensure enough training choices for customers. ETPL training documents are available on NWPA Job Connect's website.

*Identifying key employment and training activity discrepancies (if any) and solutions the board is considering and planning to implement*

A few years ago, the local board and committee members determined we had a critical need for training emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and paramedics. After considerable work and multiple

discussions, these occupations were listed on our local High Priority Occupation List (HPO). When needs are brought to the table, board and committee members and other community stakeholders discuss and work to implement training opportunities that will benefit our communities. With the growth of approved apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeship programs, gaps are being filled in occupations such as manufacturing, insurance, facilities, toolmaking, and plastics. There are two (2) newer educational providers in our area, Erie County Community College and Northern Pennsylvania Regional College. These two (2) entities work hard to increase their workforce-related training initiatives and work with employers to fill gaps. These opportunities are an asset for filling unexpected as well as long-term needs in the region. As these entities become more engrained in the region, the local board will be able to explore workforce initiatives and connect them with other partners to help meet workforce challenges.

*Explaining how the local board determines the quantity and quality of available A and DW employment and training activities*

The local board committees review and discuss the Adult and Dislocated Worker employment and training activities in the local area to ensure quantity and quality of services available to customers. Performance information on training providers listed on the ETPL is evaluated and an illustrated breakdown is provided on the NWPA Job Connect website. The ETPL and the HPO lists are regular agenda items for both the Workforce Solutions Committee and the Business Solutions Committee of the local board.

*Explaining the local board's WIOA Title I Priority of Service policy in brief terms highlighting how potential WIOA participants are identified and are provided access to services including but not limited to those receiving public assistance such as cash (e.g., TANF or Refugee Cash Assistance), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and/or medical assistance (do not attach the policy). Explain how the board is continuing to review local area labor force data to support local area discretionary priority groups. In addition, include a description of the following:*

*How individuals seeking access to WIOA services will be informed of their priority of service, such as through posters and prominent placement of other information*

*The assessments that will be used to identify barriers to employment among those entitled to priority of service and the services needed to address them*

There are three (3) statutory priority groups of individuals the commonwealth requires to be targeted for priority when providing individualized career and training services. These three (3) targeted groups are public assistance recipients; other low-income individuals; and individuals who are basic skills deficient. NWPA Job Connect's Priority of Service policy defines the three (3) targeted groups and provides other information on priority of service. Targeted populations must first meet the eligibility requirements for the WIOA Title I Adult program. Adult priority is determined for the targeted groups during initial intake and then further discussed during enrollment in the WIOA Adult program. Data and trends continue to be monitored and when warranted, discussions will occur to determine if there are other groups that need to be added locally for priority of service.

Individuals are informed of their priority of service through conversations with staff after priority of service is determined through the initial intake assessment. Priority of Service posters hang on a front wall in each comprehensive PA CareerLink® center. The Veteran's brochure states, "eligible veterans are given priority in referral to job openings and training opportunities. Disabled veterans are given the highest priority in referrals."

*The process by which Individual Employment Plans will be developed for persons entitled to priority of service that will address, in addition to career service and training needs, any barriers to employment they may have*

Individual Employment Plans are established and updated as the individual receives services from a PA CareerLink® case manager or career advisor. Individual employment plans for adults are developed within the system of record using the guide provided in PA's workforce development system of record (CWDS).

*How data will be obtained for each of the three priority groups in their service area and the approximate number of individuals in each category*

Data for the three (3) priority groups in our service area can be obtained through Ad Hoc reports in CWDS and/or through the Digital Intake Reports. The One Stop Operator and NWPB Job Connect Board staff review this data regularly and discuss with Title I managers. Title I staff is already connected with multiple agencies in our six-county region who serve the populations that meet the Priority of Service statutory priority groups. In PY 23, out of 152 Adults who were WIOA enrolled, three (1.97%) met Level 1 Priority of Service-Low Income/Public Assistance/Underemployed/Basic Skills Deficient Veteran/Eligible Spouse. 100 or 65.70% met Level 2: Low Income/Public Assistance/Underemployed/Basic Skills Deficient Non-Veterans/Spouses. Two or 1.32% met Level 3 Priority of Service: All other veteran/eligible spouse.

*The outreach that will be completed to inform the public of Pennsylvania's priority of service policy; How outreach will be targeted to best reach those potentially eligible for priority of service and any agencies that serve them*

The Outreach Coordinator (One Stop Operator staff) creates fliers for social media posts, as well as printed materials for staff to provide to agencies, community partners, and for job fairs and hiring events. This information is then shared with individuals through those agencies, community partners, and events. Priority of service is also part of the Memorandum of Understanding and explains that all parties will adhere to the statutes, regulations, policies, and plans regarding priority of service. They are also targeting recruitment to individuals who meet the criteria for the priority groups.

*How staff will be trained to understand which individuals are entitled to priority of service and how to be responsive to their needs.*

The Operator provides monthly training to all partner staff. The Title I staff receive training from the managers and follow a standard operating procedure that discusses priority of service. NWPB Job Connect Board Staff has also provided Priority of Service training to Title I.

*If used, explain the process implemented to transfer program funds between A and DW programs (as needed) to help ensure sufficient training opportunities for eligible participants*

The local board may request from the PA Department of Labor and Industry a transfer of funds between the adult and dislocated worker funding streams to provide greater flexibility in meeting the workforce needs of the local area. Any transfer of funds will be driven by a demonstrated need in a specific program and will be based on the ability to use these funds more effectively to achieve the objectives of the local area. For a transfer of funds to be approved, the transfer must not adversely impact on the local area's capacity to adequately provide appropriate services to individuals due to the reduced funding in any given funding stream. The transfer must not adversely impact on the local area's ability to achieve program performance measures as well.

*How the spectrum of persons entitled to priority of service will be served including those such as English Language Learners, who may require additional resources*

For Limited English speaking and reading populations, interpretive services are provided through Propio Language Services and assistance is also provided from Interpretive Services of partnering community agencies. The limited English speaking and reading populations are also referred to Title I adult education and literacy partners. Babel notices are posted in the PA CareerLink® centers and provided to customers as needed. The Babel notices inform the reader that communication contains vital information and explains how to access language services to have the contents of communication provided in other languages.

*How the needs of individuals with barriers to employment will be addressed in the delivery of services, such as ensuring that appropriate career planning services are provided. This should include a detailed description of how appropriate career planning services will be provided, or arranged for, through collaboration with other agencies if the LWDB or PA CareerLink® office lacks the required expertise*

Workshops are implemented in partnership with other providers. Efforts continue towards strengthening partnerships with community agencies, as well as evaluating and implementing other effective services to enhance the probability of hiring eligible participants, including those with barriers to employment.

Supportive services are available to eligible participants throughout the local workforce development area. Services include assistance with transportation, childcare, referral to medical services, assistance with work related clothing and tools, housing assistance, and linkages to community services for other needs. NWPA Job Connect has a local supportive services policy and has provided training to PA CareerLink® staff on interpreting and implementing this policy.

When there is a hearing-impaired person in need of on-site interpretive services, state certified Sign Language Interpreters are contacted for assistance. All PA CareerLink® staff are trained on the use of the TTY line. Materials are available in alternate format, Zoom text, and JAWS. Handicap parking is available at all PA CareerLink® locations. Signage includes Braille for the visually impaired. Staff, through interaction with participants, will access needs and make appropriate referrals or arrangements for special assistance to ensure there is universal access to all services.

*Describing the board's operational position and current actions relative to the development and promotion of Career Pathways, co-enrollment of participants across multiple WIOA programs, DHS employment and training programs, and work-based training activities such as pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and OJT.*



Career Pathways were established and are being used in our six-county region. Co-enrollment occurs with participants across the youth, adult, Trade, OVR, and Adult Literacy programs. The local board was awarded the America Building Apprenticeship (ABA) Grant which focuses on both Registered Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship programs in manufacturing and Early Childhood education. The Uniquely Abled Academy (UAA) grant is going strong with two cohorts in Meadville and Erie for those individuals on the spectrum to learn about machining operations. These individuals are co-enrolled with OVR and WIOA Title I Youth or Adult programs. The local board has implemented the state's waiver for a sliding scale for OJT employers to assist in promoting and sustaining these services in the local area.

A primary focus on the PA CareerLink® is to provide comprehensive workforce services, accessible to all employers, job seekers, including individuals with barriers to employment, as well as incumbent workers, which result in economic self-sufficiency and a workforce trained to employer specifications and prepared to compete in a global economy. Career services, both basic and individual, are available for eligible individuals. Training options include individual training accounts (ITAs) and on-the-job work-based training (OJTs). Incumbent worker training (IWT) options are available in our local area. Several committees of the NWPA Job Connect Board evaluate supply and demand and service offerings to provide oversight and recommend system improvements. Best practice research will be conducted as well. Committee recommendations are brought to the full board for consideration. System improvements are often implemented based on the work and recommendations of NWPA Job Connect committees. PA CareerLink® system partners attend NWPA Job Connect meetings to provide valuable input and ensure the strategic direction of NWPA Job Connect is aligned and implemented within the service delivery system.

Through partnership development and collaboration among PA CareerLink® partners under the leadership of the PA CareerLink® Operator, quality career services are made available to the Adult and Dislocated Worker populations. Service offerings include:

#### **Career Services**

- Determination of individual eligibility for services
- Outreach, intake, and orientation to the system
- Referral to PA CareerLink® partners, as well as other agencies as appropriate
- Computer-assisted assessment of skill levels, aptitudes, abilities, interests, and values mapped to the needs of local employers.
- Information on supportive services and community resources
- Provision of employment statistics information, including the provision of accurate information relating to local, regional, and national labor market areas
- Information on certified education and training providers; local performance outcomes of service providers
- Information regarding filing unemployment compensation
- Information on the eligibility requirements for all partner employment and training programs
- Information on the local performance measures
- Information regarding resource room usage
- Internet browsing for job, information, and training searches

- Up-front triage that informs and directs customers to the services
- Job search assistance workshops, placement assistance, and career counseling
- Staff-assisted job development
- Staff-assisted workshops and job clubs
- Job matching and referral (i.e., testing and background checks)
- Staff-assisted, customized assessment of knowledge, skills, abilities, and interests
- Development of an Individualized Employment Plan
- Group counseling
- Individual counseling and career planning
- Internships and work experience linked to careers
- Financial literacy services
- English language acquisition and integrated education and training programs
- Follow-up services, including counseling regarding the workplace, for participants in workforce activities authorized under this subtitle that are placed in unsubsidized employment, for not less than 12 months after the first day of the employment.
- Case management
- Short-term Prevocational Services, including development of learning skills, basic computer literacy, communication skills, interviewing skills, punctuality, personal maintenance skills, and professional conduct, to prepare individuals for unsubsidized employment or training.

### **Training Services**

Training services are defined as services designed to equip individuals to enter the workforce and retain employment. Training services may be provided to WIOA eligible adults, dislocated workers, and youth, when appropriate. The NWPA Job Connect Board sets the policies for Individual Training Accounts (ITAs). Training Services for eligible individuals may include:

- Occupational skills training, including training for non-traditional employment, provided through ITAs for adults and dislocated workers. This includes both individual and cohort-based training models.
- Transitional jobs
- On-the-Job Training
- Apprenticeships
- Programs that combine workplace training with related instruction, which may include cooperative education programs.
- Skill upgrading and retraining
- Entrepreneurial training
- Job readiness training
- Adult education and literacy activities that are integrated with other training services.
- Customized training conducted with the commitment to employ the individuals upon successful completion of the training.

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

***Expectation 1:*** Narrative must describe established priorities of the local board that allow for the service of as many eligible youth as possible, especially out-of-school youth (OSY), older youth and young people who are most at risk of

*not acquiring the necessary skills and abilities to attain meaningful employment, including individuals with a disability. Successful models of activities must be included.*

*Factors being considered include, but are not limited to:*

*Describe the makeup of the local board's Youth Standing Committee and its role in youth program design, including making the 14 Program Elements available to participants*

The Youth Committee membership has included representation from community-based organizations that serve youth, juvenile justice, Title II education, career and technical education, K-12 education, public housing authorities, and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. The Youth Committee assists the local board with planning and oversight of operational youth programs, promoting career pathways, as well as helping to identify any gaps in services and developing a strategy to address the unmet needs of youth. The Youth Committee helps to ensure quality program services are provided that include the 14 WIOA youth program elements. For all 14 WIOA Youth Program Elements, appropriate OVR customer referrals are requested and accepted for participation in this program.

1. *Tutoring, study skills training and instruction leading to completion of Secondary school (including dropout prevention strategies).*

This element provides grade-level proficiency in math, reading, and writing, instructional support, homework assistance for in-school youth, remedial tutoring for out-of-school youth, skills and knowledge needed to graduate or pass GED exam and study habits. Youth program staff work in conjunction with multiple agencies to ensure youth receive services. Examples of referral agencies include Northwest Tri-County Intermediate Unit, Titusville Regional Literacy Center, and Job Corps, etc.

2. *Alternative secondary school services or dropout recovery services.*

This program helps to re-engage youth in education that leads to the completion of a recognized high school equivalent. This can include basic education skills training, individualized academic instruction, and English as a Second Language training for those who have struggled in traditional secondary education. Other services include credit recovery, counseling, and educational plan development for those individuals who dropped out of school. The WIOA Title I youth program staff provide case management, attend meetings, and work closely with teachers and school counselors to foster success of the participant. Examples of partners providing alternative diploma classes include Warren Forest Higher Education Council, Keystone Smiles, and Titusville Regional Literacy Council.

3. *Paid and unpaid work experiences that have as a component academic and occupational education which may include: (i) summer employment opportunities and other employment opportunities available throughout the school year; (ii) pre-apprenticeship programs; (iii) internships and job shadowing; and iv) on-the-job training opportunities.*

Based on a youth participant's Individual Service Strategy (ISS), WIOA Title I youth staff connect participants with employers for work opportunities (subsidized or unsubsidized) that align with their ISS. Work experiences may be coupled with soft skills training and career exploration prior

to the beginning of the work experience to maximize the placement opportunity. Internships and job shadowing are also available to youth participants. On-the-job training opportunities are also utilized in our local area.

4. *Occupational skills training, which shall include priority consideration for training programs that lead to recognized postsecondary credentials that are aligned with in-demand industry sectors or occupations in the local area. Training must be focused on an occupational goal specified in the youth's ISS; be of sufficient duration to impart the skills needed to meet the occupational goal; and lead to the attainment of a recognized postsecondary credential.*

WIOA Youth participants who enroll in post-secondary school or a training program that leads to a degree or certificate may request WIOA funding through the ITA to help defray the costs of education. WIOA Title I staff provide information to individuals and provide support as necessary for youth to participate in training programs that align with high priority occupations and lead to a recognized post-secondary credential.

5. *Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster.*

Youth participants will be provided with integrated education and training programs that provide adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with both workforce preparation activities and workforce training for specific occupations or occupational clusters. Such programming will be provided for the purpose of educational and career advancement. The NWPB Job Connect Board contracts with WIOA Youth program service contractors that link academic and occupational education.

6. *Leadership Development Opportunities which may include community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility and other positive social and civic behaviors.*

Leadership development programs are often subcontracted to partner community agencies supported by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Youth Development Program. These programs teach dependability, responsibility, positive work attitude, punctuality, good interpersonal skills, being a team player, building self-confidence, and self-motivation. Examples of partners who have provided leadership development programs include Abraxas, Mission Empower, Taylor Diversion Program, AC Valley, Clarion Area School District, Forest Area School District, and Family & Community Christian Association.

7. *Supportive Services- enable an individual to participate in WIOA Youth activities.*

Supportive services are provided to assist with eliminating barriers to training and employment. WIOA programs provide supportive services in-house or refer participants to other partners for their needs. Services are based on an assessment of need via the participant's ISS or through the case management process. WIOA Title I staff identify community resources and/or financial assistance for youth who need work clothing, supplies, driver's license, high school equivalency credential testing, eyeglasses, and transportation needed to obtain or retain employment.

8. *Adult Mentoring- a formal relationship between a youth participant and an adult mentor that includes structured activities where the mentor offers guidance, support, and encouragement to develop the competence and character of the mentee.*

WIOA Title I staff provide primary focus for adult mentoring program services to youth over 18 years of age, for no less than 12 months to assist youth in succeeding in their education and employment. Youth under 18 years of age can also receive adult mentoring program services, which are often provided by partnering agencies, such as Venango Technology Center, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Booker T. Washington, Family Services of NWPA, Clarion Area School District, Family & Christian Association, and Abraxas.

9. *Follow Up services after program exit.*

Youth participants receive follow-up case management for a period of not less than 12 months after being exited from the WIOA Program. Personal contact is made quarterly to ensure successful completion of education and employment retention. All Youth program contractors are required to provide all participants with follow-up services, except those who fall under the exclusion categories—exit to Health/Medical; Incarceration; Death; or participants who opt out of follow up services.

10. *Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling, which includes drug and alcohol abuse counseling, mental health counseling, and referrals to partner programs, as appropriate.*

This program element is provided through collaboration with community agency partnerships. Through active case management, WIOA Title I staff can maintain open communication with youth participants on any issues identified in their needs assessment and staff can determine if interventions are needed. Interventions could include referrals to drug and alcohol counseling, counseling in the post-secondary or secondary school setting, mental health, family counseling, or rehab counseling. Examples of partner agencies assisting with guidance and counseling include Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Community Shelter Services, SafeNet, Stairways Behavioral Health, Beacon-Light Behavioral Health, Office of Children and Youth, school counselors, and social workers.

11. *Financial Literacy Education*

Program service providers partner with community agency partners to assist youth participants with discovering the relationship between earning, spending and saving, as well as the value of money. This will provide youth participants with the ability to use knowledge and skills to make effective and informed money management decisions. Some local partners provide financial literacy education. Forest Area School District and Ever-Fi partnered with Northwest Bank to provide financial literacy education; Abraxas, Mission Empower, Riverview IU6, Taylor Diversion Program, Warren County School District, Clarion Area School District, Family and Community Christian Association, and Career and Dreams are the other providers who offered financial literacy education.

12. *Entrepreneurial Skills Training*

Through effective collaborations with community agencies and partnerships, youth participants are provided the knowledge, skills, and attitudes in entrepreneurial skills including understanding the characteristics of an entrepreneur, the risks of becoming an entrepreneur, and developing a positive attitude towards self-employment. Forest Area School District embedded the Icehouse Entrepreneurship in their Ninth Grade FCS.

13. *Services that provide labor market and employment information about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in the local area, such as career awareness, career counseling, and career exploration services.*

The PA CareerLink® staff offers customers updated labor market information on in-demand industry sectors or occupations. Title I staff collaborate with school counselors to provide them with current labor market trends, as well as present this information to high school students in a group setting. Individualized counseling on career opportunities is also part of the youth participant's individualized career plan.

14. *Activities that help youth prepare for and transition to postsecondary education and training.*

Title I program staff partner with adult literacy and basic education agencies for transition classes to help prepare youth participants for post-secondary education. SkillUp™ PA, which provides access to FREE online job skills training, is another tool youth can use to help prepare for postsecondary education and training. LinkedIn Learning courses are discussed and assigned, as appropriate, to assist youth with work readiness.

*Describe how to prioritize recruitment and services to OSY (WIOA 75% expenditure requirement)*

The local board is outreaching to federal, state, and local community-based organizations and networking with partner agencies to increase recruitment of OSY. WIOA Youth program staff co-enroll with WIOA Adult programs and other youth services. In addition to the day-to-day efforts to recruit OSY, WIOA Youth program staff work with and receive referrals from programs such as TANF, EARN, literacy councils, as well as the Business Services Team.

*Describe how to increase work experience opportunities for youth (WIOA 20% expenditure requirement)*

The local board will continue to seek assistance of the Youth Committee, Business Services Team, and PA CareerLink® partners to conduct outreach to employers through social media platforms in addition to holding targeted youth career/job fairs offering work experience information to employers and eligible youth. The local board will continue to reach out and form relationships with community agencies for referrals and for potential work experiences within these agencies.

*Describe how to develop strong Career Pathways*

Career pathways should be constructed in a way that leads learners in attainable and incremental steps toward higher levels of education and work. Strong career pathways should include on-ramps for disadvantaged populations including those with limited basic skills and barriers to employment; be stackable in design, allowing each course and program to prepare students for the next step; contextualize basic skills and technical content to the knowledge and skills needed in a specific occupation or group of occupations; focus on careers in demand that provide family-sustaining wages

and ongoing advancement opportunities; and include work-based opportunities through structured experiences. Career pathways development must include active participation by employers, innovations in program content and delivery; integrated support services; and multiple ways to enter and exit pathways.

The Erie County Career Pathways Alliance (ECCPA) developed career pathways for rural counties. These were based on pathways that were created and tested in Erie County across 11 school districts. The pathways address employers' workforce pipeline needs and help students succeed, including those who are disadvantaged and have barriers to employment.

*Describe how the local board responds to the emphasis WIOA placed on the need to provide services to older youth.*

PA CareerLink® staff collaborate with local schools to meet with seniors and provide information on post-graduation support and services. Staff also meet youth in the communities at libraries, agencies, and other areas where young adults congregate to discuss programs and services, distribute information, and post information and events on social media.

*Describe how to increase the co-enrollment of youth into partner programming in alignment with the participant's individual service strategy and goals*

The WIOA Title I program services contractor will co-enroll eligible youth with other programs such as Adult, Youth Re-Entry, OVR, Adult Education, and EARN to provide comprehensive services to youth based on their Individual Service Strategy (ISS) goals. The local board and WIOA Title I program services contractor continue to partner with non-profit community agencies to develop strategies that help youth overcome barriers to their career goals.

*Describe how to leverage federally approved TANF two generational (2 Gen) Youth Development funding (YDF) to offer 2 Gen workforce activities for TANF purpose 2 that reduce the dependency on parents in need by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage for the benefit of local area youth.*

The NWPA WDB will use the TANF Youth Development Program (YDP) for a two-generation approach, benefiting both TANF-eligible youth and parents. TANF youth services, as described in this section, focus on career exploration, work experiences, and supportive services. TANF parents are offered job preparation, employment, and supportive services. Referrals will be made to and received from St. Benedict's EARN program.

EDSI will be connecting with local schools and partners to promote the TANF youth program and connect to the TANF parents also. While NWPA utilized subcontractors to provide the TANF YDP services, EDSI will seamlessly integrate TANF Youth Development Programs into WIOA Title I Youth and Adult Programs by aligning services to provide comprehensive, cohesive support for eligible participants. Using an integrated case management approach, TANF youth participants will benefit from the 14 WIOA Youth Program elements that are defined below. Coordination with WIOA resources will allow TANF participants to access a broader range of career counseling, training, and job placement opportunities, maximizes resource utilization, reduces duplication, and delivers measurable outcomes.

There is also a prioritization of services and activities to those eligible youth with any of the following barriers to success: school dropout or identified as at risk of dropping out of school; within the age of compulsory attendance but has not attended for at least the most recent complete school year calendar

quarter; basic skills deficient; an English Language Learner; have a disability; court-involved or at risk of involvement; children of an incarcerated parent(s); in foster care or aging out of foster care; homeless or a runaway; pregnant or parenting; a migrant; in need of additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure and hold employment.

*Indicate which of the 14 WIOA Youth Program Elements will be provided to the needy TANF youth, the local provider organization providing the programming, activity time (i.e, year-round or summer only) and the goals for the total number/percentage of TANF youth anticipated to receive a WIOA Youth Program Element*

The NWPA Job Connect Local Board has selected EDSI as the single provider to deliver both WIOA and TANF Youth programs in the NWPA area. This integrated model will enhance the alignment of services within the 14 WIOA Youth Program Elements, allowing for a more cohesive and streamlined approach to serving youth participants.

With both WIOA and TANF Youth services managed by EDSI, they will be able to efficiently coordinate program elements, reduce duplication, and simplify the process of connecting TANF youth to the services they need. This structure will support streamlined referral processes, allowing TANF youth to access educational support, occupational skills training, work experiences, leadership development, and comprehensive guidance and counseling more seamlessly. All activities will be offered year-round, and EDSI will connect youth to community service providers as appropriate for the 14 WIOA Youth Program Elements.

The TANF Youth program will be structured to ensure that each of the 14 WIOA Youth Program Elements is tailored to meet the specific needs of TANF participants. Below is an outline of how the program will address each element with enhancements specific to the TANF youth population:

1. **Tutoring, Study Skills Training, and Instruction:** To address the needs of TANF youth who may have been out of school for extended periods, the program will focus on remedial tutoring, literacy, and numeracy skill enhancement, including GED preparation where needed. Individualized support will be prioritized. Goal: 100% of TANF youth will be offered this element per customized participant needs assessment.
2. **Alternative Secondary School Services:** The program will offer tailored re-engagement strategies to support older youth and those significantly behind in credits, including credit recovery programs and partnerships with local education agencies. Goal: 25% of TANF youth.
3. **Paid and Unpaid Work Experiences:** The program will offer targeted pre-employment training focusing on essential soft skills and workplace readiness, especially for youth with limited or no prior work experience. Subsidized work experiences, including summer employment, internships, and OJT opportunities, will be prioritized. Goal: 50% of TANF youth.
4. **Occupational Skills Training:** To accommodate youth balancing work and other responsibilities, training schedules will be flexible and focused on achieving stackable, industry-recognized credentials aligned with in-demand occupations. Goal: 10% of TANF youth.
5. **Education Concurrent with Workforce Preparation:** The program will integrate literacy and numeracy training with occupational training, focusing on practical workplace application, particularly for youth with limited foundational skills. Goal: 5% of TANF youth.



6. **Leadership Development Opportunities:** Leadership development will include trauma-informed approaches to build resilience, self-advocacy, and interpersonal skills, incorporating team collaboration and community service projects. Goal: 90% of TANF youth.
7. **Supportive Services:** Addressing barriers to participation will be prioritized, including providing transportation, work attire, and basic needs through direct support or referrals. Enhanced focus on barrier remediation will include access to childcare and housing stability assistance. Goal: 25% of TANF youth.
8. **Adult Mentoring:** Mentoring will include both professional and personal development, fostering long-term stability and goal achievement. Mentors will be equipped to address the unique challenges faced by TANF youth. Goal: 75% of TANF youth.
9. **Follow-Up Services:** Follow-up will include extended support when necessary to ensure lasting educational or employment outcomes. Case management will continue for at least 12 months post-exit. Goal: 100% of TANF youth.
10. **Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling:** The program will include trauma-informed case management and partnerships with local providers to offer mental health and substance abuse counseling. Goal: 25% of TANF youth.
11. **Financial Literacy Education:** Practical financial skills will be emphasized, including budgeting for family needs and navigating transitions from public assistance. Goal: 75% of TANF youth.
12. **Entrepreneurial Skills Training:** The program will offer practical self-employment training, including gig economy strategies and home-based business planning, to increase economic self-sufficiency. Goal: 25% of TANF youth.
13. **Labor Market and Employment Information:** The program will focus on presenting entry-level job opportunities in high-growth industries, aligned with TANF youth's immediate employment needs. Goal: 90% of TANF youth.
14. **Postsecondary Education and Training Preparation:** The program will focus on supporting first-generation college students and those unfamiliar with higher education, helping them navigate the transition from secondary to postsecondary education or workforce training. Goal: 25% of TANF youth.

*Indicate what employment and training services (A/DW/DHS) will be provided to the needy TANF parent, identify the local provider organization providing the programming, activity time (i.e, year-round or summer only), and the goals for the total number/percentage of parents anticipated.*

Title I WIOA and TANF Youth staff will collaborate with community partners, agencies, and schools to assist in building relationships to better foster the relationship with the needy TANF parent.

TANF parents may be eligible to receive WIOA funded services, such as ITAs, OJTs, Transitional Jobs, and Supportive Services. WIOA Title I staff and DHS have a solid referral process in place to assist these individuals. Other services that are available to the needy TANF parent include resume writing and interviewing workshops, job search, and SkillUp™ PA to name a few. These activities are provided year-round. Both Title I and DHS will provide this programming. Based on the goals for the TANF Youth to be

served with each WIOA Youth Program Element, we anticipate around 25% of needy TANF parents to be served.

*Describe who is responsible for TANF Youth Development program participants, methods used for recruitment, and collaboration with local County Assistance Offices, or CAOs, the Department of Human Services Employment and Training Providers, PA CareerLink®, and other WIOA funded programs. Explain any agreement regarding or referral of youth to be served with WIOA funds.*

EDSI, the Title I provider in NWPA, will provide the TANF Youth Development Program services. EDSI partners with community leaders, organizations, education providers, and community resources for successful program outcomes.

Eligibility of TANF youth is conducted through a pre-screening eligibility verification in CWDS/CIS by the TANF Youth Development Program team through Title I. Youth must be between the ages of 12-24, or completed the 5<sup>th</sup> grade; have proof of Social Security Number; have proof of identity; be a U.S. Citizen or TANF-eligible non-citizen; be a PA resident; and have a household monthly gross income that does not exceed 235%. Youth must meet this criterion and be a TANF-eligible recipient either through TANF-receipt or TANF income-eligible.

*Describe how work experiences, enhanced by high-quality academic and workforce development programming will be prioritized for TANF youth.*

Many youth ages 14-24 will receive a work experience opportunity at a local agency, school, or employer after receiving leadership development, soft skills, financial literacy education or occupational training. Opportunities will be in a variety of industries and occupations, including maintenance/repair workers, management/supervisory, teaching, automotive, and sales. Work experience wages are \$12.00 per hour.

*Describe in detail any job placement where the LWDB plans to increase the hourly wage (the Department strongly encourages an increase in TANF youth participant wages for work experiences to be in alignment with the Governor's priorities as defined in Executive Order 2016-02 Amended, whenever possible) that is has typically previously offered participants for work experiences.*

The work experience wages for TANF Youth are set at \$12.00 per hour. The hourly wage was increased in Program Year 2021. There is no current discussion regarding increasing the hourly wage. Employers may supplement the wages.

*Describe who is responsible for recruiting employers/organizations for work experiences, building and maintaining these connections and what methods are used for recruitment.*

The EDSI TANF Youth and Title I staff will be responsible for recruiting employers/organizations for work experiences. They will utilize the Business Services Consultants and the Business Service Team to connect to sites for work experiences, as well as continued connections to those sites currently providing work experiences.

*If applicable, identify the prospective businesses, as well as any community, education and workplace partners, that will support TANF 2 Gen programming. Briefly describe any expected monetary and/or non-monetary contributions to the local board's youth project(s).*

Since EDSI is new to NWPA, they need to connect to our community, education, and workplace partners and discuss TANF 2 Gen programming to see what support can be provided. At this time, NWPA Job Connect is not expecting any monetary and/or non-monetary contributions.

*If the local board plans to use a portion of TANF funding to offer incentives to needy TANF parents and youth, describe in detail the type of incentive offered. Outline how the local board will clearly explain and make this incentive opportunity available to needy TANF-eligible participants. Explain how to accurately measure achievement of the established incentive requirements to ensure fair and equitable disbursement of any incentive awards to TANF parent and youth program participants.*

Incentives may be offered based on the local board's Youth Incentive Policy. The policy provides details on the type of allowable incentives, the required documentation, and the allowable amounts for each incentive. This information is shared with the youth participants as they are provided with the TANF Youth program services. The local board's policy was approved by the state.

*Provide the name, phone number, and email address of the LWDB staff member responsible for implementation, tracking, and reporting TANF YDF activities and expenditures.*

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*Provide the following contact information for each TANF 2 GenYouth Development Program-Youth Provider Sites in the LWDA: (1) Name, email and phone number of the Designated TANF Provider Contact Person(s) and (2) Name and Address of Provider's Office Location/Worksite.*

EDSI will be providing the TANF 2 GenYouth Development Program. We will have the Designated TANF Provider Contact Person information by the end of June and will update accordingly.

*Describe how the LWDB Monitors local providers and who is responsible for the monitoring.*

The local workforce development board, in collaboration with the Department of Human Services (DHS), Bureau of Employment Programs (BEP) regarding the TANF Youth Development Program funding, ensures compliance with the TANF Youth Development Fund program guidelines. The local WDB applies its Local Monitoring Policy and Local Monitoring Plan for program oversight monitoring. TANF program monitoring will be conducted by the Youth Program Specialist.

**Expectation 2:** *Local boards must outline and define WIOA youth eligibility documentation requirements, including the "requires additional assistance to complete an education program or to secure and hold employment" criteria. (See below)*

**Expectation 3:** *Narrative must include a description of WIOA title IV Pre-Employment Transition Services provided to potentially eligible and eligible in-school youth with disabilities. (See below)*

**Expectation 4:** *Narrative must include local board strategies and collaborative actions with stakeholders to expose more youth support to YouthBuild, Job Corp, Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps, and AmeriCorps programs and opportunities (if applicable). Data measuring the number of youth, and specifically opportunity youth, enrolled in these programs must be provided to support the narrative, as appropriate.*

NWPA Job Connect and its committees envision an effective workforce development system for youth with programs in partnership with educators and employers. The Youth Committee of the local board developed a mission to *“Assist youth as they define personal career pathways. Help them identify intermediate goals and access resources of support as they work to attain personal growth and economic success.”* This effort requires partnerships with youth programs, educators, employers, and other stakeholders to provide effective opportunities for career exploration, work readiness, and work-based learning and work experience opportunities. The committees of the local board are collaborating to help connect youth to the current career pathways established in our six-county region. NWPA Job Connect has developed strategic objectives in youth programs that produce desirable outcomes, established linkages with career and technical centers to align programs with career pathways and labor market demand, and to continue to grow summer youth employment efforts. Research of the best national practices continues to be conducted to support the development of the most comprehensive and enriching array of program services for eligible youth.

The local board engages the private sector and other employers to connect employers to the youth workforce population and recognizes that a successful youth employment strategy must engage employers in supporting talent acquisition efforts. This strategy includes shifting employer perceptions about young adults from social liabilities to economic assets; educating employers about how to provide employment pathways and refining the business case for employment pathways to increase employer investments; and engaging employers to support career pathways as a talent solution for business.

For those youth who need additional assistance to enter or complete an education program or to secure or hold employment, the NWPA Job Connect Eligibility Policy includes guidelines for utilizing, “Requires Additional Assistance” criteria. The “Requires Additional Assistance” requires that youth meet one or more of the following:

- Has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)
- Has a letter from a school counselor asserting their need of additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment.
- Is currently credit deficient (i.e. one or more grade levels behind peer group)
- Has a poor work history (been fired from one or more jobs within the last six months, OR has a history of sporadic employment, such as “has held three or more jobs within the last 12 months, and is no longer employed”)
- Has actively been seeking employment for at least two months but remains unemployed or underemployed. This includes a youth with no employment history, with limited work experience, and/or actively seeking full-time employment, but have only achieved part-time employment, or
- Has incarcerated parents.
- Any of the above criteria used for serving youth under “Requires Additional Assistance: must be fully documented and justified in CWDS and the participant file. These will be reviewed during NWPA Job Connect monitoring of Title I participants.

No more than 5% of In-School Youth served in a program year may be deemed eligible based on the “requires additional assistance” criterion. NWPA Job Connect’s WIOA Title I Program services contractor(s) will include the number of In-School Youth participants determined and documented to be eligible under the “requires additional assistance” criterion on their regular reporting to NWPA Job Connect to ensure that the 5% limitation is not exceeded. It will also be included as part of NWPA Job Connect’s monitoring of its WIOA Title I program services contractor(s). The NWPA Job Connect board

recently approved In-School Youth funding for supportive services up to 25%. These expenditures will be monitored regularly along with the outcomes.

As a core partner, OVR collaborates with the local workforce development board to provide in-school youth with disabilities opportunities to participate in pre-employment transition services (PETS) to gain skills and knowledge to enter competitive integrated employment. Work-based learning is a key component for in-school youth with disabilities as it helps them discover career paths. PA CareerLink® centers in the local area are accessible and include accommodations for individuals with disabilities.

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

- Counseling and guidance from professional vocational rehabilitation staff to explore career and training options as well as understand VR services.
- Independent Living Skills training allows students to gain knowledge to perform the daily tasks essential for maintaining or obtaining independence. Independent Living Skills can include the following: household budgeting and financial management; utilizing public transportation; navigating through the social services system.
- Self-Advocacy Training to assist students with disabilities in gaining knowledge on disability awareness, advocating during an IEP process, understanding transition processes, and advocating for themselves in post-secondary education, employment, and coordinating social services.
- Workplace Readiness Training provides students with knowledge to find and maintain competitive integrated employment. Curriculums can include soft skills training, interview skills, job readiness, job-seeking skills, HR practices, and other skills needed to become “workplace ready.”
- Job Shadowing provides students with disabilities a one-to-five-day job shadowing experience, for a maximum of 25 hours per school year, in an occupation of interest within a community integrated setting. Students are provided with an opportunity to shadow employees and obtain an overview of the knowledge, tasks, and abilities needed to work in a variety of occupational fields.
- All partners of youth-serving agencies will make services available and will share the costs of providing services to youth with disabilities. If a youth chooses not to access services and programs available through OVR, the youth will remain eligible for all other services in accordance with individual plans for employment and training.

NWPA local workforce development area started a collaborative program with OVR and WIOA Title I Youth who fall under the Uniquely Able Academy (UAA) Program. Crawford County Career and Technical Center started this program in September 2023. A partnership was started with Erie County Community College in October 2023. School districts and local manufacturing employers are supporting organizations with this program. The program introduces students to the fundamentals of CNC machine operation, CNC programming, and overall production processes in the CNC environment. Students receive hands-on experience of CNC machining alongside required theory. They learn to program, set-up, and operate CNC machines, combined with quality control instruments, shop mathematics, and blueprint reading. Graduates qualify for several entry level positions, including machine trainee, machinist apprentice, and CNC operator.

In addition, youth services benefit from the proximity of PennWest Edinboro within our local workforce development area. PennWest Edinboro has been deemed as one of the top five universities in the nation

with an exemplary commitment to providing accessible dormitory facilities to its students with disabilities.

The local board is working with its partners, including Job Corps, to increase outreach to out-of-school, disconnected youth. Meetings are held regularly with the WIOA Title I program contractor to enhance the outreach and recruitment of disconnected youth through the WIOA Out-of-School Youth program. Efforts continue in working with those individuals who are connected to the justice system, such as Parole and Probation, PACCT, and other community partners. The local board is looking to further develop a partnership with AmeriCorps to access other service providers in the local area that serve foster care, homeless, juvenile justice, and dropout youth. AmeriCorps members are often close in age to the target youth population and serve as peers to provide guidance and referrals. The local board will continue to develop these partnerships to increase enrollments for these services. Currently, there are no participants enrolled in AmeriCorps or Job Corps programs in the local area. YouthBuild programs are not currently available in the local area.

Overall, the Youth Committee of the NWPA Job Connect Board is discussing, developing, and implementing strategies to provide eligible youth with high-quality, effective services, providing career pathways programs, and establishing linkages with career and technical centers and post-secondary institutions. Our connection to Erie County Career Pathways Alliance and VenangoREADY provides more resources for youth to access career pathways information to assist with career planning and training activities.

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

*Factors being considered include, but are not limited to:*

- *Indicate if WIOA Title II adult education providers were involved in the development of the local area plan and the providers' involvement with the topics presented in prompt 3.6;*
- *Describe how the local board will carry out the review of applications to provide adult education and literacy activities under WIOA Title II for the local area to determine whether such WIOA Title II applications are consistent with the local area plan. The local board review must be consistent with WIOA Sections 107(d)(11)(A) and (B)(i) and WIOA Section 232 to ensure alignment with its local area plan and the coordinating of the activities described in the local area plan. Applicants for WIOA Title II grants are required to demonstrate alignment of proposed activities with the local area plan as one of the 13 required considerations under WIOA Title II;*
- *Describe how the local board will ensure it will make recommendations, if appropriate, to PA Department of Education (PDE) to promote alignment with the local area plan; and*
- *Describe how the local board will coordinate WIOA Title I workforce activities with those Title II adult education and literacy activities designed to be associated with WIOA Title I (i.e., for when the individuals participating in title I activities have basic education needs and when individuals in Title II programs have needs that may be addressed through Title I services or other services through the one-stop centers).*

The WIOA Title II adult education provider has a representative that sits on the local board and participates on local board committees. This provides opportunities for providing valuable input into the development of the local plan on partner program activities, service integration, and local workforce initiatives.

Postsecondary credentials and career pathways are goals for many adult education and literacy students. Incorporating career readiness and training in a student's pathway is integral to their success. Likewise, many WIOA Title I customers need adult education and literacy services, particularly education that is contextualized for work and relevant to developing career pathways.

Title II adult education and/or family literacy and WIOA Title I program partners are committed to contributing to the local workforce system as outlined in the partner memorandum of understanding. It is important to integrate basic skills and literacy programs with in-demand industry training to support making viable career pathways attainable for job seekers. The local board continues to work towards deepening these partnerships and works with the one stop operator staff and the local board on workforce development issues and initiatives that help to support increased knowledge and awareness of mutual program services. The Title II adult education and/or family literacy partner is integral in providing their expertise for customer assessment and can provide qualifying individuals with adult basic education and/or English as a Second Language classes.

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

Federal regulations require PDE to establish the process by which the local boards review the WIOA Title II applications for alignment with the local area plan and submit recommendations to PDE for improvement of alignment. PDE receives the applications for Title II funds and then distributes applications to the appropriate LWDB for review. PDE develops related review documents and rubrics and provides these to the local board along with training on how to conduct the review and return the documents to PDE. All local boards must use the PDE review documents and rubrics provided. Local boards have the flexibility in determining which members of the local board will participate in the application review process. The review work may be conducted by local board staff but cannot be limited to local board staff. Board members connected to entities that submit applications for WIOA Title II funds or that have other conflicts of interest cannot participate in the review.

Procedures announced by PDE call for the local Adult Education Program providers for services in the local area to submit applications directly to the Department of Education (DOE). DOE performs an initial review to ensure compliance by the proposers with requirements established by DOE. DOE will then share applications related to each workforce area with the appropriate workforce development board, along with the scoring framework that is being employed by the DOE. Local boards will then send recommendations regarding local Adult Education Program provider proposals to the DOE for consideration during DOE's final review, scoring, and selection process. DOE makes the final decisions and informs the local board so that representatives of Adult Education Program providers can be included in service coordination meetings led by the one-stop operator.

The current local process calls for a committee of the NWPA Job Connect Board to ensure local procedures align with the state protocols for local program review, and then for inclusion of Adult Education Program providers in service coordination meetings led by the one-stop operator.

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

***Expectation:** The narrative must describe strategies to implement the one-stop system operational goals and how these strategies will maximize coordination among one-stop system partners. It must specifically describe how the required partners' activities and services are improved and duplication is avoided, as well as how merit staff and contracted service providers are coordinated. Additionally, the narrative must contain information surrounding the roles of the operator and site administrator(s) in coordinating local area program providers' efforts and improvement of services*

The workforce system is often a confusing alliance of private and public agencies, programs, and services. Through coordination and outreach, core partners coordinate system messaging to ensure consistent messaging, access, and understanding. The one stop operator is the primary driver for coordinating system delivery. The integration of core programs at the local level is somewhat limited given that customer tracking systems are not universally accessible to all partners and require service authorizations to access. However, some key strategies have been identified to integrate core programs including system leadership provided through partner management; co-enrollment promoted by partners; partner program information shared during orientation and intake sessions; and priority of service provided to veterans and low-income individuals. Representatives from some WIOA core programs serve as members of the local board. Local board representation allows for input on the direction of workforce activities and resource alignment. Partners of the one-stop convene regularly with the one stop operator to address partner activities, service integrations, and the implementation of local workforce development initiatives.

*How the roles and responsibilities among partner programs are coordinated to achieve optimum results and avoid duplication of services.*

The PA Department of Labor and Industry oversees the Bureau of Workforce Development Partnership and Operations (BWPO) programs. WIOA Title I and BWPO staff have a longstanding relationship centered on serving jobseekers and businesses. Protocols are in place to reduce the duplication of services as appropriate to meet the needs of the customer and the limits of each program. In serving job seekers, Wagner-Peyser services are provided to job seekers looking for basic self-serve services such as access to labor market information and labor exchange services via a Career Resource Center. Frequently, employment services under Wagner-Peyser are provided to job seekers who need more intensive services. BWPO staff often refer jobseekers who need skill development to WIOA Title I programs.

In addition to employment services responsibilities, which include the state's labor exchange program, BWPO staff manage the RESEA program, a program funded by the Department of Labor to specifically address the needs of unemployment claimants. The Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program, which assists individuals who have lost employment due to foreign trade, is also operated by BWPO. WIOA Title I and BWPO staff work together to assist dislocated workers in preparing for new employment through job search, supportive services, and training assistance as needed.

The Business Services Team (BST) includes participation by all partners in the local PA CareerLink® system, including WIOA Title I and BWPO staff. The BST functions jointly in their efforts to organize recruiting and hiring events, provide tailored business services, Rapid Response activities, and match



employers to qualified workers. As required by WIOA, Wagner Peyser staff and WIOA Title I program staff are collocated in the local PA CareerLink® system and these staff contribute to share customer engagement.

*The efforts that are or will be implemented to improve program partner integration at PA CareerLink® centers.*

The local PA CareerLink® system continues to focus on improving the co-enrollment of job seekers into the Wagner-Peyser and WIOA Title I programs to seamlessly meet the primary expectations of serving customers. Co-enrollment allows staff to share responsibilities for serving customers while reducing administrative requirements.

*The one stop delivery system's referral mechanism.*

Internal cross-referral procedures are reviewed from time to time to ensure that high quality and convenient services are available to eligible customers of the local workforce system. The primary focus of the referral system is to provide integrated and seamless delivery of services to job seekers and employers. To facilitate such a system, the partners must familiarize themselves with the basic eligibility and participation requirements, as well as the available services and benefits offered for each of the partners' programs represented in the local workforce system. Referrals are entered into PA's workforce development system of record (CWDS). The partners evaluate ways to improve the referral process, including the use of customer satisfaction surveys.

*The established minimum requirements for a PA CareerLink® career services orientation, the method used for directing basic career services customer flow, use of a customizable initial intake form and a customizable template for developing Individual Employment Plans to ensure consistency and support alignment of services across programs, thus reducing duplicate data among partners.*

Customers are initially assessed by PA CareerLink® staff who ask questions to determine which partner is most appropriate to serve the customer's needs. It is recognized that each customer's path to job readiness is unique and may involve self-directed services, basic career services, and/or individualized services. If a customer is a veteran, priority of service is followed, and information is collected to determine if the individual qualifies for Veteran's Services. If the customer is an eligible Disabled Veteran, they are immediately referred to the Disabled Veteran Outreach Program (DVOP) representative. Customers may also be referred to workshops or triage for further assessment to determine how the PA CareerLink® staff can assist them with seeking and locating self-sustaining employment. This is done by scheduling the individual for an appointment with PA CareerLink® staff for other individualized services such as WIOA eligibility for Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, Trade, RESEA, Job Corps, Title II Education, which includes IU5 and the Titusville Literacy Regional Council (TLRC), OVR, and other related services. Individual Employment Plans are established and updated as the individual receives services from a PA CareerLink® case manager or career advisor. The Individual Employment Plan for adults and Individual Service Strategies for youth are developed within the system of record using the guide provided in PA's workforce development system of record (CWDS).

*The program partner's staff development efforts designed to strengthen the professional skills of co-located partners' staff in PA CareerLink® centers, such as cross-program staff training, customer service training, employer engagement training, and interviewing customers to mitigating barriers training.. As a partner, adult education may participate in delivering training in professional skills. As a partner, adult education may participate in delivering training in professional skills.*

Partner staff are provided with staff development training to increase awareness regarding services provided by other community resource groups. This allows staff from differing programs to understand other partner program services and share their own expertise related to the needs of specific populations to better serve customers. PA CareerLink® partner leadership addresses with staff the core values, performance expectations, focus on customers and other stakeholders, empowerment, innovation, learning, and organizational direction of the system. Staff are trained on new technologies and how those technologies enhance service delivery, including virtual service delivery.

The Board has competitively procured EDSI as the One Stop Operator for the local workforce development area. In that role, EDSI will employ an individual as the one stop operator. As such, they have the authority to organize partner staff to optimize and streamline service delivery efforts. Formal leadership, supervision, and performance responsibilities remain with each staff member's employer of record. The one-stop operator will, at a minimum:

- ❖ Manage daily operations.
- ❖ Manage and coordinate partner responsibilities.
- ❖ Manage hours of operation
- ❖ Coordinate daily work schedules and workflow based on operational needs.
- ❖ Coordinate staff vacations/unscheduled absences with the formal leader to ensure service coverage by center staff.
- ❖ Assist NWPA Job Connect in establishing and maintaining the PA CareerLink® system structure  
This includes but is not limited to:
- ❖ Ensuring state requirements for center certification are met and maintained.
- ❖ Ensuring career services such as the ones outlined in WIOA sec. 134(c)(2) are available and accessible.
- ❖ Ensuring NWPA Job Connect policies are implemented and adhered to
- ❖ Adhering to the provisions outlined in the contract with NWPA Job Connect and the NWPA Job Connect Regional and Local Plans
- ❖ Reinforcing strategic objectives of NWPA Job Connect to partners.
- ❖ Ensuring staff are trained by their formal leadership organizations and provided technical assistance, as needed.
- ❖ Integrate systems and coordinate services for the center and its Partners, placing priority on customer service.
- ❖ Integrated Workforce Service Delivery, as defined by WIOA, means organizing and implementing services by function, rather than by program, when permitted by a program's authorizing statute.
- ❖ Coordinate policies, staff communication, capacity building, and training efforts.
- ❖ Functional alignment includes having one-stop center staff who perform similar tasks and serve on relevant functional teams (e.g., Skills Development Team or Business Services Team).
- ❖ Service integration focuses on serving all customers seamlessly (including targeted populations) by providing a full range of services staffed by cross-functional teams, consistent with the purpose, scope, and requirements of each program.
- ❖ Seamless service delivery means the services are free of cumbersome transitions or duplicative registrations from one program service to another and there is a smooth customer flow to access the array of services available in the workforce center.

- ❖ **Oversee and coordinate partner, program, and PA CareerLink® system performance.** This includes but is not limited to:
  - Providing and/or contributing to reports of center activities, as requested by NWPA Job Connect.
  - Providing input to the partner program leadership on the work performance of staff under their purview.
  - Notifying the formal leader immediately of any staff leave requests or unexcused absences, disciplinary needs, or changes in employee status.
  - Identifying and facilitating the timely resolution of complaints, problems, and other issues.
  - Collaborating with NWPA Job Connect on efforts designed to ensure the meeting of program performance measures, including data sharing procedures to ensure effective data matching, timely data entry into the case management systems, and coordinated data batch downloads (while ensuring the confidentiality requirements of FERPA, 34 CFR 361.38, and 20 CFR part 603).
  - Ensuring open communication with the partner program leadership to facilitate efficient and effective center operations.
  - Evaluating customer satisfaction data and proposing service strategy changes to NWPA Job Connect based on findings.
  - Manage fiscal responsibilities and records for the center. This includes assisting NWPA Job Connect with cost allocations and the maintenance and reconciliation of one-stop center operation budgets.

Prior to the selection of the one-stop operator, core values sessions were held with all partner staff in the local area. Core values are the principles and standards upon which an organization builds its future, and they are used to shape the behavior of every person involved with the organization. A core values statement was adopted by the PA CareerLink® staff following the session. The core values are consistent with the local board's mission and vision and include Display Professionalism; Communicate Proactively; Command Knowledge; Collaborate Actively; Extend Respect and Protect Privacy; and Perform Reliably. The purpose of this strategy and subsequent core values is to maximize coordination of services and avoid duplication of effort across partner agencies within the local workforce development system. The One Stop Operator is responsible for ensuring the core values are embedded into the day-to-day operations. Additionally, meetings are conducted with all colocated partner staff to discuss daily operations and to coordinate staff activities. Regular training is conducted to ensure staff members understand the roles and responsibilities of all partners, promote coordination of services and process improvements, as well as Equal Opportunity and Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.

**3.7 Core program facilitation- How will the local board work with the entities carrying out core programs to:**

- **Expand access to employment, training, education, supportive services, and co-enrollment for eligible individuals, particularly individuals with barriers to employment.**
- **Facilitate the development of Career Pathways in core programs (specify on-ramps from adult education).**

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

*Expand access to employment, training, education, supportive services, and co-enrollment for eligible individuals, particularly individuals with barriers to employment*

The local board continues to work closely with its partners to better coordinate, increase awareness, and expand access to the services and resources available in the local area. This is important for individuals with barriers to employment. The Lean Governance Council, comprised of local PA CareerLink® staff, meets monthly to discuss service delivery improvements and expand access to services across all partners. As mentioned in other sections, mobile and virtual service delivery for services, referrals, and workshops are offered across our six-county area. This allows for those individuals with transportation, childcare, and other barriers to participate in PA CareerLink® services. Referrals are provided to partner agencies to better support veterans, senior citizens, individuals with disabilities, and others who need partner support to enter and remain in employment. Most individuals served through the ABA grant are from under-represented populations.

*Facilitate the development of Career Pathways in core programs (specify on-ramps from adult education).*

The local board developed and implemented career pathways for our local area through the Erie County Career Pathways Alliance. These career pathways include on-ramps from Title II Adult Education. Co-enrollment is provided to individuals, where appropriate, to meet their needs. One of the Title II adult education partners in our local area conducts local workforce system comprehensive assessments. Individuals receiving services from the Title II adult education partners are provided with information on WIOA Title I programs. Referrals provide eligible Title II participants with on-ramps for career pathways to eliminate barriers to employment and gain employability skills leading to family-sustaining employment.

*Describe the local board's method of validating the eligibility of individuals, including the use of telephone verification and documentation inspection verification, especially in consideration of individuals with barriers to employment/ and Outline the steps staff will take to verify eligibility prior to self-certification.*

The WIOA Title I program services contractor staff is responsible for reviewing and signing off on all registration paperwork for completeness and accuracy when determining participant eligibility and maintaining a centrally controlled file for each program applicant and registrant which contains copies of documents collected. NWP Job Connect requires a documented secondary staff review of eligibility determination for all WIOA participants. All data must be entered into CWDS for tracking the participant registration and eligibility.

The NWP Job Connect WIOA Eligibility Policy posted at [www.nwpajobconnect.org](http://www.nwpajobconnect.org) outlines eligibility verification prior to self-certification for participants. While use of self-certification should be limited, NWP Job Connect stresses the importance of serving individuals in a timely manner. Title I must follow the WIOA Eligibility guidelines located in the CWDS Help center for those data elements where self-certification is acceptable. Title I uses the Self-Certification form found in the CWDS Help Center and uploads the completed and signed form into CWDS for the WIOA application, as applicable. Basic Skills Deficient may not be self-certified for WIOA Eligibility. The link to the WIOA Eligibility Guidelines is included in our local policy. The local area will continue to follow the commonwealth's direction on self-certification processes.

Telephone verification is a viable option for verifying specific WIOA eligibility elements. There is a specific form provided by BWDA for Title I staff to use when needed. The document is then uploaded into CWDS, the state system of record, for the data element it verifies.

*Describe strategies and operational elements established to ensure the participant “co-enrollment” across relevant programs is practiced.*

The local board places emphasis on planning across multiple partner programs to ensure alignment in service delivery. The development of effective partnerships across programs and community-based providers provides individuals with employment, education, training, and support services they need. This is critical to maximize resources and align services with career pathways and sector strategies. The local board’s program services contractor determines the appropriate level and balance of services based on the service needs of the participants and if the participant is career ready. This is based on an assessment of their occupational skills, prior work experience, employability, and the participant’s needs. The Title II Adult Education and/or literacy program providers conduct comprehensive assessments for WIOA Title I participants and provide a feeder for co-enrollment between Title I and Title II programs.

*Describe strategies and operational elements established to increase awareness and access to WIOA Title II programs, including an understanding of Title II specific eligibility requirements.*

The local Title II Adult Education and/or Literacy Program Providers are active partners in the local workforce system. One of the providers conducts comprehensive assessments for participants in the local area. This provides the opportunity for individuals to learn about Title II and Title I programs and services. This also allows for the coordination of services between the two programs so participants can receive the full spectrum of services for both educational and employment needs. Since Title I and Title II collaborate to co-enroll participants as needed, there is on-going communication regarding eligibility requirements for both programs. Referrals are made, as needed, to ensure participants receive essential services to assist them in educational, employment, and training needs.

*Describe strategies and operational elements established to increase awareness and access to the WIOA Title IV programs, and that operational compliance concerns are addressed (e.g. qualified Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) counselors determine eligibility for services.*

WIOA Title IV programs are an integral part of the local workforce system. Individuals with disabilities are entitled to the same full range of services as everyone else. Through service delivery, PA CareerLink® staff may become aware that a customer has a disability. The staff may not make unnecessary inquiries into the existence of a disability. The customer chooses whether they supply any information regarding their disability. If the customer discloses a disability, then staff should provide information on WIOA Title IV programs and provide a referral to the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR).

Eligibility to receive services under WIOA Title IV may only be determined by a qualified OVR Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. Vocational rehabilitation counselors determine eligibility for and work with customers to develop an Individual Plan for Employment, providing services necessary to meet their specific vocational goal. As a core partner, OVR provides Vocational Rehabilitation services for people with disabilities. Eligible OVR customers receive multiple services that may include but not be limited to diagnostic, vocational counseling and guidance, vocational evaluation, restoration, training, job

placement and pre-employment training services for eligible and potentially eligible high school students with disabilities. These individualized services are designed to prepare OVR customers to become qualified trained members of the workforce. OVR recognizes the value of customer access to various services and resources and encourages co-enrolment across programs as appropriate.

Since WIOA merges many different workforce programs and establishes a system to meet the needs of all job seekers, there are many priority populations and individuals to be served. Advocacy efforts are essential to ensure the needs of individuals with disabilities are not overlooked and that individuals with disabilities are well served under WIOA. Through creating understanding among other PA CareerLink® staff concerning OVR services, other one stop partners can utilize the expertise of OVR to meet customer needs and refer individuals to OVR who could benefit from their services.

As part of the local board's efforts to provide universal access, outreach to the public and targeted populations, including individuals with disabilities, is accomplished through advertising the one stop system's services in local media outlets, and consulting and collaborating with community service and advocacy groups. These strategies help the local one stop system improve its outreach and services to individuals with disabilities and broaden the pool of people using one stop services.

*Describe strategies used to promote and develop Career Pathways to provide access to employment and training for individuals in adult education programs.*

Since 2020, Career Pathways have been in place for targeted industries such as advanced manufacturing, healthcare, building and construction. The Erie County Career Pathways Alliance developed the career pathways initially for Erie County and the pathways have now been implemented in the other counties of the Northwest PA region. VenangoREADY and ForestREADY are two (2) areas who are utilizing career pathways in their counties.

NWPA Job Connect ensures that the local workforce system is universally accessible, customer centered, with training that is job driven. Customers entering the PA CareerLink® can receive a full array of career services. Career services are tracked in CWDS. Customers requiring individualized services are evaluated and recommendations are based on the initial assessment of knowledge, skills, and abilities. Based on the initial assessment, the customer begins job search activities, moves into the individualized career services process, and is evaluated for training services.

*Describe efforts to identify and improve access to work-based training activities leading to a recognized postsecondary credential, including Registered Apprenticeship and OJT. Improve access to activities leading to a recognized postsecondary credential (industry-recognized certifications or portable, and stackable certifications).*

The local board works to identify, develop, and feed sector pathway programs in the local area. These programs and activities should result in attainment of industry-valued and recognized post-secondary credentials that are aligned with employer workforce needs. The local board works toward improving access to activities leading to a recognized post-secondary credential, including portable and stackable credentials. The local board supports training for credential programs that are affordable and readily available at places and times convenient for working adults; those programs that clearly articulate costs and prerequisites and clearly denote the skills, knowledge, and abilities that are benchmarked by a given credential; those that are stackable meaning one of multiple parts that add to a more substantial credential and do not require starting over at each step; transferable credentials; and credentials linked to a job or educational pathway. The local board contracts with a WIOA Title I program services

contractor who serves to inform participants of available apprenticeship programs through fliers, apprenticeship workshops, ATO information, distribution of materials at community events, providing information to training providers, job seeker introductions/Q&A Sessions, as well as the Learn About Apprenticeships workshop. The local board is utilizing the America Building Apprenticeship (ABA) Grant through NTMA and Early Connections. Local board staff participate in meetings with the Intermediate Units, high school counselors, and career and technical centers to share apprenticeship opportunities.

*What existing programs and funding streams are available and best positioned to support Registered Apprenticeships and Pre-Apprenticeships?*

The following funding services are available for Registered Apprenticeships: ITA, OJT, CJT, IWT, and Supportive Services for Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs. The Northwest Region received the America Building Apprenticeship Grant (ABA). This initiative is to create and expand RAs and Pre-RAs over the next two years. NTMA and 1199C with Early Connections (EC) as an employer are key partners in this movement. One new RAP for Robotics Tech/Mechatronics Tech and the Drafting/Design Pre-Apprenticeship through NTMA started in January 2024. NTMA is expanding the current Toolmaker/Mold Designer program and the Precision Machining Pre-apprenticeship program. Venango Career and Technical Center is expanding their Machinist Pre-Apprenticeship program. 1199C in partnership with EC is starting a Child Development Associate (CDA) Apprenticeship program while expanding their Early Childhood Pre-Apprenticeship program. NTMA has enrolled and served 6 new apprentices in Mold Design, Tool and Die Maker, and Machinist apprenticeships. All individuals are from underrepresented populations. There is one pre-apprentice in the Child Development Specialist pre-apprenticeship. The grant runs through March 31, 2026. NTMA's goal is to serve 15 apprentices and 14 pre-apprentices. Other apprenticeship programs in our local area have received or are receiving WIOA funding for their Registered apprenticeship programs through ITA and OJT funding. The Title I Business Solutions Consultants are certified RA Navigators who work closely with our local registered apprenticeship programs.

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

*Expectation: Narrative must include how ITAs and contracts, as outlined in WIOA Sec. 134, will be used in a coordinated manner to provide such services in the local area.*

Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) are a primary strategy for providing occupational skills training to WIOA participants. The ITA must be for an in-demand occupation on the High Priority Occupation (HPO) List in the local workforce development area. The training provider's program needs to be within a reasonable commuting distance that the customer has agreed to, or in an area where the occupation is in demand and the customer is willing to relocate. Documentation of the customer's willingness and ability to relocate must be provided. Preference must be given to local occupations on the High Priority Occupations List and programs submitted by the Northwest regional training providers when making this determination.

The Commonwealth's High Priority Occupations (HPOs) depict areas within selected industry clusters that are considered in demand by employers, require high skill levels, and are more likely to provide family-sustaining wages. The HPOs are identified by the Center for Workforce Analysis (CWIA). Courses and programs funded by ITAs must appear on the Northwest PA WDA's Eligible Training Provider List

(ETPL). To meet the needs of business and industry, NWPA Job Connect manages a local HPO list, which drives the submission of quality programs for the ETPL. Based on labor market analysis as well as employer input from NWPA Job Connect members and industry partnership members, some occupations may be limited by NWPA Job Connect to funding via an ITA. Reasons why occupations may be subject to this funding limitation are lack of a self-sustaining wage, low annual openings, and occupation saturation. In addition, programs/courses submitted by training providers must be of primary importance and the training required to gain employment in the occupation(s). NWPA Job Connect will continue to develop and strengthen connections with its industry partnerships and higher education institutions to ensure the training conducted in the NWPA area is what employers are looking for, as well as to help educators identify needed changes in curriculum, and identify gaps and skills needed for current and emerging occupations. NWPA Job Connect will develop, maintain, and distribute the ETPL, working closely with the commonwealth and ensuring compliance with the Commonwealth's Eligible Training Providers policy.

*Describe the ITA cap for the local area, as well as the methodology used by the local board to determine the cap.*

The local board's Individual Training Account (ITA) Policy sets the cap for ITAs at \$5500. This was determined by evaluating the number of eligible participants who opted for training, the average cost of training, and the total amount of training funds available in the local workforce area. The local board policy also states the amount of the ITA may be increased based on specific grant requirements, if needed.

*Describe how the local board will determine the circumstances in which contracts will be used instead of ITAs.*

When circumstances arise where NWPA Job Connect determines there is a need to facilitate the training of multiple individuals in in-demand occupations or sectors (incumbent workers), or instances where there are training services provided by community-based organizations or other private organizations that benefit the needs of individuals with barriers to employment, contracts for services may be used instead of ITAs as identified in 20 CFR 680.230.

When contracts for services must be used instead of ITAs, NWPA Job Connect will solicit training providers, including but not limited to, work-based and cohorts, along with registered apprenticeship program sponsors, within and outside of their respective local areas to ensure a competitive market designed to promote consumer choice and achieve successful implementation of data-driven career pathways and sector strategies on the Local Training Provider List (LTPL). The eligibility of a provider and/or program will be based solely on measurable factors and shall include the criteria in the Commonwealth's Workforce System Policy. Information must be entered into CWDS.

On-the-job training (OJT) contracts are another avenue utilized in the NWPA Local Workforce Area. Title I provides OJT contracts to local employers/businesses for WIOA eligible individuals to provide knowledge and skills essential to the full and adequate performance of the occupation; provides reimbursement to the employer for the costs of providing the training and additional supervision related to training; and is limited in duration as appropriate to the occupation for which the participant is being trained.

*Describe how the local board will ensure informed customer choice in the selection of training programs regardless of how the training services are to be provided.*



The WIOA Title I program contractor requires participants to evaluate training providers when requesting ITA funds for occupational skills training. By evaluating similar training programs, the participant can make an informed choice. Participants are required to complete a Training Selection Form which details the training providers/programs reviewed and which one was chosen and why. This completed form is kept in the participant's physical file and reviewed during monitoring.

*Describe how the local board will account for the registered apprenticeship structure in the use of contracts and ITAs.*

Title I staff utilizes OJT and ITA funding reimbursement for apprentices who are eligible to receive WIOA funding. OJT funding is used for the On-the-job learning portion of the apprenticeship while ITA funding is used for the Required Technical Instructional hours of the apprenticeship. Supportive Service funding is also used as needed by the WIOA enrolled/eligible apprentice. All relevant local policies have been updated to comply with Registered Apprenticeships and Pre-Apprenticeships. As guidance is updated through ATO, the Compliance and Policy Specialist will review and update, as needed, the appropriate policies. All updates to policies and ATO information are shared with the One-Stop Operator and Title I staff.

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

*Local board strategies to coordinate and enhance workforce services regarding secondary and postsecondary education. The description needs to include methods involved to avoid duplication of services.*

*How will the local board coordinate with CTE to ensure their students are referred to other applicable services.*

The local board is committed to coordinating with and supporting the local career and technical centers (CTCs) as part of the Perkins V local comprehensive needs assessment process by providing workforce development and labor market information on in-demand and high demand occupations. Local board staff participate year-round in the local occupational advisory committees of the CTCs, as well as stakeholder committees for the Perkins V local needs assessment and other activities that support the completion of the local needs assessment. The local board partners with seven (7) Career and Technical Centers in the six-county region. A local workforce board staff attends the comprehensive needs assessment meetings, some occupational advisory committee meetings, shares information about the High Priority Occupations and In-Demand Occupations, and votes on supporting programs and expenditures. Often, board staff are invited to planning meetings. This helps to ensure connections to local jobs that provide individuals with family sustaining wages. Erie Together, a collaborative movement of local individuals, organizations, and businesses have two prominent initiatives. These are Career Street and the Erie County Career Pathways Alliance (ECCPA). These initiatives focus on career exploration and career pathways development for K-12 students to better connect them to opportunities and employers in the region. Most Erie County school districts, six colleges and universities, all three (3) Erie County high school-level career and technical centers, along with education, workforce development and community partners, and hundreds of employers are engaged in this work.

As the local area has committed youth funding primarily to out-of-school youth, the risk of duplication of services is low. ETPL helps to coordinate the CTC and post-secondary entity programs in the region by

serving as a public facing database of the available programs that are eligible for WIOA funding. This can help those entities identify training needs and avoid duplication as well.

The Title I provider reports on apprenticeship activities for WIOA enrolled apprentices at each Workforce Committee and Business Solutions Committee meetings held every other month, alternating between the two committees. The information provided in the committee meeting reports is also included in the Title I board report for the NWPA Job Connect Board meeting. Local board staff also pull reports from CWDS Ad Hoc to verify the number of current WIOA enrolled apprentices, the number who have completed the program, and this data system allows us to review demographic information, as needed, to show what populations are being served through apprenticeship programs.

*Accessibility improvement of post-secondary programs and expanding access to appropriate technology in career and technical education programs, especially to online training programs that may help eliminate skill gaps.*

The local board continues to work towards increasing offerings of postsecondary educational institutions that train job seekers in skills for high priority and in-demand occupations through outreach and encouragement of eligible training providers to apply for inclusion on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). The local board also coordinates with the local Title II Adult Education Program partners to appropriately refer customers to critical services offered through their programs. Through partnership with the local workforce system, Title II Adult Education Program partners are committed to working with the one-stop operator to develop more effective referral processes and contribute improved service coordination and co-enrollment of participants. The local board has placed ADA workstations across the six-county area that allow individuals with disabilities to access job search and PA CareerLink® services. PA CareerLink® services are also offered through virtual connections and can be accessed by those who have mobility challenges. The ADA workstations placed throughout the local area provide opportunities for increasing access to PA CareerLink® services that can connect the customer to available postsecondary services. Workshops are also offered virtually as well as in person. These workshop offerings are sent to education providers monthly to provide to interested individuals. The computer lab at the PA CareerLink® center is also available to the public and for use by partner programs as well.

*Local board actions related to Perkins Act Section 134 biennial “CTE comprehensive needs assessment,” include the local board’s role with secondary, adult, and post-secondary Perkins V recipients.*

*Relevant education programs that include adult education, registered apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeships, community colleges, community education councils, private licensed schools.*

#### *Basic skills training*

Representatives from local education and various community agencies serve on the local board and/or its committees. The committee and board members collaborate to develop effective youth programs and address barriers to employment while enhancing services and reducing duplicative services, such as Title II Adult Education and/or Literacy Program providers coordinating assessments and providing basic skills training. The Board’s committees work collaboratively to align and integrate workplace education, on-the-job training, counseling, and support services to create accelerated pathways to postsecondary education credentials and employment in in-demand and high priority occupations. The Workforce Solutions Committee supports NWPA Job Connect in ensuring the PA CareerLink® system coordinates with secondary and post-secondary education programs, provides opportunities for entrepreneurial ventures, and allows for co-enrollments to avoid duplication of services. NWPA Job Connect staff

maintain an active role as members of local advisory committees for secondary and postsecondary providers, which include Clarion Career and Technical Center, Corry School District, Crawford Tech, Erie Career and Technical Center, Union City, Northwestern PA Regional College (NPRC), Venango Career and Technical Center, and Warren County Career and Technical Center. NWPA Job Connect reviews Title II Adult Education and/or Family Literacy Program(s) funding applications, upon request, for alignment with the NWPA Job Connect local plan.

As noted above, the NWPA Job Connect staff participate on career and technical center advisory committees and other annual meetings across the local area, including the meetings held by the career and technical centers to meet the requirements of their CTE comprehensive needs assessment. Career and technical center Directors are members of NWPA Job Connect Youth Committee and participate in committee discussions to provide expertise on technical training programs. The career and technical centers have training programs on the state's eligible training provider list. This ensures that the career and technical center programs are of sufficient size, scope, and quality to meet labor market needs in the local area. As noted previously, the NWPA area does not have a post-secondary Perkins V entity.

Title I has two Business Services Consultants who successfully completed the Registered Apprenticeship Navigator training through the Keystone Development Partnership. These trained RA Navigators promote, support, and advance both Registered Apprenticeships and Pre-Apprenticeship programs and initiatives across our region. They build awareness of the training approach and provide technical assistance to sponsors/employers who are building and registering new programs and/or looking to improve the capacity of current programs and build pipelines. Apprenticeships provide a tool for employment and career building that benefits job seekers and employers. This is also a component of the local board's goal of building more effective career pathways. Apprenticeships can assist local boards in meeting their common measures of performance regarding gaining and retaining employment, earnings, credential attainment, and measurable skill gains.

#### **4. OPERATIONAL PLANNING: Local Area Workforce Delivery System**

**4.1 Business and Employer Engagement- What strategies will be implemented in the local area to improve business and employer engagement that:**

- **Support a local area workforce development system that meets the needs of businesses in the local area;**
- **Manage activities or services that will be implemented to improve business engagement;**
- **Better coordinate regional workforce and economic development strategy, messaging, engagement and programs; and**
- **Strengthen linkages between the PA CareerLink® service delivery system and unemployment insurance programs.**

*Describe the local board's strategies and key operational elements that frame the following initiatives:*

*Work-based training opportunities, including but not limited to incumbent worker training programs, on-the-job training (OJT), customized training programs, and the use of apprenticeship models to support these programs.*

Work-based training opportunities for employers include increased rates for on-the-job training reimbursement, customized job training, and incumbent worker training to help meet their workforce needs. Local businesses have engaged with the incumbent worker training program. The local board

continues to gather employer input and feedback to inform them of the need for incumbent worker training. Title I will utilize this type of training when appropriate.

The local board supports employers interested in apprenticeships by ensuring business service representatives are knowledgeable. As of June 2024, two (2) Title I Business Solutions Consultants successfully completed the RA Navigator training. They continue to share the benefits of pre- and registered apprenticeships with local employers. This includes integrating apprenticeship activities into the services offered to both job seekers and businesses. The local board promotes the programs, serves as a convener when appropriate, and applies for grants to increase the number of apprenticeship offerings in the area. We have the ABA Grant and are working with NTMA and Early Connections for both Pre-Apprenticeship and Apprenticeship programs in manufacturing and early childhood education.

The local board benefits from their partnerships with vocational rehabilitation, secondary and post-secondary education, human services programs, intermediate units, and other youth organizations to leverage resources. These partnerships can increase the candidate pool for WIOA services, Apprenticeship programs, and help leverage funds for all programs and services.

#### *Industry and Sector strategies*

The local board will promote the use of industry and sector partnerships to address the workforce needs of multiple employers within an industry. We partner with the Northwest PA Industrial Resources Center (NWIRC) to facilitate and continue the work of the local manufacturing industry partnership. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania expects to see growth over the next ten years in Education & Health Services, Professional & Business Services, and Leisure & Hospitality. Four (4) groups are expected to see long-term structural growth- Information, Financial Activities, Professional & Business Services, and Education & Health Services. Locally, we will compare the state's data to our six-county region's data in these industries and bring conversations to our Workforce and Business Solutions Board Committees, as well as the NWPA Job Connect Board meetings.

#### *Career lattices and pathways initiatives (including how they are connected to adult education)*

Career Pathways were rolled out in July 2021 through the Career Pathways Alliance in Erie County and are still being utilized in our six-county area. These pathways focus on career exploration and career pathway development for K-12 students to better connect them to opportunities and employers in the region. Intermediate Unit 5 in Northwest PA offers a variety of career and education programs, including career pathways in high-priority occupations, to help students prepare for college, employment, and post-secondary training. The career pathways can be found at [www.nwpajobconnect.org](http://www.nwpajobconnect.org) for all interested parties to review. The pathways connect workers with a career path that leads to a family-sustaining wage in an in-demand career, while addressing barriers to employment. Another aspect of career pathways is to offer multiple entry and exit points to progress in their careers.

*Expanding apprenticeship models to include development of pre-apprenticeship programs to serve as a feeder to existent registered apprenticeship programs or in concert with development of new registered apprenticeship programs.*

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

The LWDB has actively been expanding apprenticeship models within the region and plans to continue this work. The LWDB has utilized the Pre-Apprenticeship Grant, PA Smart Apprenticeship Grant, and the Apprenticeship Building America (ABA) grant to serve as feeders to existent apprenticeships and develop new ones. These partnerships have and will continue to help the local area leverage resources to expand the use of pre- and registered apprenticeships. The development of local apprenticeships has helped to recruit and develop a highly skilled workforce, improve productivity, reduce turnover costs, and increase employee retention. By filling talent shortages and closing skill gaps, apprenticeships have allowed companies to expand, innovate, and thrive.

The ABA grant has been instrumental in supporting communities through increasing apprenticeship training opportunities for those individuals who have been previously underserved. Since January 1, 2023, the LWDB has collaborated with the National Tooling and Machining Association (NTMA) and Early Connections (Early Childhood Education) through the ABA Grant. Through the grant they are providing apprenticeship opportunities to underserved individuals in both manufacturing and early childhood education. Through monthly meetings of the ABA and the Keystone Apprenticeship Alliance, the LWDB meets with the local ATO Representative at least annually to review current Registered Apprenticeships in the local area. In addition, regular communication occurs between the LWDB and the ATO office on local Registered Apprenticeships through the sharing of current listings of Apprenticeships and Pre-Apprenticeships.

*Utilization of effective business intermediaries.*

The LWDB has partnered with the Keystone Community Education Council as well as the Northwest PA Industrial Resource Center (NWIRC) who act as business intermediaries for the successful implementation of initiatives and projects in the local workforce area. The NWIRC was contracted to facilitate the Lean Governance Council (LGC) to work with key staff toward continuous improvement activities within the local one-stop system. Currently, the one stop operator is leading the LGC monthly meeting with PA CareerLink® partner staff to improve service delivery within the system.

*Other business services and strategies designed to meet the needs of regional employers*

The WIOA Title I contractor has assigned Title I Business Solutions staff to geographic areas by sectors. The Business Services Team (BST) networks and collaborates with industry partners, Chambers of Commerce, Apprenticeship sponsors and trainers, and local Small Business Development Centers. They attend the weekly BST meetings, which are coordinated by the One-Stop Operator.

*Describe who facilitates employer engagement in workforce development programs, including small employers and employers operating within in-demand industry sectors and occupations.*

BST facilitates employer engagement in workforce development programs, including small employer and employers operating with in-demand industry sectors and occupations following strategies and goals of the LWDB and the LWDB Business Solutions Committee.

*Discussing how core partners will collaborate in employer engagement (specifically referencing WIOA title IV programs, The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, and benefits to hiring people with disabilities) to do comprehensive core partner education and outreach to employers;*

As a core partner, OVR participates in Employer Engagement and provides multiple services to the business community designed to assist businesses with onboarding pre-screened qualified employees

with disabilities. OVR on-boarding supports for a qualified new hire can include reasonable accommodation consultations On-the-Job Training (OJT) wage reimbursement, referral on tax credits or deductions. OVR also works with businesses through connecting students involved in OVR's pre-employment transition services. Services under pre-employment transition services include programs like paid work experiences, job shadowing, workplace tours. OVR also offers no-cost consultation on the Americans with Disability Act (ADA), accessibility standards and helping a business to retain current employees following an accident, injury, or disability. Statewide business services staff can identify resources to assist any organization on how to improve access compliance and steps to diversify their workforce to include citizens with a disability.

*How will the local board engage employers within in-demand industries and ensure that the employment and training activities in the local area meet the needs of its employers.*

The local board includes members who represent in-demand industries, and they provide input and feedback regarding employer engagement. The BST and the Title I Business Solutions staff engage employers within in-demand industries through providing business services such as job fairs, recruiting events, mock interview sessions, assessing business needs, posting and distributing employer job listings, sourcing and screening candidates, development of internships, on-the-job training, Rapid Response assistance for business closures and layoffs, wage industry/economic trends, employment law, etc.

*Describe entity(s) tasked with the management and administrative roles of the business engagement services function (which includes employer case management, tracking of services and data research and analysis) as well as tracking which entities are making employer visits and the collaboration that occurs during these visits.*

EDSI is the WIOA Title I program services contractor charged with the management of business engagement services for the local area. The Business Solutions staff use an internal performance report that includes employer outreach, penetration, and retention; employers served by sector; job orders; total direct placement; and total work-based placement in OJT, TJ, WEX, and RA. Ad Hoc reports from CWDS are also utilized to verify outcomes. Employer visit information is also captured in the Executive Pulse system that is viewable by all BST members and economic development partners. Outcomes are shared with the local board and stakeholders.

*Describe the roles and responsibilities of local board staff hired and contracted entities primarily tasked with business engagement related activities and services.*

The local board is the leader in connecting industry with training and education to meet industry needs. Sector-driven strategies include cultivating employer engagement in workforce development, assessing employer needs through business intelligence, as well as influencing and investing in the education system and other pipeline sources. Local board staff will support the board's Business Solutions Committee that shares the board's strategic direction and goals with EDSI the WIOA Title I program services contractor charged with providing business engagement activities and services to local employers.

*How will the local board continue to develop appropriate ways to measure and benchmark employer outcome results.*

The local board's Business Solutions Committee discusses employer outcomes at each meeting and requests additional details or reporting as needed. The WIOA Title I program contractor's contract includes a Statement of Work addendum that requires a focus on employer engagement and

satisfaction. Employer engagement is included in the Statement of Work addendum to the Title I contract and includes the tracking of employers, utilization of services, and outcomes related to the services received. The Title I contractor also is tasked with writing a Business Outreach Strategic Plan along with a Business Solutions Monitoring Plan. These plans are created for each program year. Data and information that includes services, activities, and outcomes is stored in CWDS (Commonwealth Workforce Development System). Reports are pulled as needed to report on employer activity, including outcomes.

*How will the local board improve key economic development partner relationships*

The local board collaborates with various local economic development agencies, including the Northwest Commission, the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership, and the Warren County Chamber of Business & Industry. The Northwest Commission is the local development district that coordinates economic development efforts across the six counties of our Northwest local area, as well as the two (2) counties of our regional partner, West Central Job Partnership. The Northwest Commission's Executive Director and the Warren County Chamber of Business and Industry Executive Director serve as members of the local board. The local board also connects individually with the other local economic development offices regarding business outreach, support issues, and initiatives. NWPA Job Connect and Title I have recently engaged with the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) to connect with banks and financial institutions. This partnership has the following goals: developing Career Pathways for banks; identifying workforce needs to assist banks and financial institutions in reaching their recruitment goals; and developing partnerships with banks on financial education and employment.

*How are programs and services being adopted by businesses and employers*

Local businesses and employers participate on the Next Gen manufacturing partnership through the NWIRC; they have participated in incumbent worker training local area pilot programs; they participate in the local area's Manufacturing Day, as well as on-the-job training and work experiences for youth.

*If the local area has Industry Partnerships, how will the partnership employers influence not only the industry partnership training, but also that of the entire area.*

The local board is looking to prioritize training investments where overall economic returns are likely to be highest, specifically in those sectors that generate gains in terms of jobs and income. The board looks for input from industry partnerships to influence effective training strategies that have the most impact for the use of training dollars. These strategies benefit not only our local area, but that of our regional partner, West Central Job Partnership, since these industry partnerships serve both local workforce areas. Industry partnership input helps to steer investments toward ensuring that programs align with labor market trends and needs based on patterns of job growth.

*How will the local board improve strategies and practices to increase business and employer engagement over current levels.*

The Business Solutions Committee of the local board continues to review and discuss business services and employer satisfaction to develop and recommend new strategies to increase employer engagement. The Statement of Work is in effect for both the Title I Program Services Contractor and the One-Stop Operator contractor. Elements include business services and employer satisfaction.

*Describe the local board's strategies and operational elements it uses to support unemployment insurance programs and resources employed for the benefit of the local area businesses and citizens.*

*Describe how UC claimants are provided reemployment services, including a brief overview of how the local board manages the "Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program*

*Describe how the local board supports UC claimants, indicating they are complying with Pennsylvania's UC law 'Register for Work and Work Search*

*Indicate how the local board identifies and refers to UC for adjudication, listing any potential UC eligibility issues identified during RESEA or any other UC claimant interaction.*

Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) are conducted by Merit staff either virtually or in person, based on the participant's preference. As of July 2022, UC Representatives are providing in person meetings by appointment in the two comprehensive sites located in Erie and Venango Counties. These positions initially were a product of the equity grant. In addition to the required RESEA information and individual plans, additional information on PA CareerLink® workshops, job fairs, and resource referrals are provided. UC Claimants also have access to the UC computer located in the Resource Center at both comprehensive sites.

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

PA CareerLink® staff are knowledgeable on UC requirements for PA CareerLink® registration. If UC required components are missing, staff will provide the claimant with contacts for the appropriate resources to complete the missing steps. Staff are also familiar with the UC claimant's work search requirements and can provide guidance to the claimant regarding how to track their work search. During the RESEA interviews, the staff member would note any questionable statements made by the claimant, such as vacation, injury, etc. The information would be provided to the UC office for investigation as instructed in the UC manual.

Our goal is to educate the unemployed job seeker with the toll-free numbers he/she needs to file for unemployment compensation and provide access to a variety of printable resources, such as UC postings, signs, pamphlets, handbooks and forms, for both claimants and employers.

For those UC Claimants looking to file an appeal, forms are provided and submitted via fax at no charge and with limited wait. Staff provide copies of the confirmation printout for all faxes sent on behalf of Claimants.

**4.2 Economic Development- How will the local board coordinate local area workforce investment activities with regional economic development activities that are specific to a local area? How will the local board promote entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services?**



*How will the local board strategically coordinate with regional economic development and employer partners in the local area to identify and fulfill industry needs.*

The local board is working with local economic development agencies to inform and educate regarding each other's strategies and participate in grants and/or projects. Coordination is challenging, covering a large geographic region with both urban and rural needs, with most areas working on their own economic plans. The local board works to provide workforce development expertise to align strategies and identify partnership opportunities. The local Business Services Team has access to regionalized labor market information to connect businesses to a full range of partner services. The Executive Director of the local development district covering our eight-county regional area (Northwest Commission) is a member of the local board and provides significant insight and collaboration between economic and workforce development to benefit businesses and delivery solutions.

*Describe regional and local area DCED supported activities (e.g. Small Business Development Centers (SBDC), which are PREP agencies) that collaborate with interested entities.*

The local development district, Northwest Commission, received the Engage! Grant to cover our eight-county region. This includes our regional partner, West Central Job Partnership. PREP programs serve our area, and the Executive Pulse is a tool that effectively serves employer customers.

*Describe the relationship between the local board and the Community Action Agencies.*

Community Action agencies cover our six-county region and are also mandated partners. Representatives from the agencies report on their programs and outcomes at monthly partner meetings. Their initiatives are shared with appropriate board committees to help promote their programs.

*Describe resources the local board will use to promote entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services*

Professional and personal networks, education, and funding are important to successful entrepreneurship. SBDC is a local partner providing skills, funding, and networking to assist in this effort.

*How is the local board measuring employer outcome results.*

The local board utilizes a Statement of Work, which includes tracking employers, utilization of services, and outcomes related to the services received. The local board also analyzes the results of focus group meetings, industry partnership meetings, local employer surveys, business solutions representative meetings with employers, discussions with chambers and economic development agencies, and state labor market information data.

*How will the local board support and promote a training strategy that leads to self-employment? How might this strategy be used to help individuals or participants with barriers to employment (e.g. persons with disabilities and ex-offenders)?*

Entrepreneurship and small business development have been identified as important employment options for populations that have barriers to employment. Self-employment can offer individuals with disabilities greater workplace flexibility and income opportunities. These individuals may work locally or at home to contribute to economic growth. Youth can benefit from the leadership and financial management skills provided by entrepreneurship work experience, especially during a tight labor market. By partnering with the SBDCs, the local board provides access to more resources, such as debt financing and equity financing via financial assistance programs, for prospective entrepreneurs and small

business owners. The local workforce system provides access to unemployed workers, knowledgeable staff, and funding support through SBDC partners. Customers are informed about self-employment opportunities and staff help customers understand the demands and requirements of entrepreneurship. Assessments help to determine whether their financial skills, attributes, and experience make them good candidates for starting a business.

*How will the local board better coordinate regional workforce and economic development strategy?*

As local economic development entities develop long-term plans for regional economic growth, the local board will provide workforce development expertise to align strategies and identify opportunities. Local board staff participate on economic development PREP meetings and other joint collaborative meetings and provide information on aligning work-based learning with high priority occupations in the region and meeting employer needs.

*If the local area has the Engage! Program, how will Engage! further strengthen the relationship between workforce and economic development.*

The Northwest Commission was awarded an Engage! Grant and continues to be the administrative entity for the program in our local workforce area to support a systematic business retention and expansion (BRE) program to assist in the identification and targeting of PA companies, the engagement of those companies, and assisting the targeted companies through referrals and direct technical assistance. These services are provided to retain existing businesses in the community and to help them grow and expand by building solid relationships with business owners or key decision makers and economic and workforce development partners and their representatives. The local board partners with the Northwest Commission to provide support as the workforce intermediary in the local area. The local board and the local workforce system uses its expertise and resources to assist in identifying needs and matching resources to help existing businesses and industries address their challenges to become more competitive and successful.

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

*Roles performed by the PA CareerLink® Business Services Team, or BST, within the scope of the region as a whole; describe the BST organizational structure and who manages the BST; describe coordination efforts amongst BST members as well as actions of the local board; and indicate the program providers that comprise the BST (e.g. Veteran program LVERS, OVR staff, Rapid Response staff). Since no BST vendor should be acting alone, describe how you will ensure this does not happen.*

The Business Services Team (BST) includes WIOA Title I, Title II, Title III, OVR, Rapid Response, and Veteran's Services representatives. There are three separate monthly meetings that include the Rural Internal Team, the Erie Internal Team, and the External BST team. Daily interactions occur between individual team members and outside organizations such as local Chambers of Commerce, Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), employers, and industries identified as emerging industries for growth and high priority. These interactions enhance the efforts of the group and help to eliminate duplication of efforts and services.

*For program partners not specifically represented on the BST, describe how these partners are connected to employers (e.g. provision of adult basic education and workplace literacy information to employers).*

EARN, AARP, SCSEP, and Job Corps staff work collaboratively with the BST members. Information pertinent to employers and job seekers is shared with all partners.

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

Registered Apprenticeships will be promoted through a variety of public engagement strategies to increase awareness of the benefits of apprenticeships as an essential tool for workforce development, recruitment, and training. PA CareerLink® partners and stakeholders, including but not limited to, BWPO, OVR, Local Veteran's Employment Representatives (LVERs), Disabled Veteran's Outreach Program (DVOP), IU5, local board, educational representatives, business leaders, RA sponsors, and economic development organizations have met to discuss RAs. The BST team will focus on developing sector and career pathway strategies utilizing apprenticeships, recruiting and screening apprentice candidates, provide pre-apprenticeship and basic skills preparation, provide supportive services as applicable, and contribute funding for on-the-job training or classroom instruction (ITA). Registered Apprenticeships are discussed at the BST meetings when the ATO representative is available to attend the meeting. The BST team developed an employer information packet that includes Registered Apprenticeship information. When fliers are received from Apprenticeship programs, these are posted in the comprehensive centers. When training is needed, the BST team reaches out to ATO and/or the local Apprenticeship and Training Representative (ATR).

Board staff monitors the apprenticeship information Title I provides for the committee and board meetings. Board staff also pull monthly training reports to gather data on the number of active RAs, the successful completes, and demographic information to respond to questions regarding the number being served from underserved communities. Weekly meetings are held between Board staff and Title I to discuss data, outreach, and concerns with apprenticeships.

All staff have access to apprenticeship information, including access to local policies, which are housed on the NWPA Job Connect website under the Policy and Procedures section. Staff have contact information for our region's ATO representative. Fliers and brochures are handed out at community events, job fairs, and are available in the Career Resource Centers (CRCs) at the comprehensive centers. Social Media platforms are used to help promote Registered Apprenticeships. There is a workshop titled Learn About Apprenticeships which focuses on how apprenticeships can assist you with training and equipping individuals with skills.

*Describe regional coordination of messaging and engagement; which program providers are making employer visits and the collaboration that occurs during the visits; and the management of tracking business related services and associated data analysis for all program partners to share.*

WIOA Title I conducts visits with employers and collaborates with any and all partners prior to and after the visit, as appropriate. All services are entered into CWDS (PA's workforce development system of record), and notes are viewable by all BST members and economic development partners via Executive Pulse. The Local Employment Veterans Rep (LVER) conducts employer visits to promote the hiring of veterans. After the meeting, the LVER sends a soft hand off email introducing WIOA Title I staff and their services.

*What WIOA Title III (Wagner-Peyser Act) employer-based services, as well as other services and resources made available from partners are made available to business customers including Registered Apprenticeships; describe*

*how the activities and services are accessed by business and employers or their legal representatives; and offer insight into how workforce-oriented programs and services are being adopted by businesses and employers in the region*

PA CareerLink® staff conduct employer assessments and connect them to identified services. Staff are knowledgeable and responsive to business and workforce needs. They align needs with sector strategies and provide access to recruitment processes, human resource needs, and other services. Employer-based services include but are not limited to providing access to labor market information and assisting with its interpretation; providing customized recruitment and job applicant screening, assessment, and referral services; consulting on human resource issues; posting job orders in the state's labor exchange system; developing on-the-job training or incumbent worker training contracts; use of PA CareerLink® facilities for recruiting and interviewing job applicants; providing information regarding workforce development initiatives and programs; providing information regarding assistive technology and communication accommodations; providing information regarding disability awareness issues; and conducting job fairs. Rapid Response activities regarding closures, downsizing, or natural disasters are also provided. The Rapid Response Coordinator collaborates with employers to create and execute layoff aversion strategies. Additionally, they organize informational sessions featuring representatives from BWPO, Title I, and Unemployment Compensation, Pennie, United Way, and other organizations. These sessions provide valuable opportunities and available supportive services. Staff contact the Rapid Response Coordinator when they hear of potential closures and/or downsizing. Information regarding changes in businesses is also discussed at the LWDB Business Solutions Committee, Workforce Committee, and the full NWPA Job Connect board meetings.

*What WIOA Title IV (Rehabilitation Act of 1973) employer-based services are made available to business customers*

For WIOA Title IV eligible customers, OVR provides additional multiple services to the business community designed to assist businesses with onboarding pre-screened qualified employees with disabilities. OVR business services include reasonable accommodation consultation, OJT, and referrals on tax credits or deductions. OVR meets the needs of businesses by providing no cost services that include Americans with Disability Act (ADA) awareness training, ADA Accessibility evaluations, accommodation recommendations for current employees, and retention services. OVR also continues to partner with employers with on-the-job training (OJT), providing 100% wage reimbursement to businesses that hire OVR customers. OVR also works with businesses through connecting students involved in OVR's pre-employment transition services, which include paid work experiences, job shadowing, and workplace tours.

*Describe how businesses and employers engage with education*

Opportunities exist in the local area to enhance employer and business engagement with education. This is accomplished through industry partnerships, an annual Manufacturing Day event, and connections to the Intermediate Units in our local area. Participation on the NWPA Job Connect Board and its committees provides opportunities to engage businesses and employers with education. Employer feedback supports program development that meets the needs of the business customer. Educators and employers collaborate during the HPO petition process to better connect employer's needs and educational programs to prepare individuals for the job openings.

Career Pathways also offer an effective and customer-centered approach to workforce development because they structure intentional connections among workers, employers, and service providers. Aligning educational opportunities that lead to the industry-recognized qualifications, skills, and academic credentials helps bring workers and employers into the training system on the front end. In turn, this transforms businesses from “customers” into “partners or co-investors” in the local workforce system.

*If there are local board innovative practices such as the use of board staff and contracted entities providing business engagement activities and services, the narrative must detail the administrative and operational relationship between the BST and the local board business engagement efforts as well as demonstrating the reduction of duplicative services and activities.*

The local board staff does not provide direct business engagement activities and services. Under the management of EDSI as the PA CareerLink® Operator, a coordinated set of business services in collaboration with local economic development is provided to local employers that include but are not limited to:

- Employer visits include maintaining existing business relationships, as well as connecting new employers to the local workforce development system that provides an assessment of business needs.
- Support for creating business folders, uploading job postings, searching for potential employees, reviewing candidates, etc. in CWDS, the state system of record.
- OJT programs that engage employers with the local workforce development system that provides on-the-job training for job seekers in exchange for wage reimbursement.
- Job Fairs specifically targeted to business and industry to provide access to cohorts of skilled job seekers.
- Industry Partnerships that assist targeted industries with similar training and employment needs.
- Incumbent Worker Training- NWPA Job Connect may reserve the right to use up to 20% of funds allocated to pay for the cost of providing training through a training program for incumbent workers.
- Occupational assessments, such as WorkKeys.
- Unemployment Insurance Information sessions and/or workshops.

The one stop system partners have developed employer services that separate the PA CareerLink® from a crowded field of providers (both publicly and privately funded) similarly serving employers in the Northwest Pennsylvania region. It is the intent to increase the number of employers who access and receive business services, as well as to increase the quality and effectiveness of the services. With limitations on staff and funds, the resources are targeted toward existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and those industries that provide entry level jobs with a career pathway within the industry.

NWPA Job Connect has embraced efforts to address business and employer needs through Next Generation Sector opportunities. With Next Generation Sector Partnerships, the opportunity exists to expand engagement of additional industry sectors beyond manufacturing to include healthcare, building and construction, and hospitality and tourism. The mission of the Business Services Team (BST) is to enhance the community and economic vitality of the area it services by partnering with businesses,

community and economic development organizations, and educational institutions. BST supports employers as customers to attract and retain a qualified workforce, with an emphasis on emerging and targeted industries. NWPA Job Connect is a partner with the Engage! Grant which was awarded to the Northwest PA Regional Planning and Development Commission on behalf of the PREP partners. Through this process, BST staff are responsible for entering employer information into Executive Pulse to share information among all partners. BST staff have access to the data stored in Executive Pulse, which allows for more informed meetings with business customers. Economic development is well represented on the local board. NWPA Job Connect along with the BST organizes and staffs job fairs and conducts assessments of potential employees for the economic development community and employers.

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

*Expectation: Narrative must describe how the local board determines the variety, quantity and quality of workforce services (i.e., employment, education and training activities), the services providers and the activities that support this endeavor.*

*Explain the local board's periodic process that may employ regional and local area labor market information, HPO list, as well as stakeholder input to help inform and meet workforce activity goals and objectives.*

The one stop operator oversees one stop operations and meets regularly with partner management to discuss service access, service delivery, staffing, complaints, and local workforce initiatives. The one stop operator also constructs a continuous improvement plan annually that looks at connecting partners and stakeholders. The Board staff recently connected the operator to the State WDB One Stop Continuous Improvement Committee. Information discussed at this committee, including practices adopted by other boards and from the PA Department of Labor and Industry, is shared with board staff and partners. The Business Services Team of the local one stop system meets weekly and is responsible for addressing employers' needs. The local board's Workforce Solutions Committee is responsible for overseeing the service needs provided to job seekers in the local area to assist in helping them to become employed in family-sustaining employment. The Business Solutions Committee of the local board is responsible for ensuring that quality services are provided to meet the needs of businesses in the local area. The local board reviews and discusses local workforce services through its committees, as well as during the workforce development discussion at its public meetings to ensure continuous improvement of the local workforce system and the services of its contracted providers. The local board continues to oversee efforts to promote continuous improvement and quality service delivery in the one stop system through its monitoring activities as well.

The local board conducts outreach to local employers and legislators annually during the High Priority Occupations petition period. Stakeholders are invited to provide evidence-based recommendations to add occupations to the high priority occupation list. This provides an opportunity for review of regional and local labor market information, in-depth review of the current HPO list, as well as opportunities for stakeholders to provide input on occupational critical needs in the local area, such as emergency medical technicians and paramedics. This is an important process for local businesses to position their company and our region to receive the state support needed to prepare candidates for in-demand, hard-to-fill jobs, as well as providing a process for local legislators to identify constituent needs, which also include employer needs.

NWPA Job Connect reviews the HPO list from the commonwealth annually. Training providers must meet specific criteria to be approved for eligibility. They can petition NWPA Job Connect to add programs to the HPO List if they can provide documentation of local job availability and wages for an occupation. Input from private sector employers on the NWPA Job Connect Board, as well as the economic development partners, helps NWPA Job Connect better understand employers' needs and identify any new or emerging occupations to be placed on the HPO list as needed.

*Describe how the board projects the needs of employers, workers and jobseekers, including consideration of pipeline needs.*

The local board partners with local economic development on skills gap strategic planning and studies to identify local workforce and pipeline needs. The local board also coordinates with education to identify new courses of study to meet employer and job seeker demand. Representatives of local education are included on the local board and its committees.

*Describe the local board's outreach plan designed to better understand employers and their needs as well as service providers (e.g., employment, training and education)*

The local board staff includes an Information and Communication Specialist who coordinates efforts with the One Stop Operator for regular postings via website, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn to promote employment and training opportunities. Job fairs, recruitments, surveys, and focus groups are used to gather customer feedback. Workforce development discussions are a standing agenda item at the regular board meetings. Board staff participate on the Next Gen Industry Partnership meetings and provide the information to the local board and board committees for recommendations of board strategies and planning.

*Describe how the local board will ensure sufficient numbers of quality eligible providers that meet the needs of employers and individuals.*

The local board incorporates a competitive bid process for awarding its WIOA Title I program services and One Stop Operator contracts for the local area. These are well advertised and reach out beyond the local area and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to ensure sufficient numbers of quality eligible providers respond. The most recent competitive bid process awarded both the WIOA Title I program services contract and the One Stop Operator contract to EDSI.

There are separate and distinct contracts that include appropriate firewall assurances. The one stop operator meets monthly with all partners to oversee operations and discuss service access, service delivery, staffing, complaints, and one stop initiatives. The one-stop operator staff also convenes the weekly BST meetings. BST is responsible for addressing business needs.

Workforce development in Northwest PA is focused on partnership. It draws resources and momentum from multiple entities to provide a collaborative talent development system that engages employers and job seekers at the local level. Through regular, structured, cross-agency meetings of the partners and Business Services Team, information is shared, and strategies are developed, as appropriate, to address any deficiencies or concerns and ensure the services meet the needs of local employers and job seekers.

*Discuss how local board's application of L&I's Eligible Training Provider policy, include strategies to grow in number and improve the overall quality of eligible training providers participation in the statewide eligible training provider list.*

The local board recognizes the critical role training providers play in providing effective service delivery for individuals with barriers to employment. The local board is working within its level of authority under state policy to avoid imposing burdens that would inhibit the participation of quality training providers. The local board works toward providing a comprehensive list of quality training providers that meet performance standards and provide training to program participants in a manner consistent with industry needs in the local area. Training programs must meet performance benchmarks regarding program completion, job placement rates, earnings, and credential attainment of students. Program applications must include a program description, program length, tuition and costs, prerequisites, and credentials that can be attained. NWPA Job Connect provides information sessions for any interested area training providers for navigating the eligible training provider state system. This provides an opportunity for input to identify any new courses of study to meet employer and job seeker demand, to discuss labor market changes, performance, and employer needs. Email communication is conducted regularly with training providers; blast emails are distributed annually to ensure local eligible training providers are aware that they may apply to be on the ETPL list. Through communications with its providers, NWPA Job Connect ensures that schools providing training for in-demand occupations apply to be included on the ETPL. NWPA Job Connect continues to engage employers to identify needed skill sets and work with the schools and training providers to ensure the training provided meets the needs of the employer or industry cluster.

*Briefly explain how the local board employs the procurement process cycle to support continuous improvement*

Every four (4) years, the local board is required to procure the One-Stop Operator. Every five (5) years, the local board is required to procure the WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth services. Each program year, the current providers are evaluated through a Risk Assessment survey, monitoring reports, performance and fiscal measures, and statement of work reports. NWPA Job Connect board uses this information to determine if the contract will be renewed or if a request for proposal is needed. A statement of work is provided with the contracts and discussed each quarter with NWPA Job Connect Board staff and the One Stop Operator and Title I management in separate meetings. Results are shared with the board and committee members.

*Describe the local board's oversight roles assigned to the board and how it is implemented throughout the workforce service delivery system to support continuous improvement, and Describe the local board's assessment and monitoring process of the service providers; include the review of training provider's performance data as well as qualitative information.*

Members of the local board who participate in the Fiscal/Monitoring Committee are involved in the monitoring of the one stop centers, one stop operator, fiscal agent, state monitoring of the local area, etc., to ensure compliance. Monitoring is done frequently to determine any risks or weaknesses early on so that technical assistance can be provided to ensure the success and longevity of the contract. As part of this process, the committee and members of the board are involved in the evaluation of the providers and provide recommendations to the board regarding quality of performance. A committee of board members, CLEOs, and partners are involved in the selection of providers. A separate committee reviews the Statements of Work for both the WIOA Title I contractor and the One Stop Operator. The results of these monitoring activities are shared with the full board.

*Describe the local board's review, tabulation, and consideration of customer satisfaction surveys.*



The Fiscal/Monitoring Committee is involved in ensuring the firewall between the Operator and Title I contractor includes partner surveys. The Fiscal/Monitoring Committee reviews the surveys of the customers (jobseekers and employers), done by NWPA Job Connect staff. This is done in addition to the satisfaction surveys by the PA CareerLink®. When contact information is provided, staff contact the customer seeking information and resolutions. Survey information is also shared with the NWPA Job Connect Board and CLEOs.

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

***Expectation:*** *The narrative must explain how the local board plans to leverage technology, transportation and information sharing to help expedite service access to customers in remote and rural areas, target populations and individuals with disabilities. Available vocational educational services, training programs, and outreach activities must be described regarding services that partner agencies provide, and how to access such services.*

*Plans to leverage resources and expand capacity in remote areas within the local area workforce delivery system*

The local board leverages partner programs to provide more customer services and has expanded access through building relationships with existing community infrastructure. These partners can provide access to online resources to increase customer flow and provide career services to the broader community. This is further enhanced by the Ring Central technology that was implemented in the local areas to provide a platform for communicating and transferring documentation in a safe and secure manner. Ring Central is a global provider of cloud-based business communication and collaboration solutions that provide increased accessibility. It allows for secure transfer of documentation, as well as accessible connection on devices. It provides a platform where individuals can communicate and collaborate, taking into consideration all hearing, visual, mobility, and cognitive disabilities. It has capability for customizable fonts for easier legibility, quick navigation for those with vision limitations, visual voice messages for the deaf and hard of hearing individuals, and closed captioning. The introduction of this technology to the local workforce system increases access to programming services, especially in the more rural areas, as it can be used with mobile devices. The local board will continue to expand access and use of technology to increase opportunities to serve individuals with barriers to employment so they can enter career pathways.

Mobile services have been provided to jobseekers and businesses since July 2017. PA CareerLink® staff have the necessary equipment to meet individuals and businesses where it is most accessible for them to meet. A few examples of places where mobile services occur are local libraries, Salvation Army, other local agencies, and employer locations. Privacy and confidentiality are of utmost importance when meeting individuals in public places. Policies and procedures are in place to ensure privacy and confidentiality are met.

The local board leverages partner programs to provide more customer services and support. To achieve broader outreach, the local workforce system continues its relationships with community organizations including Community Resources, Inc, Voices for Independence, Climate Changers, and others that can benefit from or contribute to local workforce system services and facilitate smooth linkages of new customers to PA CareerLink®. Mobile services continue to be provided to individuals and employers through our partner agencies and other local establishments. New sites are always being evaluated for use.

*Describe efforts to provide quality services to remote and rural areas using technology and other means*

Ring Central technology and the increased availability of community-accessible broadband through partnerships with the Information Technology Disaster Resource Center (ITDRC) have expanded access to employment, training, education, and supportive services in our local workforce area, especially in the more remote areas that have had limited access in the past. The safety and security of using Ring Central has created opportunities to continue service delivery when an office needs to close for assorted reasons.

Title II instructors provide supplemental distance learning options to interested students as outlined in division policy. Technology based tools include: Khan Academy for self-paced math and literacy practices; Kaplan Digital Resources for GED preparation and skill building; Google Classroom to organize assignments, share resources, and facilitate remote instruction; Burlington English for ESL Learners to build language skills outside the classroom; PA CareerLink® workshops, which are accessible virtually for career readiness support; Transition Support Activities in which students use technology to complete job and college applications, create and update resumes, register for events and schedule appointments, research community resources to help with barriers, and Foundation Skills Framework learning activities. Instructors participate in ongoing professional development to enhance their ability to integrate technology effectively into instruction and support students remotely. All students attend an online orientation and complete a technology survey. This survey allows for collection of data and a review of interest and technological needs.

St. Benedict's Education Center (EARN) teaches digital literacy in house to their participants. There is a 9-module course from WISC-online. This is offered every other week. The instructor provides both in person and remote instruction dependent on the participant's situation. If a class is missed, the participant can work independently on the website. The website tracks and sends progress reports to the instructor. Checklists to track the participants' progress are kept in their files.

*In conjunction with a WIOA participant's interaction with the one stop delivery system, and program case managers in particular, describes how and when participant or employer information is entered into the state's system of record (i.e., CWDS). If a program case manager does not enter some or all the participant and employer information, describe who enters the information. Describe when the participant or employer information is entered into the state's system of record (i.e., CWDS) in relation to the time services were actually performed*

WIOA participant information is entered into PA's workforce development system of record (CWDS) by PA CareerLink® staff within the timeframe required by the PA Department of Labor and Industry. Employer services are also captured in CWDS by PA CareerLink® staff, including business service team members within the allotted timeframe by the PA Department of Labor and Industry.

*Describing other state-owned case management information system(s) employed in the local area that WIOA participants' information is entered and stored (examples include, but are not limited to Unemployment Insurance, Adult Education and OVR). The local area must indicate the program partner that is the responsible entity that uses the case management information system;*

Each program partner is responsible for entering their respective participant information into CWDS for those with authorizations. Title II enters information into the PA Department of Education database system (E-data). Results of CASAS assessments are provided to Title I and Title III staff for entering scores into CWDS.

The Title II Adult Education and/or family literacy provider conducts the CASAS assessments needed for local area workforce participants. Through the comprehensive level of coordination in that effort, the Title II provider can identify early in the process any participants who would benefit from their services. Additionally, through individual interviews, including discussions about barriers, education, and education goals, PA CareerLink® can identify participants who need Title II adult education and/or family literacy services. PA CareerLink® staff have a strong collaboration with the Title II providers, and a strong referral system exists to ensure participants receive needed services to assist them in their educational and employment activities. PA CareerLink® staff use CWDS to submit referrals to Title II providers. This system is also used to communicate referral status. Using this customer-focused approach increases access to services and barrier mitigation. The Title I Operator pulls monthly and quarterly reports on the number of referrals and presents this data to the NWPA Job Connect Board via reports.

*Describing the process that identifies participants not provided with WIOA title I and title III career and training services but are enrolled in other WIOA programs. Describe how and when these WIOA participants' services and activities are entered into the CWDS;*

All Labor Exchange (Wagner-Peyser) services provided by WIOA Title I and Title III are entered into CWDS within the required time stated by the PA Department of Labor and Industry. Referrals are made within CWDS with Title II adult basic education and Title IV Office of Vocational Rehabilitation services, respectively.

*Listing non-Commonwealth owned and leased information management system(s) employed in the local area to aid in the management of WIOA programs (include information management system(s) used by contracted service providers). If such system(s) is used, describe the process the local area uses to align the WIOA participant information entered into the local area's additional non-Commonwealth owned and leased case management information system(s) with CWDS. The local board must provide a rationalization for why this data alignment process with CWDS is an optimum utilization of time, effort and funds. The local board must describe how it maintains compliance with federal rules and regulations protecting personally identifiable information, if applicable.*

No non-Commonwealth information management systems are being used in the local workforce area. The only system being used is CWDS.

*Participating in the development of Career Pathways that provide access to employment and training for individuals in adult education programs;*

The career pathways developed by the Career Pathways Alliance of Erie County and implemented in July 2021 are still being used in our local area. In close relationship with the Career Pathways Alliance of Erie County, the local workforce system provides opportunities to tap into the strong relationships with multiple school districts in utilizing these pathways. The strong relationship with Erie Together, who manages and facilitates the Career Pathways Alliance, further assists in increasing outreach and access and expands opportunities for those individuals with barriers such as poverty.

The local board partners with the Career and Technical Centers in the six-county area, with local board staff participating in their Comprehensive Needs Assessment meetings and Occupational Advisory Committee meetings. We continue to build relationships with the Intermediate Units which include

school superintendents and school counselors. Information is shared on the career pathways, as well as discussing the High Priority Occupation and In-Demand Occupation lists.

VenangoREADY and ForestREADY also provide career pathways information to students in their respective counties.

*Utilizing partner's program information sharing in ways that stress the importance of getting the information to customers quickly, as well as ensuring that communication is accessible*

The local board has an Information and Communication Specialist staff member who communicates information to customers efficiently and enhances the information being made available to the public. The local board also works with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and other divisions of the PA Department of Labor and Industry to ensure the information is ADA accessible, especially the information that is being shared virtually. This includes but is not limited to the One Stop Operator, Title II Adult Education, EARN, SNAP, Title I WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Programs, TANF Youth Development Programs, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Veterans Services, which includes referrals to the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Representative for Disabled Veterans, Wagner-Peyser Services, etc. Meetings are held with frontline PA CareerLink® staff to discuss program challenges and opportunities and increased access through technology, etc. Ad Hoc reports are pulled monthly and quarterly by the Operator, Title I, and NWPA Job Connect board staff. Information is compiled and presented at both board committee and board meetings. Discussions regarding data and progress with goals are held on a weekly and bi-weekly basis with Title I management and the One Stop Operator. The goals are set using Common Performance Measures and Fiscal Measures to ensure compliance.

*Identify strategies for better meeting the needs of individuals with barriers to employment (such as improving digital literacy skills)*

The local board partners with advocacy groups and community organizations with expertise in serving individuals with barriers to employment. The local board continues working toward identifying physical and programmatic barriers and recommending ways to improve access to ensure more job seekers connect with a career pathway and a family-sustaining job. The Title I contractor offers a Computer Basics Workshop. SkillUp™ PA is another platform utilized to help individuals learn digital literacy.

Referrals are made through CWDS to OVR and Adult Education programs as needed and requested by individuals. Mobile services continue to be offered in our six-county region to better accommodate individuals.

Many of the local board's strategies and initiatives are realizing positive impact on meeting the needs of individuals with barriers to employment. Significant work by the board has culminated in the development of methods and initiatives for increasing access to programs and services for this population. This includes the progressive impact of the mobile service delivery model and the addition of ADA accessible workstations in partnership with community agencies. The development of the Accessibility Protocol has supported increasing awareness and knowledge for ensuring accessibility to programs and services for all populations. Registered Apprenticeship programs can ease the transition for individuals returning from incarceration. The addition of virtual technology has benefited individuals with disabilities in overcoming barriers and opening new opportunities for employment.

*Ensuring access to services, i.e interpreters and translated documents for person with impairments (visual, hearing, and other accessibility needs) as required by law*

The local board continues to evaluate ways to improve access to services through partnering with community agencies with expertise in serving individuals with disabilities and those with barriers to employment, ensuring that reasonable accommodations are available to assist those individuals in accessing the local workforce system services.

There are two (2) comprehensive PA CareerLink® centers in the local area where any customer in the area may seek services. Public hours and locations for the comprehensive sites are advertised at [www.pacareerlink.pa.gov](http://www.pacareerlink.pa.gov).

PA CareerLink® has developed partnerships with many local community agencies who work in partnership with PA CareerLink® to provide support and assistance to individuals with barriers to employment. St. Benedict Education Center, the Employment Advancement and Retention Network (EARN) local program contractor, provides job training to address soft skills for individuals who are referred through the County Assistance Offices. Through EARN, clients participate in activities and abide by the corresponding program criteria. Where appropriate, the services of PA CareerLink® and other partners are utilized to achieve customer goals. Such partnership building has resulted in improved outreach to these special populations, especially individuals with barriers to employment.

Partnerships with the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) agencies provide an opportunity to enhance skills under the Older Americans Act through programming for eligible individuals in need of additional training to re-engage in the workforce.

Co-enrollment occurs between programs when applicable. One example is out-of-school youth who are working with the Title II Adult and Education and/or Family Literacy center to obtain their GEDs while learning job skills through WIOA Youth Work Experiences.

Virtual services/technology continue to be used more effectively to provide services off-site and in rural areas with limited or no internet connectivity.

For limited English speaking and reading populations, there are designated interpreter numbers for use through Propio. Referrals are made to Title II Adult Education providers for additional assistance. The following information comes from the CWIA Barriers-Language report regarding individuals who speak English less than very well: Clarion County has .8%; Crawford County has 2.2%; Erie County has 2.4%; Forest County has 1.6%; Venango County has .9%; and Warren County has 1.2%. Relationships with agencies such as the Multicultural Resource Center (MCRC) and Catholic Charities continue, and they provide expertise on services to individuals with barriers to employment.

Programs and facilities within the local workforce development area are compliant with WIOA Section 188 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. This is ensured through regular program/facilities monitoring by the NWPA Job Connect staff monitor/EO Officer, as well as through state ADA compliance reviews conducted annually. PA CareerLink® staff training sessions are regularly provided to ensure staff members are prepared to provide the best services possible to individuals with disabilities. Resources include the Test Telephone or Teletypewriter for the Deaf (TTY), ADA accessible desks, computers, etc. American Sign Language interpreters are provided when requested in advance by deaf or hard of hearing customers. Ubi-duo is a speech generating device used to assist deaf or hard of hearing customers who

walk into a PA CareerLink® center. Training is provided by OVR as needed. Large print and/or braille documents are provided to blind or low vision individuals as needed. Coordination with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) helps to maximize service and funding opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

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

The committees of the NWPA Job Connect Board support and advise the board in the establishment and delivery of services to individuals with barriers to employment, including individuals with disabilities.

*Describe language assistance requests received for limited English Proficiency (LEP) populations*

When requests for language assistance are received, PA CareerLink® staff utilize Propio for language translation. Staff call the designated number and are transferred to the appropriate person at Propio who translates into the requested language. Referrals are also made to the Adult Education programs for additional assistance.

*Describe reasonable accommodations (used to mitigate impairments caused by a disability) requested by employees and participants, and the response provided to the request. If the request for accommodations was denied, explain the reason for denial.*

At the PA CareerLink® comprehensive centers, there are accessible workstations loaded with software used for screen magnification, screen reading, and visual enhancements. In addition, each comprehensive center has a CCTV magnifier used to project a magnified image onto a video monitor with variable magnification. ADA accessible workstations are installed in community partner locations to better accommodate clients' needs. Reasonable accommodations are provided, upon request, as part of the menu of services and is not separately tracked.

*If applicable, describe the level of participation in SNAP and what factors led to these partnerships within your local area.*

Individuals who receive SNAP benefits are referred by the County Assistance Office to the local EARN provider, St. Benedict Education Center. The guidelines are similar to EARN with fewer required hours. SNAP participants have access to the same activities as EARN participants, including intensive case management, instruction, and employment coordination. They are referred to the local PA CareerLink® as appropriate. The SNAP program is discussed at the quarterly Local Management Committee Meetings (LMC).

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

*The narrative must explain the local area's set of strategies designed to:*

- *Identify supportive services and resources (e.g., transportation, public libraries, childcare, legal aid, housing, mental health, refugee and immigration services, vocational rehabilitations services, independent living services, community reentry programs) and*
- *Coordinate supportive services and resources to allow customers to participate.*

Information on the coordination of transportation can be found in the Northwest PA Workforce Planning Region Multi-Year WIOA Regional Plan at [www.nwpajobconnect.org/resources](http://www.nwpajobconnect.org/resources) Supportive services must be available to support eligible participants during training and assist them in overcoming barriers to training and employment. The area's PA CareerLink® centers work to establish strategic partnerships with local agencies to assist adults, dislocated workers, and youth in the local workforce development area with supportive service needs. The NWPA Job Connect Board has a local supportive service policy that defines the provision of supportive service funding for participants to participate in workforce-funded programs and activities to secure and retain employment. Referrals are made to community agencies that may provide support services to maximize the availability of supportive services in the LWDA. Discussions on supportive services are also conducted with the Local Management Committee, which includes representatives from the local County Assistance Offices.

Advances in telecommunications and technology allow for seamless, universal, and remote access to education, training, and other workforce development services. While technology cannot fix all barrier access problems, it helps staff to improve accessibility and offset the challenges of lack of transportation, especially in more remote, rural areas.

Supportive services can be used to provide the availability of technology to participants such as internet, laptops, and other technology.

To assist with the transportation barrier, mobile services are provided to individuals and businesses in our six-county region. The One Stop Operator continues to meet with local agencies and businesses to partner with them to better serve those in our area.

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

**Expectation:** *Narrative must describe the strategy and role of the local area and regional (if applicable) business service teams roles with the Rapid Response services. Narrative should include a description of the local area's layoff aversion strategy. In addition, describe how the board is using the Rapid Response Guidance and Rapid Response and Trade Guidance released early 2017, and in 2024, to guide partners when providing rapid response services. Since Rapid Response events do not only include those held at a PA CareerLink® location, but all Rapid Response events in the area, narrative must include the strategy to ensure dislocated workers that do not attend Rapid Response events are captured by the PA CareerLink® Team. Describe how those outcomes will be captured (i.e., what will local areas do to partner with their Rapid Response team to ensure these individuals are engaged?).*

The purpose of the Rapid Response system is to provide comprehensive information and technical assistance leading to re-employment of dislocated workers affected by layoff, closure, and/or disaster. Rapid Response activities are provided to employers and workers when a layoff or closure is going to occur, is occurring, or has occurred, in compliance with state and federal regulations.

The Rapid Response coordinator is the point of contact for Rapid Response activities and works with affected employers to determine the services needed and the service delivery approach that best serves the needs of each employer and the affected workers. The Bureau of Workforce Development

Partnership and Operations (BWPO) and WIOA Title I Dislocated Workers staff work with the Rapid Response Coordinator to form a Rapid Response Team, providing Rapid Response sessions and Benefits Rights Interviews (BRIs) along with other services as determined to be needed. PA CareerLink® staff provide information at Rapid Response sessions to educate and inform job seekers of opportunities available through the PA CareerLink® system. WIOA Title I and BWPO staff then begin the referral process to ensure that job seekers affected through Rapid Response receive eligibility determination and enrollment for appropriate services, with the goal of reemployment. NWPA Job Connect Board staff coordinates directly with PA Department of Labor and Industry, BWPO, and the local Rapid Response Coordinator in applying for Rapid Response funds for local coordination with statewide Rapid Response activities.

Layoff aversion activities are also conducted in the local workforce development area in partnership with the Steel Valley Authority through their Strategic Early Warning Network (SEWN) working with and providing turnaround services to at-risk small to mid-size manufacturers throughout Northwest Pennsylvania. The Steel Valley Authority is a multi-municipality government authority addressing layoff aversion helping workers, their families, small manufacturers, and communities survive global economic change. SEWN obtains referrals to struggling companies through a variety of sources, including workforce development professionals, local workforce development boards, financial institutions, company customers, suppliers or vendors, industrial resource centers, unions, or affected workers themselves. Within 48 hours of receiving a referral, SEWN staff and/or Rapid Response Coordination Services will contact the company and attempt to establish a meeting and plant tour. SEWN staff has expertise in several areas of business turnaround and layoff aversion, including financial restructuring; buyouts; succession planning and ownership transition; labor-management relations; high-performance workplace strategies; operations; and cost management.

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

*Expectation: Narrative must list the services provided to participants beginning with the universal services (e.g., Wagner-Peyser Act based Employment Services) and concluding with a description of how individuals with barriers to employment are uniquely served.*

*Describe how the one-stop delivery system employs a methodical process ensuring customers' accessible intake; establish participant status, determine needs of the participant and identify any barrier(s) to employment.*

PA CareerLink® staff use an intake script for initial calls received from potential customers. The one stop operator tracks intake data via a Formstack tool. Labor Exchange services and other reports are entered into CWDS by PA CareerLink® staff, ensuring the information is entered within the state's requirement of 30 days from the date of service.

*Describe how local areas will utilize Digital Intake information to employ barrier mitigation processes.*

Digital Intake Information reports are pulled from CWDS and reviewed by the Operator staff. The demographic information included in the reports allows for conversations regarding referrals to agencies who can provide needed services, activities, and program resources to individuals, especially those with barriers to employment.



*Describe how the one-stop delivery system employs a methodical affirmative outreach process that presents the benefits and services of the workforce development system to individuals and groups. A description of outreach activities may include information sessions regarding services that partner agencies provide and how to access such services. These outreach efforts may include presentations on available services that target certain populations, specifically individuals with barrier(s) to employment.*

Through mobile and virtual service delivery methods, individuals receive workforce development services in locations and environments where they are most comfortable. There is continued work in developing and implementing the processes to apply technology as well as expanding customer access to technology. The adoption of Ring Central technology to provide secure transmission of documents has proven to have a significant positive impact on serving individuals with barriers to employment.

*Describe how the local area will include all partners in regular community outreach*

Title I continues their outreach to non-profit organizations and other agencies across the six-county area seeking to establish a reciprocal referral network of customers across a wide spectrum of populations. All parties share information with customers through printed materials and social media posts. Partners attend monthly meetings to discuss their programs, initiatives, outcomes, and successes.

*Describe how the one-stop delivery system provides the appropriate services and resources equally to participants*

WIOA Title I staff conduct social media outreach to various populations. They follow NWPA Job Connect Board's social media policy and protocols. Title I provides information to employers regarding job fairs, specific industry job fairs, and helps coordinate the events. Title I staff also shares information on youth programs and work experience posts via youth-friendly outlets and employers. Workshops available from PA CareerLink® are posted on the PA CareerLink® website, social media, and via fliers that are placed in the community. A system-wide outreach effort to non-profit organizations and social service agencies in the six-county region began in February 2021 and continues today. The value and benefits of the PA CareerLink® system are provided to the agencies to help create a mutually beneficial relationship. UC customers also receive outreach from PA CareerLink® staff, using UC flier information in PA's workforce development system of record to target that population.

In addition to following the priority of service requirements and protocols, staff assess each participant to determine the next steps for services that meet their specific needs. Whether it is one partner, a combination of partners, or even agencies beyond the PA CareerLink® core partners, services and service delivery plans and the timing of those services are crafted as appropriate for the individual.

*Describe services provided to individuals with disabilities eligible for services under WIOA Title IV*

The PA CareerLink® system in the Northwest PA region provides career services that include but are not limited to outreach, intake and orientation, skill assessment, career counseling and job search, referrals to and coordination of activities, placement assistance, and funding for training services. Services are provided by partner staff from a variety of federal and state employment and training programs such as WIOA Title I, Wagner-Peyser, Trade Act, Veterans Employment, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Carl Perkins, Adult Education and Literacy, Unemployment Compensation, PA Department of Human Services, Community Service Block Grant, and programs funded through the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

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

Through a coordinated referral system, customers learn about other community partners and the specific services they provide. Staff make appropriate referrals as needed. The special populations focus includes:

#### Services to Individuals with Disabilities and Barriers to Employment

Efforts are made to ensure that individuals with disabilities receive access to all services provided within the PA CareerLink® centers. Under WIOA Title IV, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) focuses on individuals who meet their eligibility and follow their policies, procedures, and regulations. They also play a role in recruitment and outreach to this population. Sensitivity training is provided for PA CareerLink® staff, as well as training on the various adaptive technologies used within the PA CareerLink® sites. As with other participant groups, referrals are made, as appropriate, to other partnering community agencies to ensure full accessibility to services. The local board's committees support and advise NWPA Job Connect in the establishment and delivery of services to this population. Also, by developing relationships and conducting outreach to local agencies such as Community Resources for Independence and Voices for Independence, we build on local expertise to benefit our customers with disabilities and barriers to employment.

Business service staff can identify resources to assist employers in hiring individuals, including those with barriers to employment. Specifically for individuals with disabilities, OVR provides multiple services to the business community designed to assist businesses with onboarding pre-screened qualified employees with disabilities. OVR on-boarding support for a qualified new employee can include reasonable accommodation consultation On-the-Job Training (OJT) wage reimbursement and a referral on tax credits or deductions. OVR also offers no-cost consultation on the Americans with Disability Act (ADA), accessibility standards, and helping a business to retain current employees following an accident, illness, or injury.

#### Services to Veterans and Related Eligible Persons

Upon entering the PA CareerLink®, individuals are greeted and asked if they are a veteran. Once identified as a veteran or eligible spouse of a veteran, customers are apprised of the services available, including the veteran's priority of service. Specialized veteran workshops have been developed to assist veterans in meeting employer expectations, including a workshop designed to enable veterans to transfer their military occupational experience to civilian job descriptions. Job/Career Fairs utilize early admission for veterans. A regional veteran's outreach plan was created to enhance opportunities to connect veterans to products, services, and employment. PA CareerLink® staff members are trained to ensure veteran's priority of service is in effect, regardless of funding limits, if the veterans or related eligible person meet the eligibility criteria.

Eligible Disabled Veterans are immediately referred to the Disabled Veteran Outreach Program Representative (DVOP) for additional services.

### Services to TANF customers and Low-Income Individuals

Public assistance recipients may have multiple barriers to employment and require a range of services. These would include case management, multiple support services, basic education remediation, vocational education, and job search assistance. Partnering with Employment Advancement and Retention Network (EARN) coordinates resources and services, as well as expanding case management and supportive services to this population. NWPA Job Connect is working to further enhance service integration between the EARN program and the PA CareerLink® system locally. All parties are committed to improving service integration and the leveraging of resources for the benefit of all job seekers.

### Migrant Seasonal Farm Workers

Migrant and/or seasonal farm workers often lack the necessary basic education and vocational skills necessary to obtain a family sustaining income. These customers seeking assistance may benefit from the available services through partnership with local adult literacy and education agencies across the region. To address the communication barrier of limited English-speaking customers, local interpreters and dial up interpreters through Propio Language Services are provided as needed. Written materials of available services are also available in Spanish. Migrant and seasonal farm workers receive any additional services needed to obtain employment. Locally, PathStone Corporation oversees the National Farmworker Jobs Program.

### Services to Displaced Homemakers

Displaced Homemakers receive services at the PA CareerLink® which include aptitude and interest assessments, discussions about informed career choices, and workshops for resume writing and interview skills. Referrals are made for adult literacy and education services and to other partnering agencies to better meet their needs. Transitional Jobs and On-the-job training can be beneficial to this population. Outreach is conducted to both the jobseeker and the employers regarding the benefits of work-based training.

### Services to Women and Minorities

Services to women are made through referrals to local women's shelters, the Salvation Army, food banks, county assistance offices, Community Action, Inc., and Community Services. Minorities often experience higher rates of high school dropouts and unemployment. Referrals for high school equivalency (HSE) credential preparation services are made. Job search assistance and other PA CareerLink® services are also available.

### Older Individuals

An active referral process exists between the PA CareerLink® and partner agencies for program information and assistance for mature workers. Resources are shared and appropriate services are provided. For participants with little or no prior work experience, paid work experience opportunities through Transitional Jobs can be provided. The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) is a community and work-based job training program for older Americans.

### Persons with Limited English Proficiency

Individuals with Limited English Proficiency are provided with interpreter services through Propio Language Services. Written materials outlining available services are also available in Spanish. Individuals wishing to improve their literacy can access services through local adult literacy and education partner agencies. A Babel notice is in place to assist individuals who need assistance in a language other than English. Individuals are also referred to local agencies who provide language assistance.

### Ex-Offenders/Returning Citizens

Ex-offenders face special challenges in reentering the workforce. PA CareerLink® staff members conduct on-going conversations with the federal prison system, the county jails, local church groups, parole, and probation offices, and concerned citizens regarding assisting those who have completed their incarceration find employment. In Erie County, as part of the Unified Erie approach to violence reduction, a group of stakeholders including law enforcement, social service, religious, government and educational professionals, and ex-offenders convened to explore the successful reentry of formerly convicted county, state, and federal offenders into the community so they can reach their highest potential. Erie County Reentry Services and Support Alliance (ECRSSA) continues to meet regularly. The primary goals of the ECRSSA are to (1) increase access and connections to support services and assistance for transitioning and call-in clients; (2) to promote a responsible quality of life through positive family, spiritual, and informal support connections; (3) to achieve safer communities through reduced violence and recidivism. The local workforce development system supports this effort through employment services such as soft skills training, resume writing, interviewing skills, and other job seeker services available through the PA CareerLink®. Through the established partnership between Title I and the Erie County Probation officer, they saw a significant decrease in the recidivism rate to 5.4% while the state rate is above 50%.

### Refugee and Immigrant Population

The local workforce area has a diverse population that includes refugee and immigrant populations, located almost solely in Erie County. Included populations are Bhutanese/Nepalese, Somalian, Sudanese, Eritreans, Bosnians, Ukrainians, Iraqis, Afghans, and Asians. Many refugees and immigrants have suffered political or religious persecution and have spent decades in refugee camps, unable to return home. The PA CareerLink® has developed partnerships with the Multicultural Resource Center, the International Institute, the Urban Erie Community Development Corporation, Catholic Charities, and Erie Homes for Children and Adults to provide this population with a wide range of collaborative language and cultural diversity supportive services to assist them in breaking down barriers to employment. These services include but are not limited to resettlement services, interpretation in over thirty languages, childcare, housing, transportation, overcoming past trauma and grief, managing money, understanding credit, driving simulation courses, and long-term follow-up support with employers. Many of these individuals possess skills needed by employers but need help re-establishing professional credentials in the United States. Job search assistance is also needed and provided. On-the-job training opportunities are provided to this population to assist them in their goal for employment to gain the self-sufficiency they desire for themselves and their families.

### Dislocated Workers

Individuals who are laid off or will be laid off due to plant closures or downsizing are eligible for career services through the PA CareerLink®. Dislocated Workers that are determined to be job-ready receive job matching and job referral services. Dislocated workers who need additional assistance will proceed through individualized or training services. Dislocated workers may receive training or, if eligible, Trade Act services. They will work with PA CareerLink® staff to receive the services for which they are eligible to obtain employment that leads to self-sufficiency.

### Trade Act Eligible Individuals

Eligible individuals who were laid off due to plant closures or downsizing from a trade-impacted where the company was previously certified are provided a Benefit Rights Interview (BRI). The Trade Act eligible individual meets with the Trade Act staff, a WIOA Title I application for services is completed to accomplish dual enrollment and an assessment is conducted. Supportive services are available as needed for all eligible co-enrolled individuals.

### Youth

WIOA program services are provided to eligible youth by the WIOA Title I program services contractor. WIOA requires a focus on out-of-school youth (OSY). The emphasis is on connecting youth to occupational learning and work-based learning through Work Experiences, including internships and On-the-Job Training, when applicable. STEM and other activities such as Industry Clubs, Career Camp, and Career Days are explored through the TANF Youth Development Fund Program with In-school youth. The Business Team is exploring Pre-apprenticeship program pilots, with the goal of gainful employment for youth involved, and pipeline development for local industry sectors.

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

*Expectation 1: The narrative must indicate how WIOA section 188 compliance, including civil rights and equal opportunity, and Americans with Disability Act of 1990 applicable provisions will be assured for those who avail themselves of the local area's one-stop delivery system services and resources (and that resources are at an appropriate reading level for the general population, including regional designated services locations and mobile one-stops).*

*List key technology and materials at the one-stop available for use by individuals with disabilities.*

The local board ensures that the one-stop system includes assistive technology for individuals with disabilities. Examples include, Dragon Naturally Speaking, Windows 10 has an "Ease of Access Center," low glare monitor screen, adjustable workstation, alternate mini keyboard, alternate trackball mouse, foam wrist rests, TTY phone, Ring Central system with closed captioned capability, chat room, amplification features, large screen monitors, and intercom allowing hands-free peer-to-peer use. Ubi-Duo, a speech generating device used to assist those who are deaf or hard of hearing, has been in use since 2023. Training on assistive technology is on-going in the PA CareerLink® centers.

*Describe operational support for addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities*

The needs of individuals with disabilities are supported through reasonable accommodations and assistive technology. This includes the assistive technologies mentioned above, as well as Propio language services, interpreters, Braille, Ubi-Duo, ADA accessibility reviews, and staff training to ensure equal opportunity compliance and best practices. Additionally, the one-stop system and local board are working to help employers realize the individual talents of individuals with disabilities and to help all workers realize their full potential in the workplace.

*If applicable, describe program partner and stakeholder actions related to this prompt.*

In 2018, Synergy Consulting Partners, LLC, developed an Accessibility Protocol and training for the LWDB on ADA accessibility. The Accessibility Protocol provides guidance for implementing operational requirements under WIOA. The Protocol guide was distributed as a resource for the LWDB, as well as the One Stop partners and other interested parties. The guide provides a better understanding of how to create a fully integrated service delivery system in the areas of physical, communication, and programmatic/service accessibility compliance under WIOA. The Accessibility Protocol remains in use and is part of the Memorandum of Understanding with the partners. The LWDB continues to explore best practices and ways to implement barrier removal and universal accessibility of the services provided via virtual technologies. Through a Digital Literacy Grant, our local area was able to purchase workstations and provide technology to local agencies such as Voices for Independence and Community Resources for Independence. Workstations were installed at the two (2) comprehensive PA CareerLink® centers, along with other agencies in our six-county region, including the ARC in Clarion and Crawford Counties.

*Describe local area staff trainings related to the subject matter (e.g., civil rights, equal opportunity, physical and programmatic accessibility, disability etiquette and sensitivity training) in this section and indicate when the trainings occurred.*

Following the Equal Opportunity Training provided by the Office of Equal Opportunity in Harrisburg to the NWPA Job Connect Board on April 15, 2021, an equal opportunity training plan was developed and implemented to ensure training is provided to the one stop partners on topics that may include effective communication strategies, EO policy and complaint procedures, hiring practices involving disability, increasing outreach to underserved groups, diversity and inclusion, etc. Trainings are conducted monthly by the Operator staff. Training is a combination of short videos, online modules, and handouts. Topics for PY 24 trainings include, NWPA Job Connect EO Policy, Serving Individuals with Disabilities, Religious Discrimination, and Babel Notice.

*List the one-stop program partners participating in local staff training indicative of the subject matter noted in this section.*

The individuals who participate in Equal Opportunity training will be documented by the Operator staff and submitted to the EO Monitor. Training reports are submitted to the Office of Equal Opportunity annually with the EO Compliance Review of the local area.

*Describe corrective actions addressed as a result of L&I's Office of Equal Opportunity annual compliance reviews and state current OEO compliance status (i.e., discrimination complaint procedures, LEP, affirmative outreach, training, and accessibility).*

The most recent compliance survey was completed by December 5, 2024, with results received January 16, 2025. There are a few identified items to correct that include supplying public-facing documents to assess the designation of the EO officer; need to include the EO Officer's contact information directly on the EO posters rather than as an attachment; need to use an updated Civil Rights document that includes the EO Officer and James Kayer's contact information; need to provide a contract with EO assurance language; submit the Babel notice that is sent with emails and applications; submit the third monitoring; and submit a different copy of the LWDB contract language. All items will be corrected within the specified time.

The local board completes and submits the required compliance documentation to the Office of Equal Opportunity as requested. Any technical assistance provided by the Office of Equal Opportunity is included in the required compliance review.

The NWPA Job Connect Board requires the PA CareerLink® centers in Erie and Venango Counties and any affiliated sites to be fully accessible to individuals who may be interested in accessing employment and training services. Each site is certified for compliance with Equal Opportunity (EO)/Americans with Disability (ADA) requirements by the Office of Equal Opportunity and PA Department of Labor and Industry. Compliance reviews are completed annually. All public access sites, including special sites that may be developed, will be fully accessible with reasonable accommodations. Ideally, partnerships with agencies that serve individuals with ADA needs will be established to reduce the need for special equipment and/or software, etc., and leverage available resources. Overall, the local board promotes full accessibility by requiring its One Stop Operator and One Stop Partners to:

- Conduct and participate in training of staff members and partner personnel regarding services to individuals with disabilities.
- Provide outreach and referral to agencies within the local area, such as the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) that offers services to individuals with disabilities.
- Maintain an updated list of resources available within the local area for use by staff and customers in accessing services.
- Advocate for individuals with disabilities and barriers to employment by advising and informing them about resources available within the PA CareerLink® sites and throughout the local area and coaching them on how to apply for needed resources.
- Provide access to bi- and multi-lingual personnel to assist customers with language barriers.
- Provide assistive technology items for individuals with disabilities, such as adaptive keyboards and/or adjustable workstations.
- Conduct a physical inspection of all assistive technology/equipment to ensure functionality on a regular basis.
- Coordinate staff training on assistive technology and equipment to ensure personnel are fully trained in usage and application, with assistance from OVR staff.
- Help individuals with disabilities who may require additional assistance with the registration process, making referrals as appropriate to OVR, while maintaining access to all services for the individuals.
- Maintain required federal and state notices and postings at all service sites.
- Provide access to American Sign Language interpreters upon request.

ADA and sensitivity training for PA CareerLink® staff and partner staff is provided by OVR staff. All PA CareerLink® staff and partners are required to participate in these trainings and any Office of Equal Opportunity trainings and other regular trainings on various EO topics. Any changes required to the system will be implemented. Additionally, the Office of Equal Opportunity in Harrisburg conducts annual compliance reviews within the local workforce development area and submits a report to NWPA Job Connect's EO Officer, who facilitates the completion of any needed EO changes or improvements. Technical assistance is provided by the Office of Equal Opportunity as needed. The local board's Fiscal and Monitoring Committee conducts oversight and ensures compliance for the EO functions of the board and makes recommendations to the full board on EO responsibilities and actions.

Limited English Proficiency (LEP) plans are in place to ensure the services and information are provided to LEP individuals to help bridge the language barrier between staff and all customers. LEP Plans are updated to include any new or relevant information to assist individuals with limited English proficiency. Our Title II Adult Education partner conducts assessments for PA CareerLink® participants and plays a key role in providing comprehensive LEP services in the local workforce development area to assist in meeting the LEP needs of participants, partners, and employers. Local supports such as a language line are in place to assist in addressing LEP needs in the local workforce area. This language line enables PA CareerLink® staff to connect individuals with translators capable of speaking to customers in multiple languages. Babel notices are posted in the PA CareerLink® centers and provided to customers as needed. The Babel notices inform the reader that communication contains vital information and explains how to access language services to access the contents.

*The identity and role of the individual(s) responsible for ensuring equal employment opportunities and civil right protections.*

The EO Officer for the local workforce service delivery area is:

Carrie Symes, NWPA Job Connect  
1174 Elk Street, PO Box 831  
Franklin, PA 16323  
(814) 758-0659

The EO Officer duties include, but are not limited to, accomplishing the responsibilities under WIOA Section 188 and WIOA non-discrimination regulations; ensuring the local PA CareerLink® sites are compliant with all EO and ADA laws; receiving inquiries regarding complaints from staff and OEO; providing complaint forms for those wishing to file complaints and investigating such complaints; participating in EO compliance reviews; investigating EO complaints; completing quarterly EO logs and submitting to the Office of Equal Opportunity at PA Department of Labor and Industry; ensuring that training is provided on EO/ADA regulatory requirements; functioning as the contact person regarding the American with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Section 188 of WIOA.

Equal Opportunity (EO) Liaisons related to the local PA CareerLink® workforce system include:

Joe Miceli  
Bureau of Workforce Partnership & Operations  
PA CareerLink® Erie County  
450 East 16<sup>th</sup> Street



Erie, PA 16503  
(814) 455-9966

Samuel Fulmer  
Bureau of Workforce Partnership & Operations  
PA CareerLink® Oil Region  
1345 Pittsburgh Road  
Franklin, PA 16323  
814-678-5050

Toll free number: 844-333-5248

Equal Opportunity Liaisons duties include but are not limited to ensuring that the PA CareerLink® site is compliant with all Equal Opportunity and Americans with Disabilities Act laws, receiving questions about complaints, assisting in the completion of complaint forms, investigating EO complaints, assisting during EO compliance reviews, and completing quarterly EO logs and submitting to the Office of Equal Opportunity at the PA Department of Labor and Industry.

*Describe how digital content are made accessible to individuals with disabilities*

*Expectation 2: The narrative must indicate compliance with affirmative outreach, which requires recipients to make reasonable efforts to include various groups including different sexes' racial and ethnic/national origin groups, religions, and individuals with limited English proficiency, disabilities, and ages whether there is a specific funding stream.*

*Describe outreach efforts such as: targeted media advertising (e.g., radio, newspaper, social media), sending notices about program openings and activities to schools, community groups and other special-interest groups that serve the targeted populations.*

*Since affirmative outreach includes training programs, outreach efforts and other positive steps, describe consultation with groups serving the targeted populations about efforts to improve outreach, training and services to targeted populations, and describe input received identifying training, education and services needed from organizations representing these groups, or programs, that interact with target populations, and how these needs are being addressed.*

Through outreach efforts to local agencies, a project was identified and implemented to improve training and services to targeted populations. As of June 30, 2022, ADA accessible workstations were installed in two (2) comprehensive PA CareerLink® centers, along with other workstations installed at community partner agencies such as VFI Erie, VFI Seneca, Clarion ARC, and Meadville ARC. All PA CareerLink® staff have been trained in how to use the equipment and software to better assist the individuals who are using the workstations. Through the placement of workstations in community agencies that serve and maintain relationships with these targeted populations, we have opportunities to increase awareness and gather input on how we further identify and meet the needs of this population.

## 5. COMPLIANCE

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

***Expectation:** Narrative must include cooperative agreements (as defined in WIOA sec. 107(d)(11)) between the LWDB or other local area entities described in WIOA sec. 101(a)(11)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 721(a)(11)(B)) and the local office of a designated State agency or designated State unit administering programs carried out under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act (29 U.S.C. 720 et seq.) (other than sec. 112 or part C of that title (29 U.S.C. 732, 741) and subject to sec. 121(f)) in accordance with sec. 101(a)(11) of the Rehabilitation Act (29 U.S.C. 721(a)(11)) with respect to efforts that will enhance the provision of services to individuals with disabilities and to other individuals, such as cross training of staff, technical assistance, use and sharing of information, cooperative efforts with employers and other efforts at cooperation, collaboration and coordination.*

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been approved and signed by all partners. The MOU took effect January 1, 2023, and remains in effect until June 30, 2025. A new MOU will be approved and signed by all partners to take effect July 1, 2025. NWPB Job Connect will follow the commonwealth's guidelines for executing on a new MOU.

NWPB Job Connect is committed to ensuring the local area's workforce development initiatives are carried forth in a unified, coordinated manner, with all entities working together for the benefit of residents and employers of the local area. The partners will ensure the vision and mission are reflected in PA CareerLink® operations. Services must be customer-focused and provide access and opportunities to all job seekers, particularly those with barriers to employment. Partners agree to employ continuous improvement strategies. Efforts are made to coordinate services between partner agencies/staff to avoid duplication of services and resources. Services can be provided at the PA CareerLink® comprehensive centers, at the partner's location, and/or via a direct link through technology.

Partners are requested to develop materials summarizing their program requirements and making them available for partners and customers; regularly evaluate ways to improve the referral process; commit to active follow up on the results of referrals; and commit to strengthening the lines of communication to make the referral process more effective for the individuals needing services. Partner meetings are held monthly, and discussions focus on services provided, referral processes, outcomes, promising practices and challenges.

A partnership where the local board has seen a positive referral process is with the Title II providers. We have two Title II Adult Education providers in our local area who work with adult students, students who fall under limited English proficiency, and high school dropouts of all ages and backgrounds. Title I works closely with Title II partners for co-enrollments to assist with supportive services for GED tests. Title II reports about services and outcomes at board meetings. Referrals are made from both parties as needed and requested by the individual seeking services.

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

***Expectation:** Narrative must describe the local board's debt-collection system and how grantees will utilize this system aggressively to ensure the collection of debts established because of sub-recipient audits. The narrative must also include procedures the grantee and fiscal agent will follow, once the amount of disallowed costs' final determination*

*is made. Once the final determination establishes the amount of disallowed costs, the grantee and fiscal agent must follow the procedures outlined herein to collect these disallowed costs.*

The local area will follow the procedures for debt collection of lower tier sub-recipients due to audits as outlined in the PA Department of Labor & Industry Financial Management Guide. In complying with such, the local area requires lump sum payment in full within 30 days of final determination of any amounts owed when circumstances warrant. The payment must be made from a non-federal source. If the sub-recipient is unable to make the payment in lump sum, the local area may develop a short-term installment payment based on conditions. In all cases, repayment is mandatory regardless of category (i.e. fraud, illegal acts, apathy, or lack of careful and accurate recordkeeping).

In addition, should the sub-recipient dispute the amount to be repaid after final determination is issued, the local area may impose legal sanctions as deemed appropriate. Furthermore, the local area agrees to ensure proper notification to all appropriate federal funding agencies and oversight agencies including but not limited to the Excluded Parties List System.

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

*Narrative must address the fact that the local board will implement the actions necessary to become or remain a high-performing board.*

*Attainment of the Governor's goals as described in PA's WIOA Combined State Plan.*

The local board has adopted and is working toward the six broad goals in the WIOA Combined State Plan that includes:

- **Apprenticeship and Career & Technical Education**- expand opportunities for individuals to enter Registered Apprenticeship and Registered Pre-Apprenticeship programs, assist employers in building Registered Pre-Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship programs, and increase the coordination with Career & Technical Education in these efforts.
- **Sector Strategies and Employer Engagement**- engage employers and industry clusters through innovative strategies to improve the connection and responsiveness of workforce programs and services to labor market demand, including recruiting, training, and retaining talent.
- **Youth**- increase opportunities for all youth to experience work-based learning through summer employment, pre-apprenticeship, Registered Apprenticeship, internships, job shadowing, mentoring, and other workplace experiences, including developing employability skills.
- **Continuous Improvement of the PA CareerLink® System**- identify and enact system changes and improvements that enhance the collaboration and partnership between agencies and partners in the workforce development system.
- **Barrier Remediation**- develop strategies to ensure the workforce development system is equipped to support individuals with barriers to employment in finding and maintaining self- and family-sustaining employment.
- **Addressing Workforce Shortages in Critical Industries**- prioritizing investment in industries that are critical to the economic prosperity of the Commonwealth.

*Successfully performed by meeting the local area negotiated federal performance goals.*

During Program Year 2023, our local area fell short on the Credential measure, slightly missing the 90% mark across all three programs-Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth, with the lower percentages falling under Dislocated Worker and Youth. Measures are in place and weekly meetings occur with the Title I services contractor to ensure staff enter accurate data timely in CWDS. There is still concern with the decline in Dislocated Workers seeking PA CareerLink® services. Training retention and completion is enhanced by better planning, more effective training, readiness assessment, and better career path development. Program-related communication is reviewed and shared with partners and providers to ensure everyone is knowledgeable and up to date. When local policy and procedures need to be created or revised, timely action is taken to collaborate with partners and providers to obtain their input. During regular meetings with Title I program contractors and other partners, policies, performance, and training needs are discussed.

*Sustained fiscal integrity throughout the local areas and all interactions on a regional level (include employment of appropriate fiscal practices such as adoption of internal controls and more robust procurement policies).*

The local board's fiscal agent, County of Venango, has stringent fiscal policies and practices in place based on WIOA and any associated internal control requirements for funding. There is strict oversight at the county and local elected official level. The fiscal agent is regularly monitored by the state's Oversight Division for fiscal integrity and compliance. The board has a more stringent procurement policy regarding procurement levels than those required federally and by the PA Department of Labor and Industry. In addition, reporting is done regularly to the local board including the local board's Fiscal and Monitoring Committee.

*Attainment of successful monitoring reports and other evaluations by federal and state oversight staff.*

The local board has not had any significant findings on monitoring reports and other evaluations by federal and state oversight staff. When minor findings requiring the submission of a corrective action plan are identified, these items are rectified by the local board. If an identified issue requires study or analysis, an ad hoc committee is created for this purpose. Ad Hoc committees report to the full board and have no authority beyond the purpose for which they are created. The local board reviews areas for opportunity, even if no corrective action is required. Documentation of the action is kept on file for future federal or state monitoring.

*Creation and employment of workforce governance and service delivery 'best practice's that may be modeled*

The local board has integrated the new Local Governance Policy into our board's practices. Service delivery best practices to help connect underserved and targeted populations with services that lead to training and skills needed to gain employment in in-demand occupations include: ADA Workstations across the region to better serve individuals with disabilities; Ubiduo; Ring Central for virtual service delivery; mobile service delivery; in person and online workshop delivery; integration with partner agencies to provide workshops and education on available services; implementation of digital intake; and trades videos created by Erie Together through the BEP Grant. The Business Services Team has implemented the state's updated business services structure to better serve our local businesses/employers.

*Adoption and use of new career and training services provided for the WIOA title I programs*

New career and training services include SkillUp™ PA, Design Your Future (for youth participants); Erie Together's Trade Videos, which include videos for CNC Programming, Tool & Die Makers, Machinery and Maintenance Workers, Carpenters, Operating Engineers, Ironworkers, Electrical Workers, Painters and Allied Trades, Steamfitters, Roofers, and Plumbers; industry clubs, facility tours, and the UAA Grant which provides CNC machining training/certification.

*Adoption and use of new and improved methods to reach and serve individuals with barriers to employment*

Implementation of new technologies include the ADA compliant Ring Central system to improve communications and secure transfer of documentation; new program offerings such as Skill Up™ and LinkedIn Learning are used to support individuals with barriers to employment. ADA Workstations were updated at the two (2) comprehensive centers, as well as placed in partner agencies to better serve individuals with barriers to employment. New CCTY magnifiers and TTY phones have been installed at the two (2) comprehensive sites within the last two (2) years. Ubiduo continues to be used. Limited English Proficiency (LEP) plans are updated annually to ensure the information is current. Babel notices, which are posted in the PA CareerLink® centers and provided to participants, inform the reader that the communication contains vital information and explains how to access language services to access the contents. Project Echo (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) is a virtual program used to help learn the advantages of supporting employees who are overcoming substance use disorders. Supporting recovery in the workplace sets companies and employees up for success. Bi-monthly virtual sessions provide employers guidance on reducing workplace stigma in support of substance use recovery and strategies for preventing terminations due to manageable relapses.

*Successful regional coordinated employer engagement practices between local BST(s) and local board(s) direct activities*

The regional coordination with employer engagement practices has benefited from the OH-PENN and WORC. These grants provide funding to increase awareness and development of new and existing apprenticeship opportunities across the Northwest PA Workforce Planning Region.

*Sector initiatives measured through the employment of qualitative and quantitative measurements*

The ultimate measure of progress of a workforce development system relates to the value found in the workforce and the workplace. The difficulty in calculating value is that reported impact is often subjective and anecdotal. To address specific local workforce issues and still provide some level of objectivity, the local board will use WIOA accountability measures of performance, business and industry feedback, actual program outcomes, and employment data provided through labor market information, surveys, and other reliable sources for measuring the impact of sector initiatives.

Multiple national groups and the U.S. Department of Labor have identified characteristics of high-performing workforce development boards. These characteristics cluster around the following general standards and specific criteria:

## Standard I: Strategic Planning & Implementation

### *Criteria:*

- Creation of a goal-oriented strategic plan that goes beyond the scope of WIOA funds.
- Strategic plans that are developed from a broadly inclusive process including economic development, employer, education, human services, and other community leaders.
- Strategic Plan is a living document that is part of the board's continuous improvement process.
- Adoption of a sector strategy approach in engaging employers.
- Adoption of a career pathway approach in engaging education and training providers.

## Standard II: Developing and Managing Resources

### *Criteria:*

- The board reviews and monitors the budget that aligns with strategic goals.
- Resources and assets are coordinated and leveraged among service partners.
- The board collaborates with partners to attract more public and private resources to support strategies.
- The board meets the expectations of the local elected officials in spending public funds.

## Standard III: Managing the Work of the Board

### *Criteria:*

- The board is diverse, includes major employer sectors, and includes key community planners in economic development, education, and community services.
- The board oversees the one-stop partnerships and resources pledged in the MOUs as a primary line of business.
- The board has its own business plan and manages its business in accordance with the plan, including oversight of staff to implement the board's business strategies.

The board will work closely with the Department of Labor and Industry to meet all expectations for a high performing board. In line with the standards that are areas of focus for the state, the board is committed to:

- Support for attainment of the Governor's goals in the State WIOA plan as described in this local plan.
- Negotiating performance standards tied to local conditions and meeting or exceeding those standards.
- Maintaining financial practices that ensure proper oversight is maintained by the Board and the local elected officials for fiscal integrity.
- Achieving the state's training expenditure targets.
- Employing quantitative and qualitative measurement tools to ensure high performance levels, with particular emphasis on measuring the outcomes for employers for services delivered by business service representatives.
- Maintaining program monitoring and oversight to achieve the highest levels of performance.

- Collaborating with all partners to increase outreach, recruitment, and integrated services for individuals with barriers to employment.

In addition to WIOA program excellence detailed above, the LWDB continues to work closely with the CLEOs and community partners to strategically aim toward higher levels of collective impact beyond WIOA-funded programs. Current leadership practices include:

- Creative partnerships with community organizations to expand access points to services.
- Expansion of sector-based strategies with employers in collaboration with neighboring workforce development areas, as new plans are developed for Next Generation Industry Partnership through the NWIRC.
- Selection of a PA CareerLink® Operator and WIOA Title I service provider(s) that will expand the board's work in business services, partnership development, technology applications, and connections to best practices in other regions.

A major priority for NWPA Job Connect is to expand and diversify the funding base for programs and services in the local workforce area and work in partnership with other local organizations and with broader geographic coalitions as called for in the Northwest Pennsylvania Workforce Regional WIOA Plan. Employment and Training Administration (ETA) funds such as WORC grants, Dislocated Worker Grants (DWG), and Trade Act funds are examples of funding sources used to effectively augment WIOA Title I funds. NWPA Job Connect strategies recognize and adhere to the funding restrictions of each funding stream but will continue to seek out opportunities to leverage other available resources to increase services to the local area's eligible population, especially to those populations with barriers to employment. The use of formula-based investments with other funding such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Veterans (VETS), and similar funding allows comprehensive services offered to all eligible low-income populations under WIOA. TANF funding continues to support WIOA year-round services.

The region successfully completed the \$2.9 million Greater Oh-Penn Manufacturing Apprenticeship Network, funded by a US Department of Labor American Apprenticeship Grant. This initiative brought together five (5) industry-led sector partnerships and 137 engaged businesses (Mahoning Valley Manufacturers Coalition, Erie Regional Manufacturer Partnership, Advanced Materials Manufacturing Industry Partnership in NW PA, and Portage County Manufacturers Coalition) across 14 counties spanning Pennsylvania and Ohio. It included collaboration with workforce development boards, state labor agencies, educational institutions, and other key partners. The project significantly enhanced manufacturers' ability to meet their demand for skilled, credentialed employees by simplifying apprenticeship processes, creating a multi-employer group sponsorship platform, and streamlining recruitment and prescreening operations. While this project is complete, sector partnership efforts continue to strengthen workforce development in Manufacturing and Registered Apprenticeship models in the region.

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

**Expectation 1:** Narrative must describe the robust collaboration among the many stakeholders to inform the contents of the plan. While WIOA and its associated regulations pay particular attention to the representatives of business, education and labor organizations, the narrative must include a description of the multiplicity of stakeholders that make up the local workforce system.

**Expectation 2:** Narrative must include a description of the process used by the local board to ensure the public had 30 days to review and comment on the contents of the proposed local area plan prior to its submission to the Commonwealth. Narrative describing the 30-day timeframe must include the beginning and end date of the public comment period.

During the creation of the WIOA Local and Regional Plans for 2025-2028, many stakeholders were given the opportunity to provide input. These included the LWDB and committee members, CLEOs, One Stop Operator, partners, and other community members. Discussions were held at public board/committee meetings, operator meetings, and partner meetings.

The 2025-2028 Local WIOA Plan and the Northwest PA Workforce Planning Region WIOA Regional Plan is posted on the NWPA Job Connect's website at [www.nwpajobconnect.org](http://www.nwpajobconnect.org) from June 4, 2025 to July 5, 2025 for the 30-day public comment period. Notification was sent to CLEOs, Board Members, program services contractors, Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations, Bureau of Workforce Development Administration, PA CareerLink® system partners, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, educational institutions, economic development agencies, community agencies, and other partners and stakeholders by email. An opportunity to provide feedback is available by submitting comments via email at [participate@nwpajobconnect.org](mailto:participate@nwpajobconnect.org) until 8:00 AM EDT on July 5, 2025. Alternative accommodations for reviewing the plans or providing comments will be made available by request at 814-807-2622.

See below for public comments and responses.

### **Public Comments and Responses**

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

**Comment:** "The plans thoughtfully identify and respond to critical workforce needs across the region, and we greatly appreciate the inclusive, data-driven process that guided their development. We see clear consistency between the two planning frameworks, particularly in the following areas: Workforce Development and Talent Retention, Population Stabilization and Remote Worker Attraction, Infrastructure and Equity Access, and Data Evaluation."

This commenter expressed an enthusiastic interest in partnering with the Northwest PA Job Connect Board and staff with workforce training initiatives, data collaboration, outreach campaigns, or regional grant proposals.

**Response:** NWPA Job Connect thanked the commenter for the positive comments and expressed genuine interest in collaborating and partnering with them on the abovementioned initiatives.



## Local Area Plan Instructions

### ATTESTATIONS

By checking the box adjacent to each line item, the local board attests to ensuring the compliance components and documents listed are (or will be) in place and effective prior to June 30, 2025. **In the rare circumstance that something is not applicable, the local board must write "N/A" next to adjacent line item.**

The following components and documents, including local workforce system policies, must be reviewed and revised as to be aligned with WIOA for the current planning cycle unless it is established as a best practice. Each item must be available to L&I at any time during the planning process and monitoring or auditing processes. L&I is not requiring copies of such documents to be attached to regional or local area plans at this time.

- ☒ The Northwest Local Workforce Development Area attests that each of the below referenced policies contain any required language or content and were last revised, if necessary, by this plan's effective date.
- ☒ Agreement between all counties and other local governments, if applicable, establishing the consortium of local and chief elected officials.
- ☒ Agreement between the chief elected official(s) and the fiscal agent, if a fiscal agent is designated.
- ☒ Agreement between the local area elected official(s) and the LWDB.
- ☒ LWDB policy and process that provides for nomination, appointment and removal of board members; resolutions; bylaw; code of conduct; and conflict of interest.
- ☒ Financial management policy and process including cost allocation plan; internal controls; cash management; receipts of goods; cost reimbursement; inventory and equipment; program income; travel reimbursement; audit requirements and resolution; annual report; property management; debt collection; and allowable costs.
- ☒ Local area procurement policy that must describe formal procurement procedures.
- ☒ Local area MOU.
- ☒ Program management policies and processes must include equal opportunity for customers; complaints and grievances; supportive services; one-stop operator local firewall (if applicable); file management; eligibility determination and verification; self-sufficiency criteria; self-attestation and certification random sampling; priority of service; training verification/refunds; individual training accounts; contracts for training services; statewide training providers list and eligibility verification; local area training provider list and eligibility criteria and process; "additional assistance" definition; work-based training policies including incumbent worker training, OJT, CT, and apprentice ship.
- ☒ It is best practice to have a risk management policy and process including records retention and public access; public records requests; monitoring, grievance; incident; and disaster recovery plan.
- ☒ It is best practice to have a human resources policy and process including employee classification; benefits; holidays and PTO; recruitment and selection; employee development; discipline; layoffs, terminations and severance; sexual harassment; and equal opportunity and non-discrimination.
- ☒ It is best practice to have professional services contract(s) for administrative services such as staffing and payroll, if applicable.