

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2025-2028 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2025

## INTRODUCTION

The Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Board is committed to cultivating an effective and equitable workforce that meets the evolving needs of our local economy. This local plan serves as a strategic framework to guide workforce development over the next four years. It reflects our dedication to expanding opportunities for individuals to build their skills and careers with a particular emphasis on supporting special populations and addressing the talent needs of employers within our region.

Through collaborative partnerships with local businesses, educational institutions, community organizations and government agencies, this plan outlines practical approaches to create a skilled resilient, and adaptable workforce. This plan looks to the future while including current data as well as projections. It engages the current delivery models as well as opportunities for enhanced service professionals.

As we implement this plan, we remain committed to measurable outcomes, continuous improvement and adapting to the changing economic conditions. Together we aim to create a thriving local workforce ecosystem that empowers individuals, strengthens businesses, and contributes to a prosperous community.

## 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.**

According to the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis, December 2024 Workforce Development Area Profile, the population of the region stands at 433,356, a 10% decrease since December of 2022. This places the Southern Alleghenies region at just 3.3% of the total population of the Commonwealth. As illustrated in the table below, the region’s population continues to age and there has been no significant influx of younger individuals.

AGE	POPULATION	PERCENTAGE
0-17	83,637	19.3%
18-24	35,102	8.1%
25-34	48,536	11.2%
35-44	48,969	11.3%
45-54	55,036	12.7%

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55-64	64,137	14.8%
65-74	56,770	13.1%
75+	41,169	9.5%

From July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024, 47 individuals entered training through the support of WIOA Title I training dollars. Of the 47 individuals in training services for PY 23, twenty-seven were enrolled in ITA's and 20 were enrolled into On-The Job training services. In terms of outcomes, 38 individuals completed their training during that period or 82%; 5 dropped out of the training and 2 were still engaged in training during that period. In addition to the outstanding completion rate, 89% of those receiving ITAs are employed in their field of study and are earning an average annual wage over \$59,735.00. Completers of On-the-job training had average annual earnings of over \$31,561.00 a year. Even though the opportunity to earn a high wage, as illustrated above, comes with additional training the SAWDB has noted that WIOA Title I eligible individuals are not pursuing post-secondary education at the same rate as prior to the pandemic. Local institutions are also reporting a drop in admissions. While strictly antidotal, we believe this decrease in training requests can be at least partially attributed to the significant wage increases that many employers were forced to enact to attract and retain a workforce during and following the pandemic.

One of the biggest challenges for the counselors is to find those individuals and get them connected to and engaged with the resources that might help them get their diploma and successfully become part of the workforce. School administrators express rising concern with increasing rates of defection from the public school system as the pandemic has forced brick and mortar learning to cease. Partnering with their local PA CareerLink® counselors, school administrators are working diligently to reconnect with these youth.

### AGE GROUP

### PERCENTAGE

High School Graduate (Includes Equivalency) or Less	54.6%
Some College or Associate Degree	25.6%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	18.3%

(Source: U.S. Census-2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates – DP05,B01001, and B15001)

Individuals with barriers to employment are a broad group given the 13 different populations targeted for service by WIOA. However, the impact of lower levels of educational attainment and lack of skills may be clearly seen in those individuals with barriers to employment such as poverty, disability, citizenship, and language. Included in those groups are Displaced Homemakers, Indians, Alaska Natives and native Hawaiians, Low Income Individuals, Individuals with Disabilities, Older Individuals (age 55 and older), Ex-Offenders, Homeless Individuals, Youth who are in or have aged out of the foster care system, Individuals who are English language learners, have low literacy levels, or face substantial

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cultural barriers, Eligible Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers, Individuals within two years of exhausting lifetime eligibility under Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Single Parents (including pregnant women, and Long-Term Unemployed Individuals), and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). It should be noted that many individuals are encountering multiple barriers to employment. These groups represent the most vulnerable in our system and significant efforts and resources will be directed to identifying and serving these individuals. PA CareerLink® staff recognize that unique strategies will need to be developed and deployed to reach many of the targeted populations including utilizing flexible operating hours and potentially meeting customers at locations other than the PA CareerLink® office. The SAWDB will encourage and support professional development to ensure that staff are comfortable and confident that they are well-positioned to identify and address the needs of these target populations.

A meaningful level of detail related to the education and skill levels of the target populations in the local area is currently unavailable. What can be shared is as follows:

- 11.3% of those sixteen years of age and older (39,142 individuals) have an income that places them below the poverty level, 26% of this group are employed, 7% are unemployed and 67% are not attached to the workforce.
- 13.7% of the labor force age 25-64 report some type of disability. The unemployment rate for that group runs from 7.8% to 13.5% in the counties included in the region while the unemployment rate for those without disabilities is 3.3% to 4.9%.
- With individuals, less than 1% or 3,862 individuals are reported as not speaking English “very well.”
- Single parent households with children under age 18 represent 34% of all households in the region with children.

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

Under the leadership of the SAWDB, the PA CareerLink® staff will be expected to expand outreach to these target groups. Through community resource mapping, we will identify those program providers who routinely serve these individuals and establish a coordinated method for referral to and case management with the public workforce system. The PA CareerLink® staff will conduct greater outreach to the agencies below and measure customer referrals:

- Veterans Organizations including the US Department of Veterans Affairs
- Family Counseling Services including homeless and women’s shelters and related community and faith-based organizations, food pantries, public libraries, EARN providers.
- County Bar Associations, MH/MR Community Services and Addiction/Recovery providers, and Transitional Re-entry Advisory Councils

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- Senior Community Employment Program providers and County Area Agencies on Aging
- Community Action Agencies; Chamber of Commerce committees
- County Children and Youth services, free medical clinics, and community family counseling service providers

The PA CareerLink® staff have significant experience in serving individuals with barriers to employment; they will utilize their combined expertise and a variety of assessment tools to help customers develop their individualized employment plans. These ‘roadmaps to success’ will include not only those services provided through the public workforce but also identify appropriate referrals to partner programs that can further support attainment of the individual’s vocational goal. Close communication and collaboration will be expected between the PA CareerLink® and supporting partner agencies and will be essential to meet, in many cases, the special needs of those in the target populations.

For information on labor force data and commuting pattern data, please refer to section 1.2.

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

The SAWDB utilizes information from multiple sources including federal census data, state level resources, a regional data consortium, and local data gathered from PA CareerLink® partners, industry partnerships and economic developers.

### Technological and Demographic Factors

The Southern Alleghenies region is undergoing significant shifts driven by both demographic changes and technological advancements. These factors present both challenges and opportunities for workforce development, requiring strategic planning and targeted interventions to sustain economic growth and labor force participation.

One of the most pressing workforce challenges in the region is an aging labor force. With the median age amongst the highest in Pennsylvania, with a continued growing percentage nearing retirement. With the demographic shift leading to a declining labor force participation rate, it is making it difficult for more employers to find skilled workers. With the outmigration of younger workers to urban areas, this seems to have compounded the problem, creating gaps in key industries such as health care, manufacturing, and skilled trades.

Addressing this means prioritizing talent retention and attraction strategies, including developing career pathways that align with in-demand occupations, expanding work-based learning opportunities for younger workers and workforce adaptation and advancement.

Rapid technological changes are beginning to reshape job requirements across multiple sectors, with automation, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and digitalization influencing how work is being performed. The manufacturing sector, which is a cornerstone of our regional economy, is increasingly becoming reliant

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on advanced automation and smart manufacturing systems. Similarly, healthcare is integrating new technologies, such as telemedicine and electronic health records, requiring workers to adapt to digital tools.

In response, our workforce development initiatives in the region are focused on upskilling and reskilling efforts. Programs aimed at digital literacy, technical certifications and robotic process automation (RPA), ensure that both current workers and new entrants are prepared for a technology-driven job market.

Existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors include:

- Healthcare continues as the top existing in-demand industry employing 19.4% of the labor force. In the region, 31,646 healthcare workers have an average earning of \$57,347. Center for Workforce Information and Analysis projects a 5.1% growth from 2022-2032.
- Professional and Business Services Industry Cluster is a broad category that covers many services provided to businesses in the region. The projected growth in this sector to 12,430 workers in 2032 which equates to a 4.2% increase in this time period.

Southern Alleghenies Targeted Industry Location Quotients:

<u>Industry Cluster</u>	<u>Location Quotient</u>	<u>Employment</u>	<u>Employment %</u>
Healthcare	1.27	31,646	19.4%
Manufacturing	1.19	18,365	11.6%
Agriculture/Food Production	1.17	7,016	4.3%
Logistics/Transportation	1.08	7,805	4.8%
Building/Construction	1.25	14,423	8.9%
Wood Products/Publishing	1.61	3,206	2.0%
Business Services	0.51	10,688	6.6%

Source: Center for Workforce Information and Analysis, Southern Alleghenies QCEW Statistics 2024

### **Growing and Declining Occupations in the Southern Alleghenies Region: FY25 and Beyond**

The Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development area continues to experience evolving labor market trends driven by technological advancements, demographic shifts, and changing industry demands. Understanding these patterns is critical to aligning workforce strategies with current and future employer needs.

#### **Growing Occupations**

Data from the Department of Labor and Industry and the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis indicate continued growth in the following occupational areas:

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- **Healthcare and Social Assistance:** Registered Nurses, Home Health and Personal Care Aides, Medical and Health Services Managers, and Behavioral Health Specialists remain in high demand due to an aging population and increasing focus on community-based care.
- **Skilled Trades and Technical Occupations:** Growth is projected in Electricians, HVAC Technicians, Welder, and Industrial Machinery Mechanics as regional infrastructure ages and manufacturing modernizes.
- **Transportation and Logistics:** Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Drivers, Supply Chain Coordinators, and Warehouse Technicians are increasingly needed due to growth in e-commerce and regional distribution networks.
- **Information Technology and Cybersecurity:** While smaller in scale, IT Support Specialists, Network Administrators, and Cybersecurity Analysts are emerging growth area as digital integration becomes essential across all sectors.
- **Education and Early Childhood Services:** Teachers, Special Education Professionals, and Childcare Workers are increasingly in demand to meet regional education needs and support working families.

## Declining Occupations

- **Administrative and Clerical Support:** positions such as Data Entry Clerk, File Clerks, and Typists continue to decrease as digital systems streamline office operations.
- **Manufacturing Roles in Legacy Industries:** Occupations like certain Assembly Line Workers are declining due to automation.
- **Retail Sales:** Cashier and other traditional retail roles are seeing reduced demand as self-service technologies and online shopping continue to grow.
- **Print and Publishing Roles:** Printing Press Operators and Prepress Technicians face declining prospects due to the digitalization of media.

The SAWDB is committed to proactive workforce planning that anticipates these trends by:

- Continued prioritization for training for high-demand occupations through local educational institutions and PA CareerLink® Partners.
- Supporting incumbent worker training to upskill employees in evolving industries.
- Investing in current partnerships that engage employers in shaping responsive training programs.
- Ensuring equitable access to career pathways for all job seekers, especially in growing sectors.

These insights will guide resource allocation, program development and employer engagement strategies in the coming year and beyond, ensuring the region remains responsive and resilient in a changing economic landscape.

## Key Economic Conditions

The civilian labor force across the six county Southern Alleghenies region has now reversed a downward trend from 2007, increasing from 195,600 in August 2022 to 198,300, according to the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (CWIA) December 2024 **Southern Alleghenies WDA Profile** report.

According to the CWIA Southern Alleghenies WDA Occupational Employment 2022-2032 Long-Term

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Projections, there were 177,250 jobs in the six counties in the region as of 2022. These long-term projections reflect a 1.5% increase in employment by 2032, with employment estimated at 179,870.

The region performs consistently worse than both the state and national figures. Based on the **Advance Central PA Labor Market Status Report for October 2024**, regional economic conditions include:

- Unemployment rates consistently higher than state average
- Aging population
- Challenge to retain and attract younger workers to the region.
- Business community vitality that creates employment opportunities through a diversified business base

## Unemployment

According to the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis, the region has the fifteenth highest unemployment rate among the 22 workforce development areas in the state. The unemployment rate in four of the six counties in the region is higher than the state rate and these counties are included with the 36 counties having the highest unemployment rates in the state.

## Labor Force

The job market in the Southern Alleghenies region is poised by both challenges and opportunities in the coming years. While we continue to see a strong demand in healthcare, manufacturing, transportation, and skilled trades, workforce shortages and demographic shifts remain a concern. Our biggest challenge is ensuring we have a pipeline of skilled workers to fill High Priority Occupations (HPOs) and meet the evolving needs of local industries. An aging population and declining labor force participation mean we must focus on attracting and retaining younger workers while investing in training programs that align with employer needs. At the same time, we are optimistic about the region's ability to adapt and grow.

Based on the CWIA December 2024 Southern Alleghenies WDA Profile, with an estimated population 16 years of age and older, the regional labor force stands at 195,300, down just 300 from August of 2022. The region loses nearly 16,000 workers net to other workforce regions every day and five of the six counties experience an overall net loss of workers daily.

The Southern Alleghenies region faces an aging population and a shrinking labor force, creating significant workforce challenges. With a growing number of residents retiring and fewer young workers entering the job market, the region must address potential skill shortages and maintain economic vitality.

To tackle these challenges, SAWDB has outlined the following plans:

### 1. **Attracting and Retaining Younger Workers**

- o Partner with local educational institutions to promote career opportunities within the region.
- o Work closely with local planning and development organizations to align workforce initiatives with regional economic growth strategies and address the challenges posed

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by a shifting labor market.

## 2. **Upskilling and Reskilling the Current Workforce**

- Provide training programs tailored to help older workers transition into high-demand fields.
- Increase access to digital literacy and technical skills training to meet the evolving needs of local industries.

## 3. **Promoting Apprenticeships and On-the-Job Training**

- Strengthen partnerships with employers to create new apprenticeship opportunities and OJT programs designed to bridge skill gaps.
- Focus on in-demand sectors such as healthcare, manufacturing, and information technology.

## 4. **Enhancing Employer Partnerships**

- Work closely with employers to identify workforce needs and develop collaborative solutions.
- Encourage businesses to invest in training and retaining local talent through strategic partnerships and workforce support initiatives.

## 5. **Leveraging Technology and Innovation**

- Implement advanced workforce analytics to predict trends and align training programs with future demands.
- Expand virtual job fairs and remote training opportunities to reach a wider audience.

By addressing these challenges proactively, SAWDB aims to sustain a dynamic and adaptable workforce capable of supporting the region's economic growth.

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

Frequent and consistent employer feedback, combined with setting measurable employer-focused goals, will be essential to ensure the region's workforce development system meets the needs of the business community. Some efforts will include:

- The OSO is utilizing satisfaction instruments that are in a digital format. These are utilized to gauge business response to existing services and help identify gaps. With expected guidance from the US DOL and the PA Department of Labor and Industry, the SAWDB will work with the OSO, PA CareerLink® site administrators and WIOA Title I providers to develop an instrument that will help capture 'Effectiveness in Serving Employers' and measure movement toward meeting the negotiated WIOA performance goal. The SAWDB's PA CareerLink® Scorecard measures employer market penetration and system utilization by return employer customers as a measure of satisfaction.
- Employer-centric and measurable goals will continue and be expanded upon in the PA CareerLink® Scorecard. Current measurable objectives include increased employer market penetration as reflected in the number of job postings, return customer utilization rates and those participating in services including OJT and other training and recruitment-related activities. Goal setting around these metrics continues.
- Employer-driven discussions around training topics to include incumbent worker training,



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apprenticeship development and customized training programs will be facilitated. Significant efforts are currently underway to promote registered apprenticeships. The SAWDB and its OSOs will actively promote RAPs and the value they bring to employers and job seekers. While the Board does not currently utilize WIOA Title I Funds to support incumbent worker or customized training, it has and will continue to use these funds to financially support the OJT as well as classroom portion of RAPs. This additional financial support is promoted to employers, several of which have used this funding to cover those portions of RAPs. In supporting the expansion of the apprenticeship model, SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® partners envision the expansion of existing pre-apprenticeship and the development of new programs, tied to existing apprenticeships, to further support the pipeline of workers and the vision of our youth who successfully complete pre-apprenticeship activities transitioning into recognized apprenticeships with local and regional employers. Roundtable discussions will continue to be held; these forums bring together employers, economic development, the public workforce system and education to begin identifying and addressing key issues. The SAWDB has long supported OJT and other work-based learning programs, industry partnerships, sector strategies, and career pathways. Targeted employer feedback will support program development that meets the needs of the business customer.

- Established employer forums will provide the conduit for key business intelligence to be communicated to the SAWDB and workforce partners and likewise offer the venue to promote workforce resources to the business community. Representatives from the one-stop Business Service Teams and workforce leadership will participate in employer consortiums, Society of Human Resource Management, Chamber of Commerce, and other business-led forums to identify and assess employer service needs. This information will be conveyed back to the SAWDB; the Board in turn will ensure that service priorities are communicated to providers and resources are dedicated to implement and expand training services to include incumbent worker and customized training and apprenticeship development.

To effectively serve employers, the workforce system must recognize the needs of the business community and respond with appropriate services to address those needs. Agility is a hallmark of any successful enterprise; successful businesses are positioned to meet the changing needs of their customers. The workforce system must do likewise. The strategies outlined above -- regular employer engagement and specialized service development, implementation, and assessment, will help to ensure that the region's workforce system will be well-positioned to meet the needs and exceed the expectations of the employer community it serves.

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

Ensuring business engagement in the workforce system, regardless of size and industry, comes down to three things: determining employer needs, informing the employer that the system is able, willing, and ready to meet their needs, and having the ability to meet those needs in a timely and effective manner. Small employers (49 employees or less) make up 95% of all the companies in the region. They often lack resources, both human and financial, so the SAWDB and its workforce partners will work to ensure that the one-stops are well-positioned to meet the needs of these business customers.

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Strategies to ensure effective engagement of business and industry are and will continue to be developed and deployed on two levels: Administrative (SAWDB) and Programmatic (PA CareerLink® and Workforce Development Partners).

The Board will use continuous improvement techniques to evaluate the administrative and programmatic strategies, receive regular updates from staff and gather input from employer board members. Additionally, the Board and the one-stop operator consortium have collaborated to form a business services strategy team with business services representatives, Local Veterans Employment Representative, Title I representatives and the board's Employer Services Development Specialist to examine current policies, make recommendations, help establish priorities and develop new strategies to increase employer engagement. In the Southern Alleghenies region, joint business calls are being conducted by county economic developers and PA CareerLink® Business Service Team leads. During these visits, participants engage in a 'deep dive' into the company's challenges and work together to identify ways to help address these issues. These visits have enabled one-stop staff to not only strengthen good existing relationships with the economic development community, but more importantly, they have made significant connections with business leaders that have resulted in increased employer recognition of and increased engagement with the public workforce system. The region's Scorecard will continue to track the percentage of employers in the region who use the one-stop, the percentage of repeat users, and the number of employer services provided each quarter. These figures will be used to track improvement towards the goal of increased employer engagement.

## Administrative

- The SAWDB will annually review its policies to ensure, where legally possible, they are employer-customer friendly and do not create barriers to effective service provision. Agility is key to business success and the public workforce system, and its administrators must strive for the same.
- The SAWDB will continue to support and look for opportunities to expand Next Generation Industry Partnership participation in targeted sectors.
- The SAWDB will continue to support opportunities for professional development and employer networking and identify and work to secure flexible funding to support incumbent worker training as well as address future pipeline supply issues.
- The SAWDB will promote opportunities for skill training to ensure that significant resources are available to expand the promotion and utilization of OJT, incumbent worker training, work-based learning opportunities, apprenticeships, customized training, and other proven employer training services. Interest in registered apprenticeships has begun to gain momentum and the SAWDB and its workforce partners will utilize employer forums to promote this valuable employee/employer tool.
- The SAWDB will continue to support staff involvement in and engagement with the PREP partners to ensure alignment of workforce and economic development strategies and resources.
- The SAWDB and OSO will annually review the PA CareerLink® employer service mix to determine any gaps, based on local need and WIOA direction.
- The SAWDB and OSO will annually review employer services outreach materials and enhance

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and professionalize the materials, utilizing the expertise of the SAP&DC Marketing and Communication Specialist.

- The SAWDB, with input from the PREP and employer partners, will review the High Priority Occupation List to ensure it reflects employer hiring needs.
- The SAWDB will encourage quality education providers to submit relevant programs for inclusion on the Eligible Training Provider List to ensure customers can access training that meets employer demands.
- The SAWDB and OSO will annually review PA CareerLink® employer-centric goals to ensure alignment with Governor Wolf's and the SAWDB's strategic vision and confirm that the benchmarks are sufficiently ambitious and promote continuous improvement.
- Though small (4), the SAWDB staff will continue to designate a staff person to serve as the board's 'point person' regarding to business services. A significant amount of her time is spent participating in Business Service Team meetings, attending Industry Partnership roundtables, and meeting, along with the site administrators and Business Service Team members, with employers to discuss available services and identify service gaps and training needs. Considerable time is spent monitoring the significant number of OJT contracts; the WIOA Title I providers contract directly with the employers but the SAWDB staff are responsible for all monitoring to include compliance with local, state, and federal guidelines and employer and employee satisfaction with the program.

### Programmatic

- The OSO, PA CareerLink® site administrators and PA CareerLink® management teams will review their employer policies and procedures to identify and mitigate any barriers to service provision.
- The OSO and PA CareerLink® site administrators will ensure that each PA CareerLink® has an active Business Services Team made up of the 'right' representatives from partner agencies. As the lead entity responsible for facilitating employer engagement at the one-stop level, it is essential that the Business Service Teams are viewed by employers as professional, well-coordinated, business-focused and committed to service to the region's employers. These teams meet regularly to discuss engagement strategies and have 'point' staff responsible for different aspects of business services. Databases that track employer visits are utilized. In some cases, team members utilize Executive Pulse, a PREP tool, to track and make partner referrals. Close communication between partner staff dedicated to serving employers, including the use of spreadsheets that track employer visits, outcomes, and referrals, will help to significantly reduce the risk of redundant employer visits/communication pieces.
- The PA CareerLink® staff will gather business intelligence through employer outreach and utilization of Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (CWIA) data to ensure alignment of job seeker services with employer hiring needs.
- The PA CareerLink® site administrators and OSO will review Business Service Team communication plans to ensure that employer outreach is coordinated among all partners and that small employers and those tied to in-demand industry sectors are targeted for assistance.
- The PA CareerLink® staff will strengthen relationships with employer-driven organizations and associations (SHRM, Chambers of Commerce, Rotary, etc.) and use these as vehicles to educate members on available services and resources.
- The PA CareerLink® staff will work closely with PREP partners to provide leveraged resources in

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support of business recruitment, retention, expansion, and training efforts.

- The PA CareerLink® staff will organize employer-driven incumbent worker training opportunities.
- *Better coordinate regional workforce and economic development strategy, messaging, engagement and programs; and*

The SAWDB will continue to support the long, well-established, and highly effective partnership between the public workforce system and the region's economic development agencies. For decades, the economic developers and workforce development professionals of the Southern Alleghenies have participated in a recognized and effective network dedicated to improving the region's economy. The public workforce system is a key partner in the Southern Alleghenies PREP; the SAWDB director and PA CareerLink® site administrators have been non-financial members since the PREP's inception. This relationship is reinforced and broadened through both entities' ties to the Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission (SAP&DC). Serving as fiscal agent and staff to the SAWDB, the SAP&DC is one of seven Local Development Districts (LDD) in the state uniquely positioned to help ensure the 'workforce-economic development connection' and alignment of programs and services.

As an arm of the SAP&DC, the SAWDB and its staff are involved in all projects that include a workforce development component. This helps to further cement the strong connection between the public workforce system and economic development network. Assistance to the affected companies and their workforce serves to illustrate the coordinated and cooperative approach taken by the region's workforce and economic development professionals. Each brings unique resources to the table that include:

## Workforce Development

- Labor Market Information - an inventory of the skill sets of the affected workers will help identify current opportunities for re-employment and provide economic developers with data they can use in their business recruitment efforts.
- Employer Services - range from Rapid Response assistance available after notification of a downsizing (staff from JARI, an economic development agency, participates on two counties Rapid Response Teams), to assistance with new employee assessment, recruitment, and training.
- Dislocated Worker Services - range from assessment and remediation to job search assistance and its components, career counseling, and opportunities for retraining.
- Resources of the US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration and the PA Department of Labor and Industry - from dedicated funding (National Emergency Grants, Made in America, POWER) to technical assistance and labor market information.

## Economic Development

- Employer intelligence - In-depth knowledge of the employer/industry and its needs, challenges, opportunities for growth/diversification/economic restructuring.
- New Market Identification & Expansion - assistance with government procurement and product export.

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- Business recruitment services - financing packages, shovel-ready property, tax incentives understanding of supply chain. PA CareerLink® Business Service Team and SAWDB staff are often invited by economic developers to participate in meetings with site selection teams. This reinforces the relationship between economic and workforce development professionals and presents a 'united front' to prospective companies.
- Resources of the Appalachian Regional Commission, Economic Development Administration, PA Department of Community and Economic Development, United States Department of Agriculture, Local Economic Development Fund, and Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority that range from dedicated funding to technical assistance.

Many of these same resources will also be coordinated in support of business recruitment and expansion efforts. The SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® sites are positioned to provide labor market information that can be used to promote the region to site selection committees. These range from radial analysis reports that illustrate population demographics and commuting pattern studies that identify workforce movement and possible recruitment opportunities to target industry data including an analysis of the location quotient and potential availability of a skilled workforce. Furthermore, workforce funding will be leveraged to incentivize a company to establish a presence or expand operations in the region. In many cases, the opportunity to access On-the-Job training funds resulted in companies' decisions to relocate to the region.

The workforce and economic development communities recognize the value and unique resources each possess, complementing rather than competing with one another.

The SAWDB, along with the PA CareerLink® partner staff and the PREP partners are committed to working together to ensure that the needs of the business community are identified and addressed. With this shared mission comes the risk of overwhelming employers with multiple communications, including visits designed to share information on available services and learn of the companies' needs. The following strategies will be utilized to increase coordination between the workforce and economic development partners to reduce the chance for duplication of services and lessen employer fatigue:

- Encourage greater connectivity between the worlds of workforce and economic development by inviting local economic developers to attend BST meetings when possible and appropriate; share minutes and other appropriate communications with the local agencies.
- Greater utilization of Executive Pulse to track employer contacts and outcomes. While one-stop staff enter employer engagement information into PA CareerLink®, they also utilize Executive Pulse to make and respond to referrals.
- Continued involvement in PREP meetings, and when possible and appropriate, PREP-related initiatives.
- Additional exploration in the utilization of the Next Gen Industry Partnership model will result in the communication of greater industry intelligence without the need to call on the employer in the workplace.

We believe that increased collaboration between the region's workforce and economic development partners will lead to reduced service duplication and ultimately enhanced service to employers.

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

Recipients of Unemployment Compensation (UC) make up a significant percentage of the PA CareerLink® sites foot traffic and represent an important target customer group. The one-stop staff recognized that new strategies had to be employed to help the region's tens of thousands of individuals who found themselves out of work and unable to effectively connect with the UC system that was overwhelmed by over one million unemployed Pennsylvanians.

The PA CareerLink® staff developed an innovative approach to helping those with UC issues. Basic information was collected from those calling in to the PA CareerLink® seeking UC assistance. Select and trained Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations staff were dedicated to investigating each issue, and while not providing the customers with specific UC information, they were able to help them open new claims or investigate issues with existing claims. Providing this assistance proved invaluable and helped some 9,000 individuals to collect desperately needed compensation. Our hope is that these efforts can continue, though on a greatly reduced basis.

Also, the SAWDB is highly supportive of the new outreach effort to UC recipients who have exhausted their benefits. With this initiative, each PA CareerLink® office will receive a list of UC exhaustees; staff will develop strategies on how to best connect with the target group. The one-stop staff will receive customer-specific data to not only include contact information but also specifics related to their industry and educational level. The outreach message will be consistent, regardless of the partners engaged in the outreach. It will be crafted to engage the customer quickly, be customized and speak to the individual, rather than just a 'form letter,' be supportive and empathetic, and encourage them to quickly connect with the one-stop staff. We anticipate that this approach will be successful, and results will be reflected in the number of exhaustees who engage with the workforce system.

With the passage of state legislation that requires those collecting UC to engage in the public workforce system, PA CareerLink® staff not only have the opportunity but responsibility to ensure that Pennsylvanians seeking to collect UC are complying with the "Register for Work and Work Search." Staff utilize the RESEA (Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment) lists to reach out to those expected to exhaust their unemployment benefits prior to gaining reemployment in a number of ways including:

- Direct call-in to attend RESEA orientations. During the sessions, participants learn about the variety of resources available to jobseekers through the workforce system. Sessions are informational and provide jobseekers with an overview of PA CareerLink® services and programs. The session covers such topics as: conducting a job search using the PA CareerLink® system, reviewing the tools available on the operating system, including the use of O\*net, an overview of local labor market information, WIOA training opportunities, Basic Career Service workshops, and partner services. Upon completion of the formal presentation, the WIOA Title I staff, and Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations staff can provide an individual counseling session that marks the beginning of the Preliminary Assessment process. This includes a review of the jobseeker's skills, abilities, work interest, job history, and recent job search activity. Staff identify any potential barriers to employment and make appropriate

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customer referrals to additional partner or community programming on behalf of the jobseeker. Individual career counseling services begin, and customers learn more about in-demand industry specific occupations. Jobseekers have the chance to review training opportunities using the High Priority Occupation List and the Eligible Training Provider List on the operating system. Information on funding opportunities for available training programs are introduced not only in the orientation program, but also again during the individual counseling sessions. Jobseekers are encouraged to take advantage of the array of Basic Career Services. At the conclusion of these orientations, RESEA participants meet with Wagner-Peyser staff to review RESEA -related requirements, while WIOA Title I and site staff provide services to the remaining jobseekers.

- Promoting special services available to long-term dislocated workers or those likely to exhaust their benefits. The SAWDB has secured and/or participated in state-wide special National Emergency Grants and other initiatives targeted to dislocated workers. Staff have effectively used the RESEA lists to market these special training programs and where appropriate, included program promotional flyers in UC mailings. The SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® sites have also used the UC call line to include messages promoting these programs. Instead of silence or music, listeners would learn about special workforce programs designed to help them reengage with the workforce and instructed them to contact their local PA CareerLink®.

The SAWDB measures the effectiveness of outreach to UC claimants and includes these outcomes on its PA CareerLink® Scorecard. A recent addition to this dashboard includes the number of UC claimants in the region in a given quarter compared to how many of these individuals have come into the PA CareerLink® and received a value-added service by staff. Under the leadership of the OSO, additional goal setting around these metrics will occur.

One would normally consider UC services applicable to the unemployed individual, however, the PA CareerLink® sites offer a valuable resource to the employer community. UC Board of Review hearings are held in many of our sites, offering greater convenience to the employers who participate in meetings. Each year, UC staff conduct UC-related seminars for employers to educate them on changes to the system, provide valuable information to those who have minimal experience with UC, and in all cases, share their expertise on a subject of great importance to employers. These workshops are well-attended by employers, who welcome and appreciate this assistance.

The SAWDB has instituted policy that recognizes the importance of continuous improvement by soliciting input from a broad range of organizations and groups that are involved in workforce development. This open-door policy has made the Southern Alleghenies region a leader in programs that make a difference. On-the-Job Training and Registered Apprenticeship programs deliver significant resources to the PA CareerLink® centers and their employer partners to match the best employees offering the correct skill sets.

In this region, the SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® sites utilize a myriad of resources to address skill gaps that employers face with hiring needs. These resources include On-the-Job Training (OJT) contracts and Skill Up™ Southern Alleghenies. In PY23 and PY24, the barriers to employment faced by potential OJT participants made positive outcomes more challenging than ever. Many of the OJT participants came with criminal records, literacy and numeracy deficiencies, and disabilities. In PY24, the SAWDB directed considerable funding to support 25 OJT employers across multiple industry sectors. With

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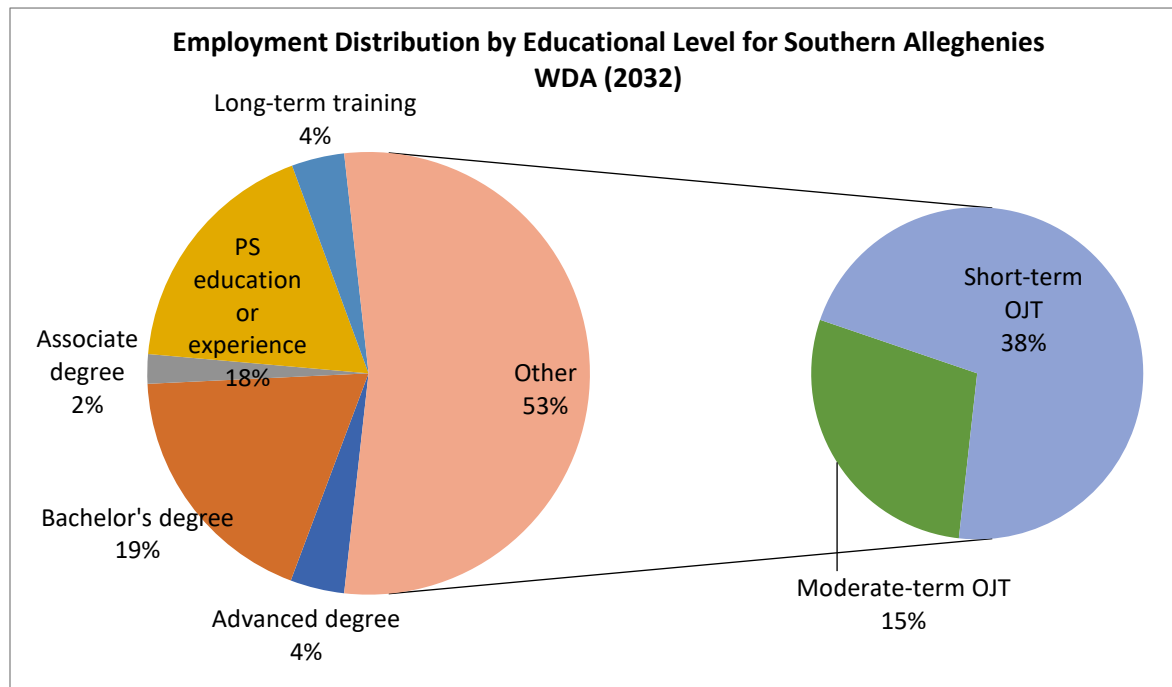
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contracts supporting up to 960 hours of training through OJT, this tool has helped the public workforce system address skill gaps with employers. The diversity of the industries represented through OJTs demonstrated the significance of the need experienced by employers from manufacturing, IT, electrical and HVAC, to publishing and marketing. Consequently, employers have teamed up with the region's one-stops, accessed SkillUp training and partnered with career and technology centers to develop training that complements the OJT program.

Additional tools in the Southern Alleghenies toolkit includes the experienced Business Service Teams (BSTs) within each PA CareerLink® and Skill Up™ Southern Alleghenies. The BSTs have formed strong relationships with local employers who appreciate the job posting power of PA CareerLink®, training boost of OJTs, and deeper dive conversations associated with Engage visits. The SAWDB and one-stops are also promoting the thousands of on-line courses that are available free of charge through Skill Up™ Southern Alleghenies. Employers report that they are using these for their incumbent workforce as well as new hires, to help address skill gaps that can be addressed through on-line learning opportunities.

The CWIA Employment Distribution by Education charts below illustrate that for the projectable future, the education requirements for the region's workforce are not expected to change. There will be virtually no change to the education distribution among the workforce. Short to moderate-term OJT will make up more than half of the requirements supporting the Board's decision to concentrate on promoting OJT and Registered Apprenticeships to the region's employers.

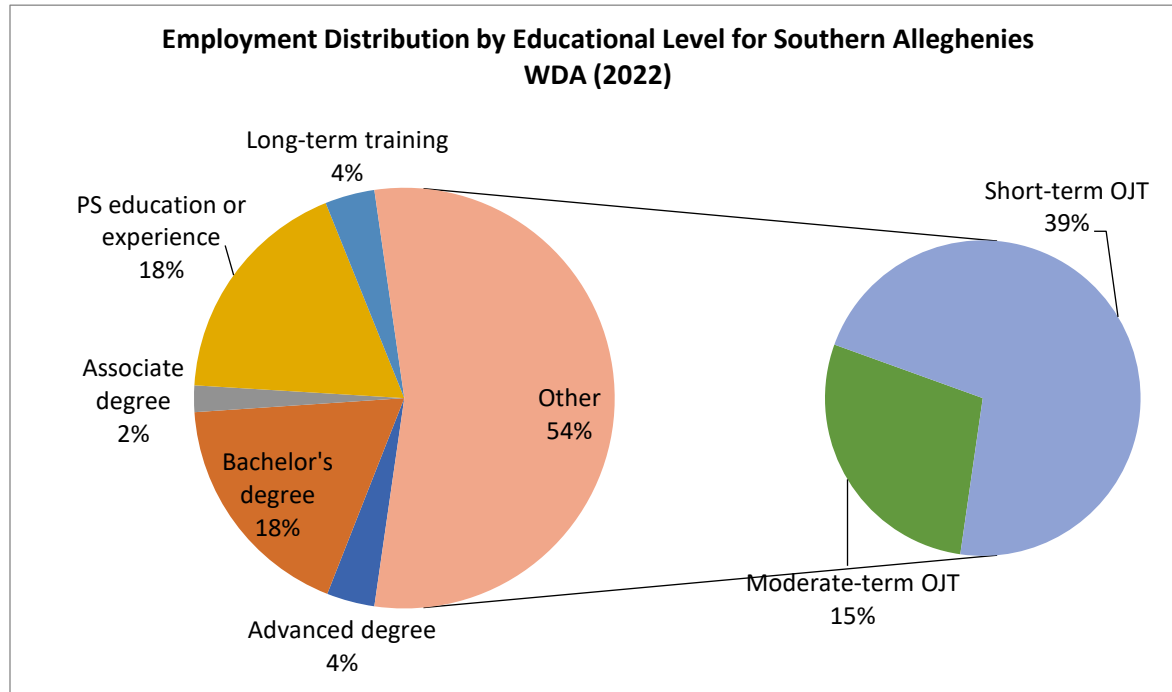




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### *1.4 Workforce Development Activities analysis – Provide an analysis of local area workforce development activities, including education and training.*

A wide range of workforce development activities are available within the Southern Alleghenies region and provided by multiple partners that include but are not limited to the one-stop system, career and technical centers, for-profit providers, community colleges, and post-secondary institutions. There are seven Career and Technical Centers that provide training to secondary and post-secondary students. There are two community colleges that provide training to most of the six-county local area. There are five degree producing institutions and one business college that also provide training to residents of the local area. In addition to institutions of higher education, the region has seen a growing number of registered apprenticeships.

While the local area is home to a significant number of post-secondary institutions and a variety of public and private training providers, many of our residents are not prepared to pursue and successfully complete training programs because they lack the requisite reading, math, and digital literacy skills. The SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® sites will continue to work closely with the coalition of ABLE Title II providers, community-based and other service organizations that provide adult basic

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education services, and the local area's network of public libraries to ensure that job seekers have the necessary skills to successfully complete post-secondary education coursework and return to the workforce. The Division of Adult Education Coalition meetings are held regularly and include representatives from career and technology centers, school districts, child and adult development corporations, a WIOA Title I provider that also provides Title II services, and members of the SAWDB and its staff. Frequent communication with partners and referrals between providers and the Board and PA CareerLink® sites has served to better connect those customers in need of adult basic education with appropriate providers of the service. The SAWDB has further cemented its position on the importance of adult basic education by including a Coalition representative on the SAWDB, its One-Stop Operator Consortium and its committee dedicated to serving special populations. Digital literacy has been called 'the most important lifelong learning tool' and being 'digitally literate' is essential for jobseekers, regardless of their vocational goals. The PA CareerLink® sites offer the Northstar digital literacy assessment, which defines the basic skills needed to use a computer and the internet in daily life, employment, and higher education. PA CareerLink® customers can take any or all eleven modules that range from basic computer skills and Windows 10 and Mac OS X to Microsoft Office applications and information literacy. Our customers can receive digital badges whenever they pass the assessments and can additionally receive certificates when they pass the assessments in our proctored environment. The credentials associated with Northstar are included in the jobseeker's portfolio. In addition, the SAWDB is placing strong emphasis on credential attainment, ensuring that job seekers are able to earn industry-recognized certifications that enhance their employability. The Metrix Learning Skill Up platform is leveraged to provide online training, credentialing opportunities, and career pathway development to help job seekers acquire in-demand skills and advance their careers.

The Southern Alleghenies public workforce system consists of five full PA CareerLink® sites and four affiliate sites where residents can receive personal service or conduct self-service activities. This is critical given the diverse and rural geography of the region where a one-stop may be more than an hour's drive from some parts of the county. Those one-stops and the affiliate sites are the entry point to services that can include orientation, job search (both assisted and unassisted), career training, targeted skill development workshops, and job fairs. The activities are planned and organized so that a participant can get on at any point depending on their personal situation and level of need and get off when they have met their own goals. Orientation is the introduction to the one-stop and its services. A confident self-motivated job seeker can take advantage of PA CareerLink® 2.0® and the statewide system of job postings and somebody who never completed a resume can receive one-on-one assistance from staff to utilize PA CareerLink® 2.0®. Assistance with using labor market information to make informed career and training decisions is also available. A variety of workshops are offered regularly and range from basic and intermediate computer to preparing for an interview. All the activities are geared toward putting people to work.

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Many of the institutions listed above provide programs made available to eligible workforce system participants through the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). Currently, the local ETPL has a total of 91 programs offered by 11 providers, currently the fourth highest number in Pennsylvania. The workforce system also provides the opportunity for work-based training through the OJT program, transitional paid work experience for adults and dislocated workers who have limited employment histories, work experience for youth and internships offered through special grants.

The significant number of providers and the broad breadth of consumer choice from the large number of available courses combine to provide strength to the system's ability to respond to employer and jobseeker needs. Dual enrollment opportunities for secondary students are another strong element that helps to promote educational attainment by providing students with the chance to earn college credit while in high school.

In addition to customer access to higher education, individuals can participate in a growing number of apprenticeship programs. The SAWDB and its partners have been promoting apprenticeships as a viable path to family-sustaining employment, especially for those with multiple barriers to employment and for those who are not a 'good fit' for traditional classroom-based higher education. The PA CareerLink® partners have been using apprenticeship fairs to promote employers and their 'learn and earn' opportunities. The region's WIOA Title I providers have incorporated pre-apprenticeship activities into their youth serve mix and utilized Business-Education Partnership funds to further educate young people on the tremendous opportunities available through apprenticeships.

Even though there are many providers offering a broad set of choices for training, the rural geography of the region and general lack of public transportation combine to limit access to a significant portion of the local population. Another challenge is the level of technical training offered in the vocational or trades arena. The career and technical centers provide a variety of trades training and work closely with their employer advisory committees to ensure that their curriculum and certifications are recognized and in demand by employers. Still, the cost of education continues to be a deterrent to some seeking training even with funding support available through the public workforce system. This is particularly evident for dislocated workers and underemployed adults who often must choose between attending training or working at a job that pays significantly less than their prior earnings.

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

The challenges the Board faces include the access to timely intelligence and funding priorities. Consequently, the Board strategy will be to connect with as many employers as possible using multiple avenues striving to have an impact on:

- Timely identification of needs from employers
- Development of consensus to achieve multi-employer economies of scale
- Lead times for curriculum development

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- Lead times for arrangement of trainers

The Board and staff will continue to participate on as many committees, advisory panels, and partnerships as possible to gather information from different industries, levels of leadership, and PA CareerLink® customers. The PA CareerLink® site administrators will oversee Business Service Teams (BST) tasked with connecting employers with business services and potential employees, including incumbent workers. The SAWDB allocates funding, if available, to provide the one-stop with assistance in conducting job fairs targeted at employers who have openings and are actively seeking employees. All these efforts can be successfully completed virtually or in person, depending on the circumstance and need. Through the efforts of the Business Service Strategy Team in collaboration with the One Stop Operator, each PA CareerLink® in the region can conduct virtual job fairs or training, including breakout rooms for individual interviews or one-on-one training sessions.

The SAWDB's One-Stop Operator focuses primarily on the PA CareerLink® business service teams in building awareness of and partnership with regional employers. One method of success established was a quarterly scorecard that measures progress in contacting new employers, servicing current employer customers, and developing new services aimed at attracting, hiring, and retaining employees. The OSO, site administrators, and SAWDB staff are currently revamping the PA CareerLink® Scorecard so that it better meets the needs of employers and job seekers and also provides service-related data for use by the SAWDB. The information it will contain, by county, includes:

- Unemployment Compensation data including rate, labor force, and new claims by industry
- PA CareerLink® foot traffic
- Number of job seekers served and number of services provided
- Number of recruitment events held
- Number of job postings and number of applications
- Number of employers serviced and number of services provided

This information will be provided to customers, including employers, and stakeholders each quarter.

The SAWDB will continue to connect with the economic development community directly and through the Partnership for Regional Economic Performance (PREP) where one employer need can be identified and potentially embraced by multiple employers when staff shares that need with other contacts. Also, by being an active partner with PREP, the Board has access to employer surveys which often include skill training needs. The Board will continue to pursue similar opportunities whenever possible. Some of the other avenues the Board uses to gather skill gap information are various advisory committees for high schools, career and technical centers, community colleges, and adult literacy providers.

Another potential avenue to explore for filling employer needs for skilled labor begins by looking outside of our region to import these skilled workers. The Board will work with various community groups in Altoona and Johnstown who are focused on transforming their cities by addressing blight, crime, and business declines through community development aimed at bringing younger residents into the region and encouraging entrepreneurs.

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The process of developing apprenticeships may provide a pathway to alleviating the lag in curriculum development by getting education providers in direct contact with employers who are determining what their related instruction needs to be. Consequently, the Board has placed additional focus on apprenticeship development which has already resulted in at least four companies starting on the apprenticeship development path this year. Development of apprenticeships for in-demand occupations helps to get that curriculum in place which can then be used for other apprenticeships or modified more quickly if necessary. Also, increased support for OJT will help to assist employers with their hiring needs. Since 2020, OJTs have accounted for 48% of the training service enrollments in the region. This represents a shift, with fewer requests for Individual Training Accounts and more employers and individuals interested in OJT. Requests for classroom training are down by roughly 30% compared to pre-pandemic figures. As the HPO list demonstrates, increased educational attainment will be necessary to secure many of the growing occupations in the region. This trend by jobseekers, away from post-secondary education will create yet another challenge to the workforce system.

The Board was an active partner with the committee that completed the Southern Alleghenies regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2025 - 2029. The strategies noted below are in direct support of Goal Number One in the CEDS: Seek Expansion of the Regional Economy Through Diversified Job Growth. It is of special note that Workforce Development initiatives now have five focused strategies, highlighting the growing emphasis on workforce initiatives to achieve regional economic growth.

The first Strategy relating to workforce is to continue the gradual movement of the Region to a more technology-related, diversified economy.

- *Strategy 2:* Conduct annual assessments of high demand jobs and specific skills required in those positions to focus workforce development and job placement activities according to current opportunities.

The five strategies below are to directly support workforce development initiatives that build the talent pipeline and enhance the skills of the incumbent workforce to ensure the Region's employers remain competitive.

- *Strategy 1:* Support and promote the Region's public workforce system, the Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Board, and its network of PA CareerLink® sites as a significant resource for employer and jobseeker services.
- *Strategy 2:* Expand and educate students and jobseekers to the many training options that lead to gainful employment in the Region. These can include traditional post-secondary education as well as occupational skills training through Career and Technology Centers and apprenticeships.
- *Strategy 3:* Support opportunities for increased communication and collaboration between the employer community and the Region's educators to help ensure that employer needs, and educational offerings are aligned.
- *Strategy 4:* Support programs that provide education, workforce preparedness training and hands-on learning for young adults with significant barriers to employment. These can include

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low education levels, homelessness, low income, aging out of foster care and criminal records.

- *Strategy 5:* Support expansion and enhancement of work-based opportunities for jobseekers, especially youth. These can range from summer work experience opportunities for in-school youth and internships for college students to transitional employment for adults with barriers to employment.

The various strategies described above are directed at ensuring the businesses in the region know and understand that the SAWDB and the PA CareerLink® sites are the face of the public workforce system and believe this is the place to call for assistance in addressing workforce related issues.

## 2 STRATEGIC PLANNING: Vision and Goals

**2.1 Local Board's Strategic Vision and Alignment with the Governor's Strategic Vision. What are the local board's strategic vision and goals for preparing its workforce and it's 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?**

The Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Board (SAWDB) will lead initiatives designed to enhance the skills of the workforce to meet the needs of the region's employers to compete in a world economy. To accomplish this, the SAWDB is committed to supporting a data-driven, purposeful public workforce system that:

- Is flexible and responsive to the changing needs of jobseekers and employers
- Embraces innovation as espoused in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
- Is committed to serving all those who are seeking employment or employees
- Is integrated into a larger, coordinated network that includes other entities with a similar mission
- Recognizes the importance of career pathways and invests in training opportunities that are tied to employer demand and result in jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage for the employee
- Is committed to excellence and accountable to its funding agents, its customers, and its partners

The SAWDB will help to advance its vision and support attainment of the performance accountability measures as outlined in the WIOA Section 116 for local areas through the following:

1. Increased resources directed to support industry-driven training. Beyond the training benchmarks established in Pennsylvania's Workforce Development Plan, the SAWDB will direct its WIOA Title I allocation, Rapid Response Funding, and National Emergency Grant awards and other competitively secured resources to support training that results in industry-recognized credentials. On-the-Job Training (OJT) will continue to be heavily promoted; all positions supported through OJT will provide a wage that meets or exceeds the local self-sufficiency level. The SAWDB will continue to seek flexible funding and leverage and align partner support

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to help raise the educational attainment level of our residents and support jobseeker and incumbent worker training needs. Efforts will be closely coordinated with the Partnership for Regional Economic Performance (PREP) partners and WEDnetPA service providers to ensure that employer needs are identified, addressed and services are not duplicated. As a member of PREP, the SAWDB will utilize the partnership opportunities with the region's economic developers to coordinate services that support business recruitment and retention, and incumbent worker skill advancement.

2. Increased alignment with WIOA Title II (Adult Education) and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) to support greater career pathway development and utilization. One in four WIOA Title I customers is basic skills deficient (reading below a 9th grade level), has a disability or both barriers to employment. Seamless service integration will be essential to ensure jobseekers receive the services they need.
3. Continued support for the region's Industry Partnerships (IPs). Industry-driven consortia have been in place and evolved in the region for more than 20 years. These will serve as a vehicle for promoting apprenticeships, a training model that has been slow to gain traction in the region. Increased engagement between employers that effectively utilize apprenticeships and those considering this resource for employee development and career advancement will be supported.
4. Greater analysis of the High Priority Occupation (HPO) and Eligible Training Provider (ETP) Lists to include data analysis of training investments and the effectiveness of preparing participants for employment in their fields of study. Additional work will be conducted to develop and promote micro-credentials and prior-learning credits.
5. Enhanced partner integration specifically with OVR, the Employment, Advancement, and Retention Network (EARN), and Department of Corrections with a goal of greater inclusion and seamless referral between programs. The SAWDB's standing committee will focus on service to target populations with significant barriers to employment. The SAWDB's Special Populations Committee will act as the conduit for information between agencies that serve WIOA target populations and the SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® sites.
6. Expanded and enhanced work-based opportunities for youth. The SAWDB will continue its support for and promotion of summer and year-round paid work experience, internship, and apprenticeship opportunities. Its modified OJT policy to allow for a slightly lower wage for youth participants has expanded utilization of this service. Signs indicate that continued SAWDB emphasis on OJT opportunities for youth have resulted in this service gaining greater traction and momentum. Contracts written to date far exceed the \$10.00 per hour minimum established for youth OJT participants.
7. Support for special initiatives such as YouthBuild and other services that address the special challenges of Out-of-School Youth with significant barriers to employment including a history of incarceration.

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Like the Commonwealth, the SAWDB and its workforce partners are committed to supporting an effective workforce development system built on a foundation of alignment, innovation, employer engagement, accountability structures and improved data.

Each year, the PA CareerLink® Management Teams, with assistance from the One-Stop Operator Consortium (OSO), develop their own measurable goals, objectives and action steps to support the SAWDB's vision and strategic objectives. The OSO, site administrators, and SAWDB staff are currently revamping the PA CareerLink® Scorecard so that it better meets the needs of employers and job seekers and also provides service-related data for use by the SAWDB. The information it will contain, by county, includes:

- Unemployment Compensation data including rate, labor force, and new claims by industry
- PA CareerLink® foot traffic
- Number of job seekers served and number of services provided
- Number of recruitment events held
- Number of job postings and number of applications
- Number of employers serviced and number of services provided

This information will be provided to customers, including employers, and stakeholders each quarter.

This information will be captured monthly and reported quarterly, and reviewed by the SAWDB, One-Stop Operator (OSO), and PA CareerLink® partners. It will also be shared with system stakeholders. Workforce development leadership will ensure that the new goals and objectives are aligned and further reflect the governor's and the SAWDB's strategic vision.

*2.2 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?*

Southern Alleghenies WDA		
	PY2024 Final Negotiated Level	PY2025 Final Negotiated Level
Adult		
Employment Second Quarter after Exit	71.0	72.0
Employment Fourth Quarter after Exit	70.0	71.0
Median Earnings Second Quarter after Exit	\$6,500	\$6,750
Credential Attainment Rate	80.0	81.0
Measurable Skill Gains	76.0	77.0



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<b>Dislocated Workers</b>		
<b>Employment Second Quarter after Exit</b>	81.0	82.0
<b>Employment Fourth Quarter after Exit</b>	79.0	80.0
<b>Median Earnings Second Quarter after Exit</b>	\$9,000	\$9,500
<b>Credential Attainment Rate</b>	75.0	75.0
<b>Measurable Skill Gains</b>	86.0	87.0
<b>Youth</b>		
<b>Employment Second Quarter after Exit</b>	74.0	75.0
<b>Employment Fourth Quarter after Exit</b>	67.0	68.0
<b>Median Earnings Second Quarter after Exit</b>	\$3,750	\$4,000
<b>Credential Attainment Rate</b>	54.0	55.0
<b>Measurable Skill Gains</b>	64.0	65.0

Local Area WIOA Title I Programs Performance Accountability Table includes the specific performance levels negotiated for the Southern Alleghenies region. The SAWDB's goals, identified above, are tied directly to and support the achievement of the performance measures outlined in the WIOA Section 116. They include:

### **Title I Adult & Dislocated Worker Employment Rate**

- All the Board's goals, except for those related specifically to youth, support participant employment (2<sup>nd</sup> quarter and 4<sup>th</sup> quarter past exit). Stronger entered employment and job retention rates should result from the increased emphasis on connecting individuals with industry-driven training opportunities and providing the financial resources to reduce barriers to successful completion. This is especially true for participants in the On-the-Job training service; they are considered employed on day one of the contract and retained by the employer following the successful completion of the training plan. Greater integration with partner programs (OVR, EARN, Corrections), will mean additional leveraged resources including staff assistance with participant job search and placement.

### **Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Median Earnings**

- There is a well-documented correlation between an individual's educational attainment and their employment and earning potential. Greater emphasis on training, along with the increased resource allocation to support it, will result in more participation in classroom and OJT. Enhanced development of career pathways and support for micro and stackable credentials will further increase our customers' median earnings.

### **Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Credential Rate**

- Realization of the negotiated credential rate will hinge on the local workforce system's ability to connect its customers with credentialed training and the SAWDB's ability to reduce barriers to successful completion through resource allocation and program support. As with earnings, use of career pathways, and the stackable credentials that can be earned along the employment path, will help the achievement of this measure.

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## **Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Measurable Skill Gains**

- Achievement of this performance measure hinges on the local system's ability to connect job seekers with training that will support employment in a high priority occupation and align to the participant's interests and abilities. Identifying and reducing/eliminating barriers to successful advancement will be key. Access to supportive services, combined with enhanced case management and service coordination and integration among workforce partners will support attainment of this measure. These factors apply to classroom training and OJT, with its structured training plan that includes identified skills to be attained.

## **Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Effectiveness in Serving Employers**

- The SAWDB's vision and strategic goals and those of its PA CareerLink® sites focus on identifying and meeting the workforce needs of the region's employers. Greater financial support for industry-driven training, both for potential new hires as well as the incumbent workforce, will help to address the employers' training needs. Increased collaboration among partners, including those housed in the one-stops as well as the PREP partners and community and faith-based organizations, will greatly improve service delivery to employers. No longer should employers be responding to multiple requests from various agencies all requesting the same information. Once an employer's needs are identified, referrals between partnering agencies should be much smoother and services provided seamlessly. Greater financial support for industry-driven training, both for potential new hires as well as the incumbent workforce, will help to address the employers' training needs.

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

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

The local workforce development system includes a wide range of key stakeholders, from boards of local elected officials to small community-based organizations. These many and varied stakeholders are identified in the following narrative. The board of county commissioners representing the six-county Southern Alleghenies workforce development area, is designated the Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission (SAP&DC) as the Fiscal Agent and the Administrative Agent for WIOA Title I funds. The SAP&DC, one of the commonwealth's Local Development Districts, also provides the staff to the SAWDB. The majority of the SAP&DC board is comprised of commissioners from the six-county service area; several key private sector and education representatives also serve. The president of the Commission's board is designated the region's Chief Local Elected Official; he is responsible for approving all appointments to the SAWDB. The Commission's board also works in cooperation with the SAWDB to develop and approve all local plans, reviews and approves the SAWDB budgets, and performance benchmarks. Since the SAWDB is a non-incorporated body, all contracts for services are made between the SAP&DC and the individual subcontractor; the LEOs accept liability for WIOA funds

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allocated to the region. The SAWDB director meets with the LEOs bi-monthly, and communicates as needed between meetings, to ensure that they are engaged and kept up to date on the state of the region's workforce development system.

The SAP&DC, as fiscal agent, has a broad list of responsibilities related to the disbursement of funds including but not limited to:

- contract preparation and maintenance
- invoice review and check disbursement
- expenditure tracking
- draw-down of funds from the PA CareerLink® including preparing Requests for Funds
- fiscal monitoring of all subcontract/subcontractors
- preparation and delivery of fiscal reports to LEOs and SAWDB
- PA CareerLink® Operating Budget maintenance
- check disbursement on behalf of the region's PA CareerLink® sites

The SAWDB is comprised of 27 members that represent the private sector, organized labor, economic development (PREP partner), one-stop partners including OVR, Wagner-Peyser, and the Department of Human Services, community-based organizations including community action agencies, and education. They have optimum policy-making authority in their organization and are well-positioned to speak to the needs of their industry, organization, or client population. While board turnover is low, the LEOs work directly with appropriate entities in the Southern Alleghenies region to secure nominations to appoint new members or fill vacancies on the SAWDB. Private sector nominations are made by the appropriate county business organization; nominees come from companies that provide high-quality work and represent a targeted industry cluster. Economic development representatives are members of the PREP partners and are nominated by their individual board of directors. Representatives for education are nominated by their board of trustees, their operating committee, or in the case of adult education, by the ABLE Coalition. Labor representatives are nominated by their central labor council, regional council or area labor federation. The boards of directors for community-based organizations nominate their representatives. The Commonwealth Department of Labor and Industry nominates their representative. All nominations are made in writing on agency letterhead and forwarded to the Chief LEO. The Chief LEO reviews all nominations and officially appoints all members to the SAWDB at the bi-monthly meeting of the SAP&DC, or in between meetings when absolutely necessary.

The SAWDB is dedicated to ensuring that the region's residents receive the highest level of services available through the local one-stop system and that these services be provided by the PA CareerLink® partners in the most efficient and effective manner possible. The SAWDB has four standing committees including:

- The Executive Committee meets monthly and acts on behalf of the SAWDB between its regular meetings.
- The Young Adult Council provides the SAWDB with input on all matters related to serving youth, from training-related issues to performance review. They also develop the local strategic plan for serving TANF youth.

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- The Special Populations Committee focuses on identifying any service gaps in the local workforce system ensuring that the needs of those with significant barriers to employment are identified and addressed.

The role of the SAWDB in the workforce system has been expanded under the WIOA. The SAWDB complies with all regulations set forth in the WIOA and has executed the following in partnership with the local elected officials as they relate to the workforce system and its infrastructure:

- Competitive process to identify the OSO
- Negotiation of the Memorandum of Understanding and Infrastructure Funding Agreement with the PA CareerLink® partners to provide workforce services in the region
- Review and evaluation of performance of one stops and operators and certification of the region's PA CareerLink® sites
- Negotiation of WIOA Title I Performance Goals

Other key responsibilities include:

- The selection of the WIOA Title I providers and the development of a performance management system designed to capture Title I and PA CareerLink® performance benchmarks to ensure that the workforce system operates in the most efficient and effective manner possible.
- Labor market information data collection, analysis, and dissemination. The SAWDB has positioned itself as a “go to” entity for the most up-to-date labor market information. To date, recipients of this data include the region's employers, economic development agencies, secondary and post-secondary educational institutions, and the PA CareerLink® sites.
- Industry Partnership development and support. The Board will continue to identify resources to support and address the soft skills employers so often find lacking in their new hires and incumbent workforce.
- Involvement in regional educational initiatives like BASICS (Businesses and Schools Investing in Cooperative Solutions), and the CSB2 STEM Ecosystem. The SAWDB participation has helped to promote expanded career education and work experience opportunities for youth by leveraging non-WIOA resources.
- Support for and involvement in the Southern Alleghenies Entrepreneurial Ecosystem - Startup Alleghenies.
- For the Operator's identity, key roles, and competitive procurement process used to select the operator, please refer to L3.2.

Together, the Chief Local Elected Officials, SAWDB, Fiscal Agent, and Equal Opportunity Officer (EOO) form a strong team committed to ensuring that the workforce services provided in the Southern Alleghenies meet the needs of the jobseeker and employer community. This includes ensuring that services are readily accessible in formats designed to meet the needs of jobseekers and provided without discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or political affiliation.

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### *3.2 Programs included in local workforce delivery system - What are the programs 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?*

The SAWDB has taken a 'team' approach when it comes to operations in the region and it enjoys outstanding working relationships with everyone, from the local elected officials and members of the OSO and members of the PREP, to the partner staff who work directly with the customers. Because of these strong lines of communication and spirit of cooperation that is present in the region, the local system has been recognized by the state and the US Department of Labor for its ability to meet the needs of its customers through its cooperative and coordinated approach to service delivery. The SAWDB had completed a competitive Request for Proposal process to secure a new One-Stop Operator; this consortium has led the drive for innovation and excellence; many of its accomplishments are noted in the Plan. The OSO is a key player in workforce development; it is responsible for helping provide direction to the delivery system and assist the one-stop with the implementation of the SAWDB's strategic objectives. The OSO is responsible for the coordination of services associated with the Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Area's workforce service delivery system, thereby achieving optimum service alignment. Its membership includes key stakeholders and form a consortium of three agencies (Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies, Employment and Training Inc. and the Community Action Partnership for Somerset County-Tableland Services), who, along with other providers collectively represent the mandated partners - WIOA Title I, WIOA Title II Adult Education (The Altoona School District), YouthBuild, and the Community Service Block Grant. They bring tremendous experience and a long and successful history of providing significant workforce services, especially to those with barriers to employment. They, along with the SAWDB director, business services and operations specialists, PA CareerLink® site administrators and Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations assistant regional director meet monthly to review performance metrics, discuss and identify service gaps, lay the groundwork for new program implementation, and address any pressing issues or concerns. Their current focus includes:

- Increased outreach to those with significant barriers to employment
- Identification of new performance metrics for the Pa CareerLink® Scorecards and the formation of an Operational Intelligence and Business Services Strategy Teams
- Modernize services and facilities to attract diverse customers
- Innovation of Business Services
- Promotion of the importance of Digital Literacy and Northstar Assessment

The OSO also:

- Assists with the preparation and maintenance of the PA CareerLink® Operating Budget in concert with the site administrators and one-stop partners
- Works to ensure seamless integration within the one-stop
- Helps prepare for PA CareerLink® quality review visits
- Ensures preparation and maintenance of the One-Stop Service Plan
- Serves as liaison to the SAWDB and provides one-stop updates at Board and committee meetings
- Selects, evaluates and supports the PA CareerLink® site administrators

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- Provides oversight of the performance management system relative to Common Measures and the PA CareerLink® Scorecards
- Evaluates customer needs and satisfaction
- Completes reporting requirements
- Oversees promotion/outreach for PA CareerLink® sites and system

The OSO has already taken action to move customer satisfaction measurement to a digital platform, developed a website that will tie to social media applications and further promote the system, including the addition of a 'live chat' feature, the coordinated measurement of performance levels, further help expand services through greater use of technology, i.e., Zoom, Skype and teleconferencing, supported the move of the region's two largest comprehensive one-stops into more accessible public libraries, established three additional affiliate sites, rolled out the Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment, and delivered a number of professional development opportunities for all one-stop partners to name but a few of its many significant accomplishments.

Furthermore, the alignment of these programs, and their connection to the SAWDB, PA CareerLink® partners and workforce stakeholders directly supports the workforce strategies outlined in the state plan, the Southern Alleghenies Regional and Local Plans and the shared goals and objectives of the Governor and local Board. Examples of this include:

- The SAWDB/OSO/PA CareerLink® partner development of and support for the soon to be released new PA CareerLink® Scorecard, a single page 'performance dashboard' that will be of interest and importance to employers but also provide performance and foot traffic information.
- SAWDB staff meet regularly with WIOA Title I providers to discuss topics ranging from performance management to Board policy changes, operating system modifications, and service delivery improvements.
- The SAWDB Special Populations Committee, with its representatives from state and community agencies that serve WIOA target populations, meet with the site administrators to identify service gaps and ways to improve outreach to those in need of the workforce services.
- SAWDB director participates in monthly OSO and site administrator meetings to ensure communication flows from the SAWDB directly to the PA CareerLink® sites. The OSO also participates in and reports out at all SAWDB and Executive Committee meetings.
- SAWDB director participates in state-organized meetings of the local WDB directors to ensure that information flows from the local area to other LWDBs and the state and then back to the region.
- SAWDB director and staff participate in the PA Workforce Development Association board, Policy Council, and technical work group meetings to ensure that communication flows from our local area to other LWDBs and the state and then back to our region.
- SAWDB staff participate in regularly scheduled meetings of employers, Business Service Teams, PREP partners, service organizations, etc. to convey information relative to workforce initiatives to these entities and provide feedback to the Board.

Furthermore, the SAWDB director and staff maintain an 'open door' policy so that they are accessible to all workforce partners and stakeholders, including PA CareerLink® staff at all levels.

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Required and additional partner program's resource contributions are discussed in prompts 3.4 and 5.1. See attachment 3 for a complete list of the required partners.

## Collaboration with Required Partners

Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Board is committed to building a unified, coordinated workforce system by actively engaging and collaborating with the WIOA-mandated required partners. Key ways that we the SAWDB is engaging with these partners are:

- Governance and strategic planning. The WDB engages required partners in the development of the local plan, ensuring alignment of services and shared goals. Partners are consulted in setting priorities that reflect labor market needs and customer-focused service delivery.
- Memorandums of Understanding (MOU's): SAWDB negotiates with each required partner to outline roles, responsibilities, resource sharing, and how services will continue to be coordinated across the system. These agreements ensure a common understanding of how programs will operate in collaboration at PA CareerLink® Centers.
- Cost-Sharing and Infrastructure Funding: Partners co-locate or provide coordinated services at comprehensive and affiliate sites to streamline access for job seekers and employers. The SAWDB facilitates negotiations to ensure fiscal responsibilities are fair, transparent, and compliant with WIOA requirements.
- Performance Accountability: The board monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of programs in meeting performance metrics.

The SAWDB utilizes its Request for Proposal (RFP) procurement process to promote continuous improvement in the WIOA Title I services it supports. In 2017, the Board completed a competitive procurement for all Title I services. Procurement notices were sent to roughly 200 bidders from across the region, state and country, ads were placed in papers of record, and the solicitation was included on the Pennsylvania Development Workforce Association website. All of this was done to encourage responses from qualified organizations with a strong history of providing quality workforce services. After a rigorous board-driven review process, two of the region's six counties have a different service provider, effective July 1, 2017. All contracts are considered annually and renewed based on provider performance. The SAWDB went through a similar process to competitively procure its OSO. Performance reviews of the consortium were conducted first at six months and then annually.

Measurement of customer satisfaction is another continuous improvement tool and one utilized aggressively, and across all partners and funding streams. Currently employer satisfaction is measured as part of OJT monitoring, and customers (employers and jobseekers) participating in certain services, i.e., training, work experience for youth, core workshops, are monitored for service satisfaction. The OSO and PA CareerLink® site administrators, in partnership with the SAWDB, are utilizing customer satisfaction surveys that are presented in a digital format and include participants in Basic and Individualized Career Services and Training and employers.

With the data, both quantitative and qualitative, derived from the activities and instruments referenced above, the SAWDB, OSO, and its service delivery partners will continue to assess the effectiveness of the services offered, identify service gaps, and apply continuous improvement

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strategies.

### ***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.***

The Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Area includes the counties of Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Fulton, Huntingdon, and Somerset. The SAWDB supports five PA CareerLink® sites, four affiliate sites in Fulton, Cambria and Blair Counties, and multiple sites housed in public libraries, senior and community centers and a YMCA. Adults and dislocated workers can access a full array of WIOA services at all one-stop locations; services are provided on a more limited basis at the affiliated sites. In addition to the services listed below, the SAWDB, its WIOA Title I providers and workforce partners work together to evaluate existing programs and consider new offerings to meet the needs of its adult and dislocated worker jobseekers.

The WIOA supports ‘career services’ and ‘training services’ for adults and dislocated workers. Unlike service provision under the Workforce Investment Act, there is no requirement that these services be accessed in a predetermined sequence.

Three types of career services are provided in the region. They are:

#### 1) Basic Career Services - available to everyone and include:

- Program eligibility - includes determining if the individual is eligible to receive additional assistance under the WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker or Youth programs.
- Outreach and orientation - includes participation in RESEA. Participants receive information on the wide array of services provided by the PA CareerLink® and other resources available.
- Initial and Preliminary Assessment - includes the identification of potential barriers to employment, assists with identifying special status or priority of service (veteran, low income, individual with a disability).
- Labor Exchange - supported by Wagner-Peyser staff and includes provision of labor market information, job search and placement/job referral assistance, coordination of activities including referral for service to be provided by PA CareerLink® partners as well as other organization/agencies in the community.
- Provision of Information including:
  - Performance data including information related to the one-stop’s ability to meet WIOA performance goals but also separate benchmarks established by the SAWDB for the one-stops.
  - Training-related information including review of the ETPL and LTPL, school performance (completion rates, placement, wage), cost and financial aid.
  - Access to Unemployment Insurance phone
  - Availability of supportive services including transportation, childcare, implement allowance and referral network for additional services



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- 2) Individualized Career Services may be provided to individuals who need additional assistance to retain or obtain employment and include:
  - Comprehensive and specialized assessments - these include the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) to determine math and reading literacy levels and identify basic skills deficiencies, CareerScope to identify career interests and aptitudes, and WorkKeys® career readiness credential that assesses reading for information, locating information and applied mathematics levels and the NorthStar digital literacy assessment. In addition to these tools, case managers and career planners may utilize intensive customer interviewing to identify additional barriers to employment and provide more effective career planning counseling.
  - Preparation of the Individual Employment Plan (IEP) - this document serves as the road map and includes the customer's vocational goal and identifies the services, planned and provided, that will help them reach their goal. It also identifies any barriers to employment and where appropriate, referral to other services. This is not a static document but is regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changes in services and customer circumstances.
  - Counseling, career planning and case management - includes more intensive assistance job search and mentoring.
  - Short-term prevocational services - includes helping customer gain a clearer understanding of desirable 'work ethics' and employer expectations, the importance of strong communication skills, Internships and work experience including paid and unpaid.
  - Work-Readiness services - includes computer classes (basic and intermediate), time management, conflict resolution and other workshops that help prepare the customer for employment or education.
  - Financial literacy services - includes budget development and 'Is Training Right for You' workshop that explores the financial implications that accompany post-secondary education.
  - Job search assistance for those who wish to leave the Southern Alleghenies.
  - English as a second language (ESL) and integrated education and training (IET)
- 3) Follow-up Services will be provided to those customers who are placed in unsubsidized employment for one year following placement. Maintaining the relationship between career planner/counselor and customer is vital, even after employment has been secured. This allows the PA CareerLink® staff to identify and address any possible barriers to job retention.

Training Services are available to those individuals who do not possess the marketable skills needed to obtain or retain a job that meet the region's self-sufficiency level. They can take many forms and include:

Individual Training Account- the SAWDB awards up to \$4,500 to support post-secondary education programs that are less than one year and \$6,000 for programs that are one year and greater. All training must be tied to an occupation on the High Priority Occupation List; the training provider and program must be on the ETPL. While customer choice largely drives training decisions, up-front career planning is essential so that the customer makes informed choices regarding field of study and training provider. For the period July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024, of the individuals who successfully completed training and received a credential; 89% were employed working in their field of study; a solid return on investment.

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- Work-based Training - these include OJT, customized training, incumbent worker training and transitional employment, and apprenticeships.
- OJT – In most cases, the SAWDB will provide a 50% wage reimbursement during the participant's training period. This percentage may fluctuate depending on the source of funding. To be considered for an adult or dislocated worker OJT contract, the position must pay an amount equal or greater to the region's family sustaining wage. The minimum wage for a youth OJT was set at a lower amount, \$10.00, to encourage employer consideration of youth. For the period July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024, of the individuals who completed successfully completed the On-The Job Training Program ; 93% were retained by their OJT Employer. This illustrates a solid return on investment and testament to the importance of effective case management and career counseling.
- Incumbent Worker Training, Apprenticeships, and Transitional Jobs- the SAWDB, PA CareerLink® staff and economic developers have been working closely with employers to identify training needs and promote these opportunities. Due to an aggressive promotional campaign, registered apprenticeships have been gaining traction in the region. As a result of its focus on moving people out of poverty, the SAWDB began financial support for Adult and Dislocated Worker paid work experience. This transitional job program is geared toward adults who lack meaningful work experience and dislocated workers who are looking to change their employment direction and lack meaningful work experience. From April 1, 2019 to June 30, 2024, 152 individuals were enrolled into the program, 70% completed the program and 50% obtained unsubsidized employment.

The services listed above continue to meet the needs of jobseekers and employers, as demonstrated by measured jobseeker success at securing gainful employment with a self-sufficient wage. However, individuals with more significant barriers to employment are seeking services in greater numbers than ever before. The Board's Special Population Committee has been charged with identifying service gaps, based on the needs of their target populations and compared to current service offerings. We anticipate specific new service recommendations to be presented by this committee in the coming program year; these will help to improve and increase relevancy of the services provided to those adults and dislocated workers with significant barriers to employment.

To further align its supported programs with the WIOA, the SAWDB implemented a Priority of Service Policy that mirrors the requirements under the law. Veterans and their eligible spouses are given the highest priority followed by recipients of public assistance, low-income individuals and those who are basic skills deficient. All others who do not fall into the above categories fall under the lowest priority for service. The PA CareerLink® welcome process enables staff to identify where a customer fits into the priority of service criteria and begin barrier identification during an individual's initial visit to the one-stop. Completion of the initial assessment helps to move the individual through the enrollment process much faster and more efficiently facilitates the referral to partner agencies and programs to address customer needs and barriers. Staff look forward to the full implementation of the on-line common digital intake form as it promises to increase the efficiency in capturing customer data, and with it, improve staff's ability to more quickly connect customers with relevant services.

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During SAWDB staff monitoring, case files and PA CareerLink® records are reviewed to ensure that services are targeted to those priority of service customers and that at least 51% of all those served fall under the priority of service. Staff also use the Participant Characteristic report to determine the makeup of customers being served, to better understand the potential barriers being faced, and identify the partner agencies/programs best positioned to assist with barrier remediation.

With the WIOA came the requirement to dedicate 75% of the Board's Youth allocation in service to out-of-school youth. This required a significant paradigm shift on the part of the Workforce Investment Act Title I providers who previously focused on servicing in-school youth. While SAWDB policy continues to allow service to eligible in-school youth with WIOA Title I funds, it holds each provider responsible for exceeding the 75% expenditure requirement with its Title I award. The SAWDB staff collect monthly pipeline reports that identify the outcome of outreach activities to out-of-school youth and the source of customer referrals. This has enabled SAWDB staff to monitor provider efforts to identify and serve the out-of-school population; corrective action plans have been required from those providers who were failing to reach anticipated service numbers. The SAWDB has also expanded its fiscal Red/Green Report, which outlines Title I provider expenditure levels by funding stream, to include fiscal tracking by out-of-school youth and work experience expenditures. This report is reviewed monthly by the Board and providers to ensure that the region is on track to meet these expenditure requirements; it is anticipated that the region will meet and exceed the WIOA fiscal requirements.

Each year, the SAWDB has experienced a 10% to 15% cut in its WIOA Title I allocation. Sometimes it has been challenging to meet all the jobseeker requests for post-secondary training. The SAWDB has successfully sought competitive funding to support training for adults and dislocated workers and on occasion, has transferred funding from the Dislocated Worker funding stream to the Adult training budget to help meet demand. To anticipate demand for training funds, the SAWDB staff receive monthly reports from the WIOA Title I providers that outline the anticipated requests for classroom and on-the job training. This allows the SAWDB to project demand and identify any funding shortfalls in advance. If such a shortfall is anticipated, the SAWDB reviews its financial position to determine if a transfer request between programs is feasible; if so, it takes an action to approve the request at a public meeting of the SAWDB or its Executive Committee. By taking this proactive approach to financial management the SAWDB, and the public workforce system it supports, continues to fund significant training opportunities for the region's adults, dislocated workers and youth.

As described earlier in this Plan, the SAWDB is a proponent of and provides significant support for the development of Career Pathways. Furthermore, it expects that jobseekers will be co-enrolled in all workforce programs that will help the individual achieve their employment goal. The Board has reviewed and endorsed the initial assessment, utilized across the region, as an instrument to identify individual needs and determine the services, and provider mix, needed to help the participant reach their goal. Program co-enrollment is reviewed by SAWDB staff during WIOA Title I and PA CareerLink® monitoring to ensure that jobseekers are connecting with all appropriate services and providers. An essential service element is access to skilled and work-based training. The SAWDB has placed significant value on work-based training and each year it allocates significant financial resources to support on-the job training. Support for transitional jobs using WIOA funding is aimed at out-of-school youth, adults with minimal work experience, and dislocated workers who possess minimal skills in more in-demand occupations. Providers of the Employment Advancement and Retention Network

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(EARN) services including KEYS, SNAP JETS, and ELECT programs are considering the use of their program funds to initiate support for transitional jobs; since PY 18, WIOA Title I funding has been used to support transitional work opportunities for co-enrolled (EARN and WIOA Title I) customers. Following considerable analysis, the SAWDB has directed additional funding in support of OJT; the use of OJT has been used effectively to provide work-based training for adults with limited work experience. With transitional jobs, employment is not guaranteed when the contract ends. With OJT, the participant is considered employed on day one.

### ***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.***

The Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Board, in recognition of the intent of WIOA, established priority of service to those youth/young adults with barriers to employment which require intervention for success. The targeted groups include those exhibiting the following characteristics: low income, basic skills deficient, English language learner, an offender, homeless, pregnant or parenting, individual with a disability, or a school dropout. By targeting a variety of most in need youth, the Board has insured that the program would maximize the opportunities for eligible youth. In order to maximize services to both in-school and out-of-school youth, the Board has established a priority of service consistent with TANF and WIOA guidelines that emphasizes service to out-of-school youth under WIOA and in-school youth under TANF. The Board has communicated these priorities and intends by not only incorporating them within the Request for Proposal process and the awarding of service contracts but also in review of those contractors' performance. The Board's summer program is an example of expanding the client base to serve those most in need, and both population groups, and remain consistent with the use of multiple funding sources. By utilizing WIOA and TANF youth funds to support the summer program, the Board can expand the number of youth served who receive work readiness and work-based learning and meet the priority groups from each source of funding. Another example of efforts to expand the service to as many eligible youth as possible is the braiding of funds for Youth ITAs to include PELL, PHEAA and, for youth with disabilities, designated OVR funds. This collaborative effort extends to other partners. The Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies operates both the YouthBuild and the WIOA Title I & II Programs in Cambria County. Funding of training for YouthBuild clients are shared by the two programs with those clients dual enrolled in both programs. YouthBuild clients are referred and served by WIOA after completion of the YouthBuild program. In the case of Job Corps, the Job Corps does not have a facility within our region, but the Job Corps recruiter receives referrals from the PA CareerLink® staff.

#### **TANF YDP Eligibility**

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Youth Development Program (YDP) is designed to provide eligible youth with career exploration, academic enrichment, work experience, mentoring and job readiness services that support long-term success. The program helps young people build essential skills, gain meaningful exposure to the world of work, and pursue career pathways that lead to self-sufficiency.

- Age Requirement: Between the ages of 12 and 24.
- Income Requirements: Live in a household with income at or below 235% of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines and income eligibility is based on family size total household income.

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- Youth must have a valid Social Security Number and must not be receiving services under another TANF-funded youth program that would create a duplication of services.

The Board's Young Adult Council has been appointed to advise the Board on the design and implementation of youth services within the region. Due to its makeup, the Council is uniquely qualified to dispatch these duties. The Council is made up of representatives from the private sector and from the following organizations that serve the targeted clients in addition to a past program participant: children and youth, county probation office, secondary schools, vocational technical schools, housing authority, Job Corps, and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. The Council makes recommendations to the Board concerning policy establishment, contractor funding, and budgeting of financial resources. The Council also establishes and reviews both program performance criteria and financial performance at the contractor and regional level. Client service levels by contractor are established and monitored for attainment as well. The Council recommends to the Board minimum requirements in the design of critical components of the program such as the content of the academic component of work experience and adherence to the minimum of 20% expenditures for work experience and 75% expenditures for out-of-school youth. These parameters are monitored by the Council along with the delivery of the 14 Program Elements as defined by each service provider's statement of work. The Council has set parameters for leveraging TANF Youth Development funding by allowing its use to expand the youth served on the summer work experience program and by directing services in support of area schools' efforts to comply with PA Career Education and Work Standards. With Council membership from partner agencies, opportunities for co-enrollment of youth in job corps and OVR funded programs are identified and encouraged in those cases where the client's initial assessment and individual service strategy are in alignment.

The Board, with input from the Young Adult Council, has established the following steps in identifying and serving eligible youth:

- Recruitment
- Eligibility Determination - Upon recruitment, youth and young adults are determined eligible for WIOA services. As part of the intake process, client information is gathered on characteristics which affect eligibility such as in-school or out-of-school status, age, barriers to employment, and low income where appropriate. The barriers to employment that are identified in WIOA and documented include: basic skills deficient, English language learner, offender, homeless individual, pregnant or parenting, youth with a disability, and school dropout. In addition, as required, the Board has defined an eligible at-risk youth that "requires additional assistance to complete an education program or to secure and hold employment" as follows: An individual mentally or physically challenged, learning disabled, noncash recipient or having no marketable skills (No meaningful unsubsidized work experience of at least two years cumulative or has not completed post-secondary training that has resulted in a degree, license, or certificate in a demand occupation). Documentation sources are to adhere to the Department of Labor most recent Source Documentation Requirements for WIOA Data Element Validation along with related Training and Employment Guidance Letters.
- Orientation that provides an overview of available services.

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- Initial assessment - This initial assessment includes an analysis of many factors affecting the employability of the client to include barriers to employment, functional basic skills, interests and aptitudes, etc.
- Service Plan - Subsequently a service plan is developed that will lay out the services needed to support attainment of the identified vocational goal established between the career planner and the client.
- Provision of Service - Available services are the 14 mandated service elements under WIOA.

The five area PA CareerLink® sites and affiliate sites are the hub for delivery of youth services within the region with remote sites utilized for targeted populations such as area schools. The following are types of local area youth workforce investment activities that are provided to eligible young adults and youth as appropriate:

**Dropout Recovery/Basic Education Instruction-** These services are provided in partnership with Title II Adult Basic Education partners who are generally co-located within the PA CareerLink® with the youth service providers. Individuals who withdrew from high school prior to graduation receive instruction that leads to a High School Equivalency Credential. These services may be supplemented where insufficient Title II WIOA services are available.

**Career Awareness/Exploration -** These are a key component of activities targeted to in school and out of school youth who are unsure of their career aspirations or need further research on identified careers. Youth are assessed for aptitudes and interests and participate in researching careers. Labor market information is provided in support of career matching activities to help steer the youth to possible careers in demand. In support of career exploration, tours of local employers and job shadowing opportunities are made available to clients. As part of research on careers and training opportunities, youth are provided information on and research opportunities for apprenticeships. An example of introduction and instruction specifically targeted to apprenticeship opportunities in a selected field was the Heavy Highway Construction Fair at the Greater Johnstown High School. The Title I youth provider, Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies, in conjunction with the Constructors Association of Western PA, sponsored instruction on apprenticeship requirements and opportunities in some of the following careers sponsored by various labor unions: carpenters/pile drivers, cement masons, laborers, operating engineers, and truck drivers. Students from area schools learned about paid apprenticeship opportunities, prerequisites and the application process. Another career alternative that is explored with clients is setting up their own business. Entrepreneurial training is introduced to youth as an alternative to working for an employer. Clients assessed with the aptitudes and interest in this area are provided more in-depth training on the numerous aspects of starting their own business.

**Workforce Preparation/Paid and Unpaid Work Experience including Internships -** Summer and year-round paid employment opportunities are available. Both in-school and out-of-school youth are assigned work sites in the private and public sector consistent with an identified career interest where possible. Postsecondary attendees and graduates, including Individual Training Account participants, are funneled to work sites that allow application of acquired skills. Consistent with the WIOA emphasis on work experience, many youth throughout the region participate in this activity. At least 20 hours of instruction in the following possible areas are provided in conjunction with this type of paid work experience:

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1. Work Readiness Skills Instruction on the twelve skills identified by employers will be required and provided before work at the assigned site. These twelve work readiness skills are contained in a Work Readiness Assessment Form used by the work site supervisors to assess the client's level of skills exhibited on the job.
2. Instruction in the following areas are provided before or during work at the assigned site:
  - Labor market information about in-demand occupations
  - Career awareness/exploration utilizing internet-based resources and visits to local employers
  - Financial Literacy Education
  - Additional topics of instruction may include:
    - Resume preparation
    - Interviewing techniques
    - Activities that help a youth prepare for and transition to post-secondary education and training such as researching postsecondary courses, schools, and apprenticeship opportunities including visits to postsecondary educational facilities.
  - Entrepreneurial training
3. On-the-Job Training Opportunities - For youth entering the workplace that exhibit job ready skills, referral to OJT contracts is provided. With the struggles of youth and young adults to compete for existing jobs, the SAWDB has revised its existing policy for supporting an OJT contract. As an enticement to consider a youth/young adult for employment, the prior minimum wage rate for an OJT was reduced from \$14.37/hour to \$10.00/hour. In response to this action, OJT opportunities for youth/young adults have been expanded. From July 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020, five Youth OJT contracts were finalized. It is anticipated that this activity will continue to grow as an important activity for youth/young adults.

Occupational Skills Training - For youth lacking occupational skills required for employment in occupations in demand, Individual Training Accounts are available. For those youth/young adults whose assessment and service plan determines it to be appropriate, an ITA request will be completed by their career planner and submitted to SAWDB staff. Approval of training requests will be contingent upon the training program appearing on the ETPL. While in training, the assigned career planner will continue to support the client to ensure his progress in the training program.

Referral to Employment - For those job ready clients, referral to job orders posted with the PA CareerLink® sites will be provided. In addition to use of computers with internet capacity to access the PA CareerLink® system, clients will be notified of OJT and job orders which their career planner believes are a match with their skills.

In the delivery of services to unique categories of clients, collaboration with partners who possess certain expertise and complementary resources is critical. This is especially relevant to serving in-school youth with disabilities. The SAWDB will collaborate with OVR in the provision of WIOA Title IV Pre-Employment Transition Services to in-school youth with disabilities. The Board and its Title I providers look to collaborate with OVR to provide in-school youth with disabilities opportunities to participate in pre-

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employment transition services and work-based learning services to gain skills and knowledge to enter competitive integrated employment. These meaningful opportunities allow in-school youth with disabilities to assess their own strengths and skills, while exploring vocational possibilities and removing barriers to employment. Work based learning is an important experience coupled with career exploration information for in-school youth with disabilities to engage in so they may be afforded opportunities to discover career paths. Other services that may be provided by OVR to this group are:

- Counseling and guidance from professional vocational rehabilitation staff to explore career and training options as well as understand OVR services.
- Independent Living Skills to allow students to gain knowledge to perform the daily tasks essential for maintaining or obtaining independence.
- Self-Advocacy Training to assist students with disabilities to gain knowledge on disability awareness and advocacy.
- Workplace Readiness Training will provide knowledge needed to find and maintain competitive integrated employment and may include soft skills training, interview skills job readiness, and other skills needed to become “workplace ready.”
- Job Shadowing will provide 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.

The use of TANF funding figures prominently in the provision of services, primarily to in-school youth. The table below outlines which of the 14 WIOA Youth Program Elements will be offered using TANF funding and related information regarding the service provision:

WIOA Element	Provider*	Activity Time	Goals
Tutoring, Study Skills, Dropout Prevention	GSA	Year Round	86%
Leadership Development	GSA, TSI, E & T	Year Round	95%
Supportive Services	GSA, TSI, E & T	Year Round	45%
Financial Literacy Education	GSA, TSI, E & T	Year Round	85%
Entrepreneurial Skills Training	GSA, TSI, E & T	Year Round	41%
Labor Market/ Employment Information	GSA, TSI, E & T	Year Round	85%
Post-Secondary Prep/ Transition Activities	GSA, TSI, E & T	Year Round	75%
Follow-Up for 12 months post completion	, TSI	Year Round/Summer	100%
Comprehensive Guidance/Counseling	GSA, E & T, TSI	Year Round/Summer	83%
Adult Mentoring	E & T, TSI	Year Round	35%

\*GSA - Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies, TSI - Tableland Services, E & T- Employment & Training

The WIOA Title I program managers and career planners are responsible for the recruitment of youth participants. Methods for recruitment will include but are not limited to the following:

- Social Media Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Rallyhood and PA CareerLink®, and Goodwill websites.
- Community Partners including the Alternative Community Resource Program, My Life/Magellan Healthcare, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, REI/Community Based Vocational training



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(CBVT), UPMC Behavioral Health, Blair County Youth Connections Task Force and Blair Family Solutions, County Assistance Offices.

- School Partnerships, both secondary and post-secondary include but are not limited to the Career and Technology Centers in each county, local community colleges, teen parenting programs, the Pennsylvania Graduation Initiative, and Appalachia Intermediate Unit 8 transition services.
- Word of Mouth, Refer-a-Friend and Cold Calls also play a key role in the recruitment process. Staff encourage all youth participants to refer friends and family and focus recruitment strategies and efforts toward special populations such as community and school youth groups, centers of faith, independent living homes and teen centers.

Participants in paid work experiences will receive a maximum of 360 hours at \$9.00 per hour. This enhanced work experience provides an increase from 160 hours (year-round work component) to 240 hours (summer work component) at \$8.00 per hour in past years. The increased wage will make the experience more enticing to local youth and will enhance the success of collaborative co-op and work release programs with local schools. The \$9.00 per hour wage is in line with local employers' entry level wages for most labor positions and allows staff to maintain positive relationships with employer partners. The shift from an 8 week to a 360-hour program allows for modifications to be made amid uncertainties that exist due to current and future COVID measures. It also allows for an enhanced paid work experience that is tailored specifically to participant and employer needs and schedules. Consideration was given to increasing the TANF youth participant wages to align with the Governor's priorities. However, after an analysis of the entry level wages paid by many of the worksites, it was determined that it would create a situation whereby youth participants would be earning more than many of the full-time permanent employees. Rather than seriously restrict the number of potential worksites, the decision was made to maintain the \$9.00 per hour wage.

Each paid work experience includes pre-employment and job readiness training, alongside career and post-secondary school exploration and character development. Participants in the year-round and summer programs will be offered up to 20 hours of academic instruction. The hours dedicated to the academic component for the year-round work experience allow staff to accommodate the unique needs of our participants' school schedules and extra-curricular activities. All lessons will align with the career education and work standards as well as WIOA's 14 Youth Program Elements.

Group sessions and career planner caseloads will be kept smaller than in past summers and social distancing and other measures, as directed by the Pennsylvania Governor and Department of Health, will be practices. This aligns with the year-round work experience and offers staff the flexibility to provide a variety of digital, virtual, and in-person instruction while focusing on quality work experience for youth participants and employers.

The academic component will consist of payroll and safety in the workplace, as well as money management, dressing for success, work ethic, and employer expectations. In addition, staff may incorporate a combination of any of the following topics: skill and aptitude assessments, career and post-secondary school exploration, labor market information, interviewing, application completion, resume writing, personal branding and social media footprint, entrepreneurial skills education, mock interviews, exposure to community engagement and volunteering, digital literacy instruction, high priority

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occupations and career pathways, teamwork, communication and active listening skills and pro-social behaviors.

Program managers, youth staff, WIOA Title I Business Service Coordinators, and other PA CareerLink® Business Service Team members all play an active role in the recruitment of employers and organizations that serve as worksites. Recruitment and maintenance of business partnerships occur through community and economic development consortia group memberships and organized events, networking and job seeker and business service team collaboration.

All six counties have a vast pool of businesses, community, education, and workforce partners that they draw upon to implement planned services. These include employers from high priority occupations in each county that serve as host work sites for paid work experience, attend career and job fairs specifically geared toward the youth and young adult population and volunteer their time to participate in classroom activities that provide school to work applications of concepts demonstrated by staff during job readiness and career exploration services.

Non-monetary contributions are provided by our local business partners. These partners include but are not limited to REI Distribution Center, Lampire Biological, UPMC Bedford Memorial, Spherion, M & T Bank, Bedford Reinforced Plastics, New Pig and New Pig Energy, McClanahans, Altoona Curve, Balford Linen Services, Riggs Industries, Highlands Health, Conemaugh Hospital, multiple community banks, the Learning Lamp, CJL Engineering, DRS Laurel Technologies, Johnstown Veterinary Association, multiple automotive dealerships. Community partners include local military recruiting offices, county probation, county assistance offices, children and youth services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, teen shelters, independent living homes and the Alternative Community Resource Program. Education partners include the region's career and technology centers, community colleges, IU8, Penn State Altoona, and school districts throughout the region. Workforce partners include the Bedford County Chamber of Commerce, Bedford County Development Association, Johnstown Area Regional Industry, Altoona Blair County Development Corporation and the Blair County BASICS initiative.

Monitory contributions will include:

- Community Foundation for the Alleghenies - will supplement the TANF youth development funding through its provision of the Johnstown Youth Corp. It will provide paid work experience offering philanthropic and mentoring experiences for local youth and young adults.
- Central Pennsylvania Graduation Initiative - will provide transportation assistance for customers enrolled in the drop-out prevention, year-round paid work experience program.
- The Challenge Program, Inc - will collaborate with staff to combine TANF youth development funding business donations awarded to local schools to expand opportunities available to local high school students.

The Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Board plans to use a portion of its TANF development funds to offer incentive funds to youth based upon its Youth Incentive Payment policy, which was previously submitted and approved by the PA Department of Labor and Industry. The explanation of the available incentive payments will be shared with youth as part of the recruitment and orientation to the program. Incentives will be attached to perfect attendance during paid work experience, classes and

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workshops, attainment of identified work readiness skills, safety on the work site, assignment completion, GED attainment, and documented increase in educational functional level for participants who are basic skills deficient. Service providers will submit their plans to provide one or more of the permissible incentives for acceptance by the local board staff consistent with the incentive policy established by the Board. Local board staff will then review budgets, expenditures, and program operations for consistency with the approved incentive payment plan and service providers staff will track and issue checks.

The SAWDB staff person responsible for the implementation, tracking and reporting of the TANF youth development funds, in conjunction with Department of Human Services (DHS), Bureau of Employment Programs (BEP), is Mr. Timothy Baranik , 814-949-6531, [tbaranik@sapdc.org](mailto:tbaranik@sapdc.org)

The contact information for each TANF Youth Development Program provider is as follows:

- Amy Horwath, Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies  
540 Central Avenue, Johnstown, PA 15902  
[ahorwath@gogoodwill.org](mailto:ahorwath@gogoodwill.org), 814-536-3536 Ext 287
- Barbara Covert, Employment and Training, Inc.  
54 Pennsylvania Avenue, Huntingdon, PA 17233  
[bcovert@emp-trng.org](mailto:bcovert@emp-trng.org), 814-641-6408 Ext 122
- Lisa Phillips, Tableland Services, Inc.  
535 East Main Street, Somerset, PA 15501  
[lphillips@capfsc.org](mailto:lphillips@capfsc.org), 814-445-9628 Ext 203

Mr. Timothy Baranik serves as the SAWDB staff lead monitor for TANF-funded programs. Staff use a combination of methods to monitor local providers. These include direct visits to classrooms, worksites and meetings with clients, when possible. The pandemic has affected staff ability to observe and interact with provider staff and clients in order to evaluate services. Also, client files are reviewed for service plans and educational material and work completed by clients. Monitoring results are compared with local provider statements of work to confirm compliance with contract content.

### *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?*

The Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Board (SAWDB) is committed to a fully integrated workforce system that ensures participants I Title II programs (Adult Education) have direct and equitable access to Title I services. This collaboration helps individuals strengthen foundational skills while progressing towards employment postsecondary education, and long-term self-sufficiency. The presence of the Title II coordinator on the board ensures that adult education is not only aligned with

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workforce strategies but also embedded in the region's efforts to create a cohesive, client-centered workforce system.

The region is fortunate to have an active WIOA Title II Adult Basic Literacy and Education (ABLE) coalition made up of quality providers who coordinate closely with the SAWDB and PA CareerLink® sites to provide essential remedial education services to job seekers and those in need of this special assistance. SAWDB staff participate in the quarterly coalition meetings and use these forums to share board updates, discuss customer needs and service gaps, and identify resources and opportunities to expand delivery. During the planning process, members of the ABLE coalition received the guidance documents and drafts of ABLE-related portions of the plan. Coalition input was sought, received and incorporated in the Local Plan.

The Adult Education (Title II) providers have always maintained a pivotal role in one-stop service delivery, a role that has expanded and been enhanced. With increased emphasis on occupational skills training and service to those with significant barriers to employment, the demand for literacy remediation has never been greater and the Title II providers have proven up to the task. Individuals who are basic skills deficient are targeted for priority of service and many are interested in pursuing post-secondary education. A smooth referral system to WIOA Title II has helped to facilitate access to skills training for many of these individuals. A significant number of PA CareerLink® customers are referred to Title II services as well as other programs that can help address their needs; many are co-enrolled between Title I and Title II Programs. Referrals are actively made between the Title II providers and other PA CareerLink® partners. CWDS serves as the primary vehicle for making referrals from Title I to Title II, but also is used to make referrals from Title II to Title I programs. In addition to recording referral information to CWDS, staff make the extra effort to connect participants with these programs by personally contacting provider staff while the adult learner is there in the office. Introductions are made and services are scheduled immediately so that there is no time lag between putting a referral on CWDS and the participant connecting with Title I or Title II services. In this way, momentum is not lost and there is less likelihood that the participant would fail to engage/follow-up with these services.

Board engagement with the ABLE providers has been enhanced to include a review of the Title II applications to the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The Title II applications will be transmitted to the SAWDB for their review. These applications must demonstrate alignment with the SAWDB's Local Plan. At this time, the SAWDB will offer recommendations, if needed to promote further alignment of services. The SAWDB will follow the timeline provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Education as it relates to board review of adult education applications

The ABLE Coalition members will continue to make their annual 'Year in Review' presentation during the fall quarterly SAWDB meeting. This provides an excellent venue to highlight program outcomes, performance and promising practices and raise awareness for the increased need for literacy services.

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### ***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.***

The SAWDB recognized early on that developing strong relationships with and respect for their one-stop partners is key to ensuring effective one-stop operations, including service coordination and performance attainment. It begins with regular and open communication at all levels and includes:

- Monthly meetings that include members of the SAWDB and its staff, members of the OSO, the BWPO assistant regional director and the PA CareerLink® site administrators. These forums serve to strengthen the connection between the SAWDB and the one-stops and offer tremendous opportunities to share information and address challenges or concerns. Following each board and committee meeting, the OSO, SAWDB staff and PA CareerLink® site administrators, and BWPO assistant regional director meet to review performance benchmarks, special initiative implementation, PA CareerLink® agreements and receive state and SAWDB updates.
- PA CareerLink® staff meetings and one-stop functional team meetings occur regularly and help to ensure that staff are kept up-to-date on all pertinent issues. Partners also share program-specific information so others at the site are informed. Email blasts are used between the face-to-face meetings so that information is shared and kept current.

It is also vital to have the appropriate workforce partner representatives involved in all levels of administration and service delivery. For example, the assistant regional director for the Commonwealth's Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations (BWPO) currently serves on the SAWDB, the SAWDB Executive Committee and participates in the monthly OSO meetings.

#### Goal Setting and Implementation:

Each year, for more than eleven years, the Southern Alleghenies PA CareerLink® sites have been setting measurable operational goals. These goals are aligned to the SAWDB's vision for workforce development and its strategic objectives and PA CareerLink® staff, led by the Management Teams, work together to develop their site's operational goals, formulate specific action items, develop timelines for implementation and completion, and identify the lead partner(s). Staff are also empowered and accountable to set their sites' performance levels, track progress toward goal attainment, and when necessary, develop corrective action plans to address shortfalls. While all PA CareerLink® staff are involved in the site's performance management, the WIOA Title I and Wagner-Peyser staff take the lead and jointly organize efforts. The enhanced PA CareerLink® Scorecard will provide an 'at a glance' review of one-stop performance outcomes.

This cooperation and coordination exhibited in goal setting and performance management also extends to service delivery within the one-stop system. The physical layout of the one-stop includes staff seating by function rather than by agency. Common forms are shared by partners, case notes are placed on PA CareerLink®, and an integrated referral network is established in each facility. The SAWDB has also taken steps to formalize and monitor for effective service coordination. During the annual PA CareerLink® quality assurance and monitoring visits, SAWDB staff review the following:

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- Evidence of joint provision of services among multiple partners and supporting internal communication
- Coordinated job development services
- Joint development of customer service plans (IEPs)
- Sharing of understandable performance information with the public
- Customer referral tracking and follow-up across multiple partners

All the strategies identified above have led to strong service integration and delivery and lessen the occurrences of duplication. In 2020, all PA CareerLink® sites in the region were recertified.

The OSO figures prominently in PA CareerLink® operations. The competitively procured OSO is a consortium of three entities, Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies, Employment and Training, and the Community Action Partnership for Somerset County. Collectively they represent WIOA Title I, Adult Education WIOA Title II, YouthBuild, and Community Services Block Grant - all mandated partner programs and service providers to WIOA target populations. As the lead entity charged with service coordination, it is focused on the 'implementation of a PA CareerLink® system that provides effective services for employers and job seekers in alignment with the priorities of the SAWDB, and state and federal requirements.' (OSO mission statement.) It will accomplish this through:

- Management of the region's five comprehensive sites and four affiliated sites.
- Strengthening the region through the sharing of resources, knowledge, expertise and best practices, including coordination of professional development training.
- Utilization and strengthening of partnerships and leveraging of resources through a strategy to develop an advisory council to consult and assist the OSO.
- Support to the site administrators, management teams and staff in outreach efforts, including an enhanced social media presence.
- Oversight of progress and a desire to work together with partners and stakeholders to ensure continuous system improvement.
- Recognition that collaboration is key to effective service delivery along with the goal of identifying and piloting best practices.

The SAWDB's Special Populations Committee was tasked with attending the one-stop orientations and note any concerns, or outstanding practices, with delivery and materials provided. The initial assessment form provided to all customers was developed by the OSO, in partnership with the site administrators and their management teams. It is designed to identify customer service needs early on and facilitate referrals to partner programs and others to address those needs. To facilitate information sharing between partners, the SAWDB requires that pertinent customer case notes be placed on PA CareerLink® so that all partners providing services can be informed of progress.

In the one-stops, partner training/cross training occurs at least quarterly and often monthly, depending on the subject. During the pandemic, virtual training was occurring throughout each month. Each partner, both those co-located and those not found in the one-stop, are called upon at each meeting to 'highlight' their services. This provides PA CareerLink® staff with a solid grounding in all program specifics and facilitates appropriate referrals to address customer needs. Also, all new PA CareerLink® staff attend all the different orientations and workshops to ensure that they are aware of the service

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basics.

Professional development of PA CareerLink® staff is provided through a variety of means and venues. Section 4.4 outlines EEO and ADA related trainings that all partner staff have participated in but that only scratches the surface. The Board and its members, and partner staff have provided training on subjects ranging from working with individuals with intellectual disabilities to stress and time management and developing effective communication practices. All workshops and trainings are intended to enhance the skills of partner staff.

The WIOA Title II Adult Education providers are uniquely positioned to support staff development by providing selective professional skills training to one-stop staff. Adult Education providers have delivered instruction and guidance to staff on the proper administration and scoring of the TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education); they have also provided training to WIOA Title I staff on how to interpret and review the assessment results with customers. Consideration will be given to having the WIOA Title II provider train the WIOA Title I staff to administer the TABE assessment and include utilization of the TABE training course through the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Professional Development System. In addition to this 'formal' training, staff would then shadow and learn from Title II staff during the actual administration of the TABE.

The Title II providers are also well-positioned to train staff on some of the unique challenges experienced by participants in the English Language Learners program. Though the number of participants generally is small, the challenges they face are significant and the Title II providers can educate one-stop staff on effective strategies to better serve these participants.

### ***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).***

The SAWDB and the region's PA CareerLink® sites are committed to serving all those who want and need assistance. However, increased emphasis and priority of service will be placed on outreach and service to those with the greatest barriers to employment. These include:

- Displaced homemakers
- Low-income individuals
- Indians, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiians
- Individuals with disabilities, including youth with a disability
- Older individuals

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- Ex-offenders
- Homeless individuals, including homeless children and youth
- Youth who are in or have aged out of the foster care system
- Individuals who are English language learners, individuals who have low literacy levels or are facing substantial cultural barriers, including refugees
- Eligible migrant and seasonal farmworkers
- Individuals who are within 2 years of exhausting lifetime eligibility under part A of Title IV of the Social Security Act
- Single parents, including single pregnant women
- Long-term unemployed individuals
- Others groups the Governor determines to have barriers to employment

The SAWDB has set the direction and tone for service delivery through the formation of its Special Populations standing committee; this group focuses on assistance to the target populations identified above. This committee includes representatives from OVR, Corrections, Public Assistance, Senior Employment, Title II Adult Education, a Community Action Agency, the Highlands Health Free Medical Clinic, a provider of mental health services to individuals with intellectual disabilities, and others with a commitment to assisting those who face some of the most significant barriers to employment. This committee is currently engaged in working with PA CareerLink® site administrators in identifying service gaps and outreach strategies to better connect these individuals with one-stop and partner services with demand occupations. With significant input from this committee, the public workforce system will continue to develop and deploy unique strategies designed to provide employment opportunities for those with barriers.

The region's PA CareerLink® staff utilizes a consistent and methodical process when working with customers. This begins with the very first visit. When an individual enters the PA CareerLink® to begin their relationship with the public workforce system, they meet with a member of the Welcome Team to complete an initial needs assessment. This allows the customer to identify their goals, any special needs they may have, and any potential barriers that might keep them from attaining their goals. They can also self-identify if they fall under one of the categories referenced above and entitled to a priority of service. However, regardless of an individual's 'status' the one-stop staff work with the customer to identify all their needs and seek to provide assistance, either through direct service provision or referral to a partner or non-partner program. Staff and customers have found this process most beneficial in early identification of employment barriers.

In the initial meeting with a member of the Welcome Team, information specific to the individual and their needs is provided. This represents a departure from the PA CareerLink® orientation, when a detailed review of the many resources that will be made available to them as they engage in their job search. While services are provided in a non-siloed manner, customers are made aware of the many special programs and resources that are provided by the one-stop partners. After meeting



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with a member of the Welcome Team, the individual is introduced to an appropriate one-stop staff member who is best positioned to begin helping the customer to meet their vocational goal. If the individual's barriers are such that they are not able to begin an effective job search, they are connected to the county's community action agency or other appropriate community-based organization. Once barriers have been remediated to the point that the individual is 'stabilized,' they will be referred back to the one-stop and the job search can begin. The enhanced PA CareerLink® referral system is used to record and track referrals to partner agencies.

As with its methodical customer flow process, the PA CareerLink® system utilizes a coordinated approach to customer outreach and includes printed materials, in-person opportunities, and social media to promote one-stop services. Under the leadership of the site administrator and management team, promotional materials that outline jobseeker and employer services are prepared for distribution. These materials are reviewed by the OSO and SAWDB staff to ensure quality, accuracy, and alignment with materials provided elsewhere in the region. These materials are widely distributed to off-site partner agencies and other locations where jobseekers may live (housing authority offices and public housing), visit (libraries, community centers), shop, or receive related services (county assistance offices, Department of Human Services agencies, EARN centers, community action agencies, Veteran's Assistance Medical Center and other veterans' service and social organizations and agencies, medical clinics, probation offices, Day Reporting Centers, food banks). One-stop staff also ensure that staff at these partner agencies or locations have a basic understanding of the services being referenced/promoted to further encourage individuals to connect with the PA CareerLink®. The OVR and other partner programs utilize their significant relationships with vendors and supporting agencies throughout the state, as a means of outreach to potential customers.

The one-stop staff have also begun using social media as a means of outreach to potential customers. From LinkedIn® to Facebook® and Instagram®, many individuals are utilizing electronic means to stay in touch with one another and connect with resources. It is vital that the public workforce system use similar tools to connect with potential jobseekers and employer customers. The One-Stop Operator actively promotes the use of SkillUp® Southern Alleghenies, [southernalleghenies.skillupamerica.org](https://southernalleghenies.skillupamerica.org), as a valuable resource for individuals looking to build skills, explore new industries, transition to a new career, or pursue better employment opportunities. This free, online platform offers flexible, self-paced training tailored to meet today's workforce demands. Additionally, the site provides a direct link to the Commonwealth Workforce Development System, [www.cwds.pa.gov](https://www.cwds.pa.gov), where users can access local job posting and a wide range of workforce services. The OSO and site administrators are currently engaged in an initiative to expand outreach using social media and will be tracking outcomes.

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One-stop staff also engage in 'in-person' outreach that includes taking informational presentations that utilize PowerPoint to off-site locations, many of which were identified in the above paragraph. This is another example of taking services, or information on available services, to the customer. The one-stop staff, in conjunction with on-site partner and affiliated organizations, also hold special events like resource, education and career fairs and even county fairs to promote workforce services. The PA CareerLink® booth is often seen at community events where large gatherings are expected. Though the list of venues is extensive, the OSO will be charged this year with identifying additional outreach opportunities and expanding the use of technology to reach those in need of assistance.

Section 3.3 of the Plan identify the wide variety of services that are made available to all job seekers; those with barriers to employment receive priority access to these services. In addition, the SAWDB and the public workforce system will deploy strategies and support enhanced services and activities to provide special assistance to those with barriers to employment. These include but are not limited to:

- Promotion of Apprenticeship Fairs - these events have fostered closer working relationships with companies that support apprenticeships and improved partnerships with those labor councils that provide apprenticeships. The fairs will be aggressively marketed to dislocated workers, especially the long-term unemployed and those with readily transferable skills, individuals on public assistance including EARN program participants, and young adults in hopes of addressing pipeline issues.
- Career Fairs for Target Populations - building on a successful recruitment tool, the SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® sites will support events designed to enhance employment opportunities for special, target populations including individuals with disabilities, senior workers, low-income residents, young adults, refugees, and others in need of service.
- Enhanced Business Service Team Membership - efforts will be made to ensure that representatives from the EARN program, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Senior Employment Service, and Corrections have every opportunity to actively participate on these teams and coordinate employer outreach efforts on behalf of all jobseekers. The state-wide business services staff can also serve as a resource to help the Committee identify strategies to promote workforce diversification and inclusion.
- YouthBuild – a transformative program that combine academics, to support secondary diploma or equivalency receipt, with hands-on occupational skills training. Program participants are ages 17-24 who have dropped out of high school or have dropped out and subsequently re-enrolled and are also from a low-income family, or in foster care, an offender, an individual with a disability, child of a current or formerly incarcerated parent, or a migrant youth.

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- STEPS (Steps Toward Employment-Progress-Success) - this innovative program developed by the Community Action Partnership for Somerset County, the WIOA Title I provider in Somerset County, helps participants address three specific barriers to employment: criminal backgrounds, mental health issues and substance abuse. During weekly sessions, participants tackle the issues, receive support and additional referrals to relevant agencies, and ultimately graduate to a Job Club and mainstream job search services.
- Individuals with Disabilities- WIOA Title IV eligible OVR customers receive multiple services from qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors that may include, but are not 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.

The SAWDB anticipates that the continued work of its Special Populations Committee will translate into additional special initiatives and services designed to move those with barriers to employment into jobs that provide self-sustaining wages.

The provision of services to all jobseekers begins with an assessment of individual needs. When a person enters the one-stop, they are encouraged to complete an initial needs assessment. This 'customer friendly,' simple form allows the individual to identify some of their basic needs and goals and permits them to 'self-identify' any barriers to employment. From the responses, staff can initiate referrals to in-house and community partners who are best positioned to help the jobseeker. Additional information, and confirmation of a barrier, if necessary, is gathered by WIOA Title I and Title III staff at the time of service enrollment. Throughout this process, staff are committed to providing a customer-focused, customized approach and work with all individuals regardless of barriers, in a non-discriminatory manner while providing equal access to all. Non-discrimination requirements are outlined in greater detail in the SAWDB/LEO/Partner Memorandum of Understanding; an agreement signed by all PA CareerLink® partners.

Customers with disabilities eligible for services under WIOA Title IV will receive additional assistance from the OVR that may include but not be limited to diagnostic, vocational counseling and guidance, vocational evaluation, restoration, training, job placement and pre-employment training.

Of even greater importance, especially in service to the target populations, is utilizing effective outreach strategies to take services out into the community. Section (4.9) of the Plan identify some of the unique partnerships that have been developed, including the close working relationship with Community Action Agencies. Referrals between these partner agencies and the one-stops have

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enabled a greater variety of services to be provided to customers, going beyond those workforce-related and provided through the PA CareerLink® system. Off-site system partners including libraries, social service agencies, housing authorities, food banks, juvenile and adult probation offices, county MH/MR offices and county assistance offices have readily accepted one-stop materials including service-related information and calendar of events. Under the direction of the OSO, the SAWDB will be encouraging PA CareerLink® staff to meet customers in these facilities and other community locations, where possible, to reduce any travel challenges and provide initial services to these individuals in a more familiar setting.

The SAWDB regularly reviews a breakdown of those special populations served in the public workforce system. A review of the PA CareerLink® operating system from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024 indicates the following information. Note, the barrier breakdown, as captured in WIOA Title I Eligibility, voluntarily disclosed at intake, is as follows:

- 55% were Low Income
- 11% were Ex-Offenders
- 29% were Basic Skills Deficient
- 29% were Individuals with Disabilities
- Long Term Unemployed-Unemployed 27 weeks or more
- 19% were age 55 and older
- 9% were Single Parents including Single Pregnant Women
- 4% Were Homeless Individuals
- 5% were Veterans

Given the significant number of individuals with low literacy levels, as illustrated by the significant number of those who are basic skills deficient and lack a high school diploma, will be greater opportunity for engagement with the region's Title II adult basic education providers. The SAWDB, OSO and one-stop partners will continue to monitor service levels to the target populations and use this information to gauge the effectiveness of the outreach strategies.

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

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recognizes the value of customer access to various services and resources and encourages co-enrollment across programs as appropriate.

### ***3.8 ITA Accounts – How will training services be provided using ITA’s, fund programs of study, or through the use of contacts for training services that fund work-based training.***

The SAWDB has always placed considerable emphasis on and allocated significant resources in support of classroom and work-based training opportunities. The current cap for Individual Training Accounts is \$4,500 for programs less than one year and \$6,000 for programs one year and longer. These levels were determined after considering the average costs for programs on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), PELL awards and other grants. With the costlier training, a participant may contribute a nominal amount to the expense as well. The SAWDB believes that in many cases, a participant is more likely to follow through with the training requirements when they have at least a small financial stake in the training. The SAWDB policy requires that WIOA Title I funds, along with any other grants or awards received by the training participant be first utilized to offset the cost of training before personal funds are used. In many cases, it will then be unnecessary for training participants to use any personal funds to cover the cost of their training.

As with all services, the type of training is based on customer need and choice. Many individuals arrive at the PA CareerLink® with a documented work history, strong skills, and the desire and need to enter/reenter the workforce as soon as possible. These individuals are prime candidates to participate in an On-the-Job Training contract. Each PA CareerLink® has a strong Business Service Team that has a pool of ‘work ready’ jobseekers it can refer to appropriate employers who wish to utilize OJT.

Just as many jobseekers come to the one-stop with limited marketable skills and they have the need, desire, and ability to pursue post-secondary education. The SAWDB has long prided itself on having one of the most robust Eligible Training Provider Lists (ETPL) in the Commonwealth. Currently there are 11 providers offering 91 programs. This gives the region’s customers the fourth largest list of programs to choose from in the Commonwealth. While the SAWDB continues to promote ‘informed customer choice’ when it comes to the selection of training providers and courses of study, it views the training dollars awarded to participants as ‘investments’ and wants to do everything possible to ensure the collective investment of WIOA Title I funding and a participant’s time (and potentially resources), are sound. WIOA Title I staff carefully review the information found on the state’s ETPL with jobseekers so that they can compare provider outcomes and price. This includes on-line training opportunities, which historically have had poor performance outcomes.

The SAWDB will also provide financial support to those WIOA Title I eligible individuals who are interested in pursuing an apprenticeship. The Board’s policy allows for up to \$6,000 to support training on the ETPL that is one year in length and longer. Requests will continue to be processed in the same manner as the traditional Individual Training Account (ITA). WIOA Title I staff will work with the training provider on program referrals. The Title I staff will determine eligibility and, in conjunction with the participant, complete the ITA application and submit it to the SAWDB staff for review and approval. The

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SAWDB and its fiscal agent have utilized this process to support apprentices for a number of years and have found it to be seamless. Through their WIOA eligibility determination, the apprentice is also eligible for supportive services to help reduce barriers to successful completion of the training.

Business Service Team staff continue to utilize professional development opportunities to expand their knowledge of registered apprenticeships so that they are well-positioned to promote this valuable resource to employers. This includes working closely with the regional Apprenticeship Training Representative from the Apprenticeship and Training Office.

WIOA Title I providers also work to ensure, as much as possible, that customers have the necessary skills to succeed in post-secondary training. Participants are required to have a minimum of a eighth grade education, as documented on the TABE 11/12 assessment or through documented post-secondary education. However, for individuals with a documented disability, the WIOA Title I staff will work with the customer's OVR case manager and accept OVR-conducted assessments and referrals in consideration for WIOA Title I training funds.

### ***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)?***

Coordination with the higher education consortium, county career and technology centers (CTCs) and secondary schools is facilitated through SAWDB member and staff involvement on many of the college boards and committees, CTC advisory boards and Perkins Participatory Planning Committees, the CSB2 STEM Ecosystem, school boards of directors, and school to career and employer advisory committees. Representatives of the public workforce system, through their involvement on these key committees and boards, helps to ensure that communication flows between the workforce system and its education partners. The SAWDB can also serve as the 'honest broker' and bring a variety of education providers together to develop strategies to address regional issues, leverage resources, identify gaps and highlight opportunities for improved service provision. The SAWDB staff, as a member of many Perkins V Planning Committees, have provided assistance to the CTCs and post-secondary Perkins Committees as they drafted their CTE Comprehensive Needs Assessment. Staff will continue to serve on these committees and assist with updating the needs assessments. The SAWDB and its public workforce partners have considerable experience in service gap identification and are well positioned to provide assistance with the following:

- Provide input on membership and serve on the stakeholder team
- Assist with identification and analysis of data sources
- Provide input in the identification of growth areas
- Provide input on opportunities for improvement
- Assist in setting priorities

The WIOA has required a shift in services, away from support for in-school activities and instead toward tremendous emphasis on serving out of school youth. This has not meant the end of service provision to youth in secondary education. It has however required leveraging other, non-WIOA resources to

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support its work. Through its partnership with the OVR and its Pre-employment Transition Service (PETS), and by utilizing its annual TANF allocation, the SAWDB and its Title I providers continue to support paid work experience for youth while they are still in school. Related services that include industry tours, career fairs, employer in the classroom and educator in the workplace are also provided. These activities help to prepare youth for the world of work and assist the educators in meeting the Career Education Standards. As a founding member and continued participant in the BASICS (Business and Schools Investing in Cooperative Solutions) initiative, the SAWDB continues to work with educators and employers to develop career exploration opportunities, employer-educator forums, and work experience and mentoring programs for young people.

The SAWDB's Business-Education Partnership Grants have afforded additional opportunities to increase coordination and alignment of education programs with workforce development activities. The SAWDB has helped to facilitate strategic relationships between chambers of commerce, educational institutions, employers, and workforce partners. Career camps, pre-apprenticeship workshops, STEM camps and co-op experiences, along with paid work experience/internships were supported for youth at sites related to their post-secondary school majors.

These entities have collectively been working on a variety of annual initiatives that serve to communicate employer needs to educators and expose students to career opportunities in the Southern Alleghenies Region. Examples include:

- Manufacturing Day - prior to the pandemic, this event brought together employers, educators and students, economic developers, and workforce development professionals. Activities included include industry tours, opportunities for educators, students, employers, and workforce professionals to share information on employment expectations, educational opportunities, and showcase career opportunities. Our hope is to restore this event once in-person events can occur safely.
- Careers in Demand/Career Fair - The Young Adult Council has begun exploration of virtual events that highlight and promote the region's careers in demand.
- CSB2 STEM Ecosystem activities as identified in detail in Section 2.3 of this Plan.

The SAWDB and multiple partners from the public workforce system are engaged in all aspects of planning and implementation. These strong levels of engagement have helped to not only position the board and its system as key partners in these workforce/education activities but have also led to greater coordination, sharing and leveraging of resources, and expanded opportunities for interaction between workforce, education, employers, and economic development.

Despite its rural nature, the Southern Alleghenies has a rich and significant mix of post-secondary education and training providers to include two community colleges, seven career and technology centers (CTC), five nationally recognized colleges and universities and several private, proprietary schools, and multiple registered apprenticeships offered by local employers and educational institutions. The colleges and universities have an organized regional education consortium; they support collective job and education fairs, industry tours, and educator in the workplace events. College representatives also participate in the employer consortium and BASICS committees, WEDnet trainings

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and apprenticeship fairs. Likewise, the seven career and technology centers frequently collaborate on regional initiatives, work together to draft petitions for the High Priority Occupation List, and collectively respond to Requests for Proposals. The Southern Alleghenies maintains an active regional Adult Basic Literacy Coalition (ABLE) that works closely with the PA CareerLink® sites and SAWDB in support of joint initiatives. The Coalition's involvement and support are key to addressing the significant number of individuals who are basic skills deficient. The region's education and training providers also figure prominently as partners in the public workforce system. Currently eleven schools, ranging from career and technology centers to private proprietary schools and a state-sponsored community college and member of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) make up the ETPL for the region and offer 91 different programs in support of high priority occupations. There is great connectivity at all educational levels in the region. This is due in no small part to the roles played by the SAWDB, those of convener, supporter, coordinator, facilitator, and funder. Board involvement at all levels has helped to ensure that there are increased levels of communication and cooperation with the public workforce system and that programs address identified needs, resources are leveraged, and service duplication is minimized.

## 4 OPERATIONAL PLANNING: Local Area Workforce Delivery System

*4.1 Business and Employer Engagement- What strategies will be implemented in the local area to improves 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 (UI) programs.*

Frequent and consistent employer feedback, combined with setting measurable employer-focused goals, will be essential to ensure the region's workforce development system meets the needs of the business community. Some efforts will include:

- The OSO is utilizing satisfaction instruments that are in a digital format. These are utilized to gauge business response to existing services and help identify gaps. With expected guidance from the US DOL and the PA Department of Labor and Industry, the SAWDB will work with the OSO, PA CareerLink® site administrators and WIOA Title I providers to develop an instrument that will help capture 'Effectiveness in Serving Employers' and measure movement toward meeting the negotiated WIOA performance goal.
- Employer-centric and measurable goals will continue and be expanded upon in the PA CareerLink® Scorecard. The scorecard is currently being reevaluated to include a document



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intended to be of interest and importance to employers but also provide performance and foot traffic information.

- Current measurable objectives include increased employer market penetration as reflected in the number of job postings, return customer utilization rates and those participating in services including OJT and other training and recruitment-related activities. Goal setting around these metrics continues.
- Employer-driven discussions around training topics to include incumbent worker training, apprenticeship development and customized training programs will be facilitated. Significant efforts are currently underway to promote registered apprenticeships. The SAWDB and its OSOs will actively promote RAPs and the value they bring to employers and job seekers. While the Board does not currently utilize WIOA Title I Funds to support incumbent worker or customized training, it has and will continue to use these funds to financially support the OJT as well as classroom portion of RAPs. This additional financial support is promoted to employers, several of which have used this funding to cover those portions of RAPs. In supporting the expansion of the apprenticeship model, SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® partners envision the expansion of existing pre-apprenticeship and the development of new programs, tied to existing apprenticeships, to further support the pipeline of workers and the vision of our youth who successfully complete pre-apprenticeship activities transitioning into recognized apprenticeships with local and regional employers. Roundtable discussions will continue to be held; these forums bring together employers, economic development, the public workforce system and education to begin identifying and addressing key issues. The SAWDB has long supported OJT and other work-based learning programs, industry partnerships, sector strategies, and career pathways. Targeted employer feedback will support program development that meets the needs of the business customer.
- Established employer forums will provide the conduit for key business intelligence to be communicated to the SAWDB and workforce partners and likewise offer the venue to promote workforce resources to the business community. Representatives from the one-stop Business Service Teams and workforce leadership will participate in employer consortiums, Society of Human Resource Management, Chamber of Commerce, and other business-led forums to identify and assess employer service needs. This information will be conveyed back to the SAWDB; the Board in turn will ensure that service priorities are communicated to providers and resources are dedicated to implement and expand training services to include incumbent worker and customized training and apprenticeship development.

\*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 accommodation consultation 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

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disability.

To effectively serve employers, the workforce system must recognize the needs of the business community and respond with appropriate services to address those needs. Agility is a hallmark of any successful enterprise; successful businesses are positioned to meet the changing needs of their customers. The workforce system must do likewise. The strategies outlined above -- regular employer engagement and specialized service development, implementation, and assessment, will help to ensure that the region's workforce system will be well-positioned to meet the needs and exceed the expectations of the employer community it serves.

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

Ensuring business engagement in the workforce system, regardless of size and industry, comes down to three things: determining employer needs, informing the employer that the system is able, willing, and ready to meet their needs, and having the ability to meet those needs in a timely and effective manner. Small employers (49 employees or less) make up 95% of all the companies in the region. They often lack resources, both human and financial, so the SAWDB and its workforce partners will work to ensure that the one-stops are well-positioned to meet the needs of these business customers.

Strategies to ensure effective engagement of business and industry are and will continue to be developed and deployed on two levels: Administrative (SAWDB) and Programmatic (PA CareerLink® and Workforce Development Partners).

The Board will use continuous improvement techniques to evaluate the administrative and programmatic strategies, receive regular updates from staff and gather input from employer board members. Additionally, the Board and the one-stop operator consortium have collaborated to form a business services strategy team with business services representatives, Local Veterans Employment Representative, Title I representatives and the board's Employer Services Development Specialist to examine current policies, make recommendations, help establish priorities and develop new strategies to increase employer engagement. In the Southern Alleghenies region, joint business calls are being conducted by county economic developers and PA CareerLink® Business Service Team leads. During these visits, participants engage in a 'deep dive' into the company's challenges and work together to identify ways to help address these issues. These visits have enabled one-stop staff to not only strengthen good existing relationships with the economic development community, but more importantly, they have made significant connections with business leaders that have resulted in increased employer recognition of and increased engagement with the public workforce system.

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

#### Administrative

- The SAWDB will annually review its policies to ensure, where legally possible, they are employer-customer friendly and do not create barriers to effective service provision. Agility is key to

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business success and the public workforce system, and its administrators must strive for the same.

- The SAWDB will continue to support and look for opportunities to expand Next Generation Industry Partnership participation in targeted sectors.
- The SAWDB will continue to support opportunities for professional development and employer networking and identify and work to secure flexible funding to support incumbent worker training as well as address future pipeline supply issues.
- The SAWDB will promote opportunities for skill training to ensure that significant resources are available to expand the promotion and utilization of OJT, incumbent worker training, work-based learning opportunities, apprenticeships, customized training, and other proven employer training services. Interest in registered apprenticeships has begun to gain momentum and the SAWDB and its workforce partners will utilize employer forums to promote this valuable employee/employer tool.
- The SAWDB will continue to support staff involvement in and engagement with the PREP partners to ensure alignment of workforce and economic development strategies and resources.
- The SAWDB and OSO will annually review the PA CareerLink® employer service mix to determine any gaps, based on local need and WIOA direction.
- The SAWDB and OSO will annually review employer services outreach materials and enhance and professionalize the materials, utilizing the expertise of the SAP&DC Marketing and Communication Specialist.
- The SAWDB, with input from the PREP and employer partners, will review the High Priority Occupation List to ensure it reflects employer hiring needs.
- The SAWDB will encourage quality education providers to submit relevant programs for inclusion on the Eligible Training Provider List to ensure customers can access training that meets employer demands.
- The SAWDB and OSO will annually review PA CareerLink® employer-centric goals to ensure alignment with the governor's and the SAWDB's strategic vision and confirm that the benchmarks are sufficiently ambitious and promote continuous improvement.
- Though small (4), the SAWDB staff will continue to designate a staff person to serve as the board's 'point person' regarding business services. A significant amount of her time is spent participating in Business Service Team meetings, attending Industry Partnership roundtables, and meeting, along with the site administrators and Business Service Team members, with employers to discuss available services and identify service gaps and training needs. Considerable time is spent monitoring the significant number of OJT contracts; the WIOA Title I providers contract directly with the employers but the SAWDB staff are responsible for all monitoring to include compliance with local, state, and federal guidelines and employer and employee satisfaction with the program.

### Programmatic

- The OSO, PA CareerLink® site administrators and PA CareerLink® management teams will review their employer policies and procedures to identify and mitigate any barriers to service provision.
- The OSO and PA CareerLink® site administrators will ensure that each PA CareerLink® has an active Business Services Team made up of the 'right' representatives from partner agencies. As

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the lead entity responsible for facilitating employer engagement at the one-stop level, it is essential that the Business Service Teams are viewed by employers as professional, well-coordinated, business-focused and committed to service to the region's employers. These teams meet regularly to discuss engagement strategies and have 'point' staff responsible for different aspects of business services. Databases that track employer visits are utilized. In some cases, team members utilize Executive Pulse, a PREP tool, to track and make partner referrals. Close communication between partner staff dedicated to serving employers, including the use of spreadsheets that track employer visits, outcomes, and referrals, will help to significantly reduce the risk of redundant employer visits/communication pieces.

- The PA CareerLink® staff will gather business intelligence through employer outreach and utilization of Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (CWIA) data to ensure alignment of job seeker services with employer hiring needs.
  - The PA CareerLink® site administrators and OSO will review Business Service Team communication plans to ensure that employer outreach is coordinated among all partners and that small employers and those tied to in-demand industry sectors are targeted for assistance.
  - The PA CareerLink® staff will strengthen relationships with employer-driven organizations and associations (SHRM, Chambers of Commerce, Rotary, etc.) and use these as vehicles to educate members on available services and resources.
  - The PA CareerLink® staff will work closely with PREP partners to provide leveraged resources in support of business recruitment, retention, expansion, and training efforts.
  - The PA CareerLink® staff will organize employer-driven incumbent worker training opportunities.
- *Better coordinate regional workforce and economic development strategy, messaging, engagement and programs; and*

The SAWDB will continue to support the long, well-established, and highly effective partnership between the public workforce system and the region's economic development agencies. For decades, the economic developers and workforce development professionals of the Southern Alleghenies have participated in a recognized and effective network dedicated to improving the region's economy. The public workforce system is a key partner in the Southern Alleghenies PREP; the SAWDB director and PA CareerLink® site administrators have been non-financial members since the PREP's inception. This relationship is reinforced and broadened through both entities' ties to the Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission (SAP&DC). Serving as fiscal agent and staff to the SAWDB, the SAP&DC is one of seven Local Development Districts (LDD) in the state uniquely positioned to help ensure the 'workforce-economic development connection' and alignment of programs and services.

As an arm of the SAP&DC, the SAWDB and its staff are involved in all projects that include a workforce development component. This helps to further cement the strong connection between the public workforce system and economic development network. Assistance to the affected companies and their workforce serves to illustrate the coordinated and cooperative approach taken by the region's workforce and economic development professionals. Each brings unique resources to the table that include:

Workforce Development

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- Labor Market Information - an inventory of the skill sets of the affected workers will help identify current opportunities for re-employment and provide economic developers with data they can use in their business recruitment efforts.
- Incumbent Worker/Dislocated Worker Training - assistance is available to companies that need to 'retool' their workforce as part of a job retention/product diversification strategy. Funding is available to train the affected dislocated workers so that they are prepared to reenter the workforce.
- Employer Services - range from Rapid Response assistance available after notification of a downsizing (staff from JARI, an economic development agency, participates on two counties Rapid Response Teams), to assistance with new employee assessment, recruitment, and training.
- Dislocated Worker Services - range from assessment and remediation to job search assistance and its components, career counseling, and opportunities for retraining.
- Resources of the US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration and the PA Department of Labor and Industry - from dedicated funding (National Emergency Grants, Made in America, POWER) to technical assistance and labor market information.

### Economic Development

- Employer intelligence - In-depth knowledge of the employer/industry and its needs, challenges, opportunities for growth/diversification/economic restructuring.
- New Market Identification & Expansion - assistance with government procurement and product export.
- Business recruitment services - financing packages, shovel-ready property, tax incentives understanding of supply chain. PA CareerLink® Business Service Team and SAWDB staff are often invited by economic developers to participate in meetings with site selection teams. This reinforces the relationship between economic and workforce development professionals and presents a 'united front' to prospective companies.
- Resources of the Appalachian Regional Commission, Economic Development Administration, PA Department of Community and Economic Development, United States Department of Agriculture, Local Economic Development Fund, and Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority that range from dedicated funding to technical assistance.

Many of these same resources will also be coordinated in support of business recruitment and expansion efforts. The SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® sites are positioned to provide labor market information that can be used to promote the region to site selection committees. These range from radial analysis reports that illustrate population demographics and commuting pattern studies that identify workforce movement and possible recruitment opportunities to target industry data including an analysis of the location quotient and potential availability of a skilled workforce. Furthermore, workforce funding will be leveraged to incentivize a company to establish a presence or expand operations in the region. In many cases, the opportunity to access On-the-Job training funds resulted in companies' decisions to relocate to the region.

The workforce and economic development communities recognize the value and unique resources each possess, complementing rather than competing with one another.

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The SAWDB, along with the PA CareerLink® partner staff and the PREP partners are committed to working together to ensure that the needs of the business community are identified and addressed. With this shared mission comes the risk of overwhelming employers with multiple communications, including visits designed to share information on available services and learn of the companies' needs. The following strategies will be utilized to increase coordination between the workforce and economic development partners to reduce the chance for duplication of services and lessen employer fatigue:

- Encourage greater connectivity between the worlds of workforce and economic development by inviting local economic developers to attend BST meetings when possible and appropriate; share minutes and other appropriate communications with the local agencies.
- .
- Greater utilization of Executive Pulse to track employer contacts and outcomes. While one-stop staff enter employer engagement information into PA CareerLink®, they also utilize Executive Pulse to make and respond to referrals.
- Continued involvement in PREP meetings, and when possible and appropriate, PREP-related initiatives.
- Additional exploration in the utilization of the Next Gen Industry Partnership model will result in the communication of greater industry intelligence without the need to call on the employer in the workplace.

We believe that increased collaboration between the region's workforce and economic development partners will lead to reduced service duplication and ultimately enhanced service to employers.

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

Recipients of Unemployment Compensation Program (UC) make up a significant percentage of the PA CareerLink® sites foot traffic and represent an important target customer group.

In an effort to assist individuals with their UC Program concerns, a UC agent has been placed in the region's one-stops and is available to meet one-on-one with claimants. This has proven to be highly successful; UC Program recipients are able to set up appointments and meet directly with a UC Program staff person who can help address their questions and concerns. The PA CareerLink® sites also maintain UC Program computers in their resource centers. Individuals are welcome to utilize those computers for UC Program related activities.

Also, the SAWDB is highly supportive of the new outreach effort to UC recipients who have exhausted their benefits. With this initiative, each PA CareerLink® office will receive a list of UC Program exhaustees; staff will develop strategies on how to best connect with the target group. The one-stop staff will receive customer-specific data to not only include contact information but also specifics related to their industry and educational level. The outreach message will be consistent, regardless of the partners engaged in the outreach. It will be crafted to engage the customer quickly, be customized and speak to the individual, rather than just a 'form letter,' be supportive and empathetic, and encourage

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them to quickly connect with the one-stop staff. We anticipate that this approach will be successful, and results will be reflected in the number of exhaustees who engage with the workforce system.

With the passage of state legislation that requires those collecting UC to engage in the public workforce system, PA CareerLink® staff not only have the opportunity but responsibility to ensure that Pennsylvanians seeking to collect UC are complying with the “Register for Work and Work Search.” Staff utilize the RESEA (Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment) lists to reach out to those expected to exhaust their unemployment benefits prior to gaining reemployment in a number of ways including:

- Direct call-in to attend RESEA orientations. Prior to the pandemic, in-person attendance was required and those who failed to participate were reported to UC. The RESEA program was temporarily suspended during much of the pandemic and was reinstituted in January 2021. Services are currently being provided remotely; our hope is that in-person attendance can be reinstated once it is safe to do so. During the sessions, participants learn about the variety of resources available to jobseekers through the workforce system. Sessions are informational and provide jobseekers with an overview of PA CareerLink® services and programs. The session covers such topics as: conducting a job search using the PA CareerLink® system, reviewing the tools available on the operating system, including the use of O\*net, an overview of local labor market information, WIOA training opportunities, Basic Career Service workshops, and partner services. Upon completion of the formal presentation, the WIOA Title I staff, and Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations staff can provide an individual counseling session that marks the beginning of the Preliminary Assessment process. This includes a review of the jobseeker’s skills, abilities, work interest, job history, and recent job search activity. Staff identify any potential barriers to employment and make appropriate customer referrals to additional partner or community programming on behalf of the jobseeker. Individual career counseling services begin, and customers learn more about in-demand industry specific occupations. Jobseekers have the chance to review training opportunities using the High Priority Occupation List and the Eligible Training Provider List on the operating system. Information on funding opportunities for available training programs are introduced not only in the orientation program, but also again during the individual counseling sessions. Jobseekers are encouraged to take advantage of the array of Basic Career Services. At the conclusion of these orientations, RESEA participants meet with Wagner-Peyser staff to review RESEA -related requirements, while WIOA Title I and site staff provide services to the remaining jobseekers.
- Promoting special services available to long-term dislocated workers or those likely to exhaust their benefits. The SAWDB has secured and/or participated in state-wide special National Emergency Grants and other initiatives targeted to dislocated workers. Staff have effectively used the RESEA lists to market these special training programs and where appropriate, included program promotional flyers in UC mailings. The SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® sites have also used the UC call line to include messages promoting these programs. Instead of silence or music, listeners would learn about special workforce programs designed to help them reengage with the workforce and instructed them to contact their local PA CareerLink®.

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

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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 in order for the claimant to have full access to their unemployment compensation claim dashboard on the state website. The goal of Unemployment Compensation is to educate the unemployed job seeker with toll-free numbers needed 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?***

The SAWDB will continue to support the long, well-established, and highly effective partnership between the public workforce system and the region's economic development agencies. For decades, the economic developers and workforce development professionals of the Southern Alleghenies have participated in a recognized and effective network dedicated to improving the region's economy. The public workforce system is a key partner in the Southern Alleghenies PREP; the SAWDB director and PA CareerLink® site administrators have been non-financial members since the PREP's inception. This relationship is reinforced and broadened through both entities' ties to the Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission (SAP&DC). Serving as fiscal agent and staff to the SAWDB, the SAP&DC is one of seven Local Development Districts (LDD) in the state uniquely positioned to help ensure the 'workforce-economic development connection' and alignment of programs and services.

As an arm of the SAP&DC, the SAWDB and its staff are involved in all projects that include a workforce development component. This helps to further cement the strong connection between the public workforce system and economic development network. As noted earlier in the Plan, the region's companies have been hit especially hard during the pandemic. Assistance to the affected companies and their workforce serves to illustrate the coordinated and cooperative approach taken by the region's workforce and economic development professionals. Each brings unique resources to the table that include:

### **Workforce Development**

- Labor Market Information - an inventory of the skill sets of the affected workers will help identify current opportunities for re-employment and provide economic developers with data they can use in their business recruitment efforts.
- Incumbent Worker/Dislocated Worker Training - assistance is available to companies that need to 'retool' their workforce as part of a job retention/product diversification strategy. Funding is available to train the affected dislocated workers so that they are prepared to reenter the workforce.



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- Employer Services - range from Rapid Response assistance available after notification of a downsizing (staff from JARI, an economic development agency, participates on two counties Rapid Response Teams), to assistance with new employee assessment, recruitment, and training.
- Dislocated Worker Services - range from assessment and remediation to job search assistance and its components, career counseling, and opportunities for retraining.
- Resources of the US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration and the PA Department of Labor and Industry - from dedicated funding (National Emergency Grants, Made in America, POWER) to technical assistance and labor market information.

## Economic Development

- Employer intelligence - In-depth knowledge of the employer/industry and its needs, challenges, opportunities for growth/diversification/economic restructuring.
- New Market Identification & Expansion - assistance with government procurement and product export.
- Business recruitment services - financing packages, shovel-ready property, tax incentives, understanding of supply chain.
- Resources of the Appalachian Regional Commission, Economic Development Administration, PA Department of Community and Economic Development, United States Department of Agriculture, Local Economic Development Fund, and Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority that range from dedicated funding to technical assistance.

Many of these same resources will also be coordinated in support of business recruitment and expansion efforts. The SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® sites are positioned to provide labor market information that can be used to promote the region to site selection committees. These range from radial analysis reports that illustrate population demographics and commuting pattern studies that identify workforce movement and possible recruitment opportunities to target industry data including an analysis of the location quotient and potential availability of a skilled workforce. Furthermore, workforce funding will be leveraged to incentivize a company to establish a presence or expand operations in the region. In several cases, the opportunity to access On-the-Job training funds resulted in companies' decisions to relocate to the region and bring with them 'jobs that pay.'

Two current initiatives serve as excellent examples of the strong working relationship between federal, state and the region's economic development agencies and the public workforce system. They include:

- **ENGAGE**- through support of the PA Department of Community and Economic Development, joint employer visits, conducted by PA CareerLink® business service team leads and county economic development directors, will continue to occur. Hundreds of visits with employers and industry leaders have occurred, resulting in 'realtime' business intelligence. Referrals to the PA CareerLink® and its workforce partners create an efficient system to help address the many and varied needs of the region's employer community.
- **Southern Alleghenies Entrepreneurial Ecosystem** - 'Startup Alleghenies' - support from the Appalachian Regional Commission, Economic Development Administration, and PA Department of Community and Economic Development supported the creation of a massive initiative

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designed to foster entrepreneurial development in communities impacted by the downturn in the coal industry. Local partners include the SAP&DC, SAWDB, PREP partners, the SBDC, Ben Franklin Technology Partners, the OVR, and a myriad of other entities including but not limited to education, financial institutions, and community foundations. Potential entrepreneurs will have access to a wide array of wrap-around business support services facilitated via the ecosystem coaches and mentors. With guidance and support, they can access customized services and be coached through the ecosystem that includes training, information, and resources needed for success. 'Idea Mines' located in the impacted counties will include maker spaces, co-working spaces, and special purpose spaces; entrepreneurs can access equipment and technology in these locations. The appropriate 'tools' will be determined on an individual basis and will be accessed as the entrepreneur needs them.

Through the SAWDB and its one-stop's involvement in Startup Alleghenies, there has never been a closer connection between entrepreneurial development, including skills training and resource provision, and the public workforce system. This promotion of entrepreneurship has taken several forms including:

- Entrepreneurial skills training is being taken to a new level for youth because of SAWDB and Startup Alleghenies collaboration. Several of the initiative's entrepreneurial coaches have been meeting with participants in the WIOA Title I program to discuss entrepreneurship and the essential ingredients of a successful business.
- 2020/21 SAWDB Teacher in the Workplace grant that focused connecting educators with local business creators so that they can see entrepreneurship in action. The teachers then incorporated entrepreneurship principles into classroom curriculum.

Also, there is a coordinated effort to promote apprenticeships with an initial focus on the manufacturing sector. The SAWDB, PA CareerLink®, economic development, Pennsylvania Highlands Community College and the region's Career and Technology Centers, with the support from the PA Department of Labor and Industry Office of Apprenticeships, continue to meet with employers to discuss the benefits of registered apprenticeships and in the case of several companies, take the initial steps in a positive direction.

The workforce and economic development communities recognize the value and unique resources each possess, complementing rather than competing with one another. Opportunities for cross-referrals, joint employer visits and coordinated business recruitment efforts will continue and grow.

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

Employer support for and use of the public workforce system is critical; without this most essential customer group the PA CareerLink® will become redundant. As noted earlier, to keep employer support, the workforce system must have 'products' or services that employers need to maintain their competitive edge and with it, a healthy bottom line. Equally important, they must be able to listen to

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the employer and let them drive the discussion around service needs rather than present to an employer a static list or menu of available services. The SAWDB has long required each one-stop to have an active, well-organized and relevant Business Services Team (BST). The Board has chosen to rely on a team made up of a variety of partner staff to provide the essential services rather than competitively procure for an agency or organization to assess the needs of employers and provide essential services.

Each BST includes individuals whose positions involve interfacing with employers, assessing their needs, and ultimately helping to address their hiring needs, preferably filling the vacancy with one of their customers. While membership may vary somewhat from one-stop to one-stop, staff from the following partner agencies consistently serve on the BST:

- WIOA Title I
- OVR
- WIOA Title III
- Local Veterans Employer Representative
- Wagner-Peyser

Depending on the nature and timing of BST initiatives, economic developers, including the PREP Consortia, adult basic education providers, post-secondary educational institutions including career and technology centers and the Pennsylvania Highlands Community College may also be 'at the table' helping to assess and address the needs of employers. With a staff of four, the SAWDB and SAP&DC have, for some fifteen years, dedicated resources to support the position of Employer Services/Special Initiatives Specialist. This individual is responsible for helping to coordinate business services across the region and ensure a level of consistency of service provision between all five PA CareerLink® sites and quality of materials. This staff person attends BST meetings, provides technical assistance, and helps to channel BST-related communication between the SAWDB, the OSO, and one-stop staff; she provides no services to employers but rather supports the efforts of the BST.

Since 2018, the region's economic developers and Business Services Team leads have worked together to implement the ENGAGE program here in the region. With funding provided by the PA Department of Community and Economic Development, joint calls are made to targeted companies to listen and respond to the employers' needs. Following the visit, and when appropriate, an action plan is developed that lays out the strategy for addressing the employer issues and identifies appropriate partner agencies that will work together. In over 90% of the visits, workforce-related issues are noted so the one-stop staff can plan a significant role in providing essential support to the company. This process moves the one-stop away from simply providing the employer with a menu of services to choose from and instead places BST staff in a more 'consultative' role.

To better prepare the Business Services Team members for employer engagement, the One Stop Operator Strategy Team, in conjunction with Business Services Team staff, have developed and implemented two-fold training designed to promote registered apprenticeship programs in the region. Selected participants then received a 'Train the Trainer' session that then enabled them to conduct the Employer Services training for site administrators, WIOA Title I supervisors and interested partners. The training concentrated on learning the ability to discern individual employer needs rather than list

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all the PA CareerLink® services that are available. “Registered Apprenticeship 101” training was included and focused on the fundamentals of both pre apprenticeships and registered apprenticeships. Staff were educated to the employer benefits of apprenticeships available funding opportunities, additions to the ETPL and the critical contact flow with the Apprenticeship Training Office (ATO). Staff are also working with the regional ATO contacts to coordinate additional apprenticeship training.

Each BST has a leader or point person who assists in coordinating the BST’s outreach activities and service provision; in the region, the position is held by either a WIOA Title I staff person or Wagner-Peyser merit staff member. Regardless of their employer of record, the BST is expected to work as a well-coordinated unit. Regular and frequent communication between team members is essential; seamless, non-silo service delivery does not only apply to jobseekers. Team members fill various roles; not all may be involved in employer visitations. Each BST tracks employer contacts and notes the type of contact - by telephone, e-mail, or in-person visits. The BSTs will continue to organize industry tours with key employers and among targeted sectors. These give business leaders the opportunity to ‘show off’ their facility and workforce staff the chance to see operations first-hand, hear about business opportunities and challenges from company leadership, and help to establish a professional relationship with the company. If the workforce system expects to meet the needs of its employer community, it must have an in-depth understanding of those needs and be prepared to meet and exceed business expectations.

The available business services are many and varied and include but are not limited to:

- Assistance with employee hiring. WIOA Title III, Wagner-Peyser staff are trained to assist employers registering with PA CareerLink®, place job orders on the system, and identify potential candidates for the positions. Staff can personally place job orders for an employer or their legal representative or instruct them on how to place the order themselves and search the system, with or without staff assistance. Special assistance will be given by the Local Veterans Employer Representative (LVER) to employers wishing to hire veterans.
- Coordination of job fairs and larger recruitment events. These can be organized for an individual employer, industry sector, or group of employers. Apprenticeship fairs are also provided.
- Access to funding to offset training costs. Many employers utilize OJT contracts when hiring one-stop customers. This service is a ‘win-win’ for both jobseeker and employer; the jobseeker becomes employed on day one and earns a self-sustaining wage and the employer receives funding to offset the costs associated with training the new employee, up to 50% of the wages earned during the pre-determined training period.
- Professional development/training. The SAWDB has supported ‘Core Workshops’- brief, employer-centric trainings designed to address some immediate business needs. Training topics have included ‘Understanding Multi-Generational Workplace,’ ‘Improving Communication Skills,’ ‘High-impact Sales’ and ‘Time and Stress Management.’ These workshops are offered at no cost to the employer participants, have been extremely well-received and have helped to build solid relationships between the employer community and the PA CareerLink®. In 2019, the SAWDB and Startup Alleghenies co-sponsored a day-long conference entitled ‘Alleghenies Ahead: Creating an Entrepreneurial Spirit in the Workplace.’ The SAWDB will continue to identify and support professional development/incumbent

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worker training opportunities for employers.

- Assistance with general human resource functions. Many smaller businesses lack a human resource professional. One-stop staff can provide some technical assistance and direct employers to the appropriate individual/agency for additional assistance.
- Development of employer-specific strategies that can include career pathway identification, skill upgrades using incumbent worker training and skill standard development.
- Proposed access to the Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment.
- Next Generation Industry Partnership participation. The PA CareerLink® staff can help to facilitate employer involvement.
- Access to Work Opportunity Tax Credits information.
- Access to SkillUp® Southern Alleghenies to promote incumbent worker training utilizing the thousands of on-line training courses.
- Access to up-to-date labor market information. Employers often request regional salary information to assist them with human resource functions. OVR meets the needs of businesses by providing no cost services to include ADA Awareness training, ADA Accessibility evaluations, accommodation recommendations for current employees and retention services. OVR also continues to partner with employers with On-the-Job Training (OJT), providing 100% wage reimbursement to businesses that hire OVR customers. OVR also works with businesses through connecting students involved in OVR's pre-employment transition services. Services under pre-employment transition services include programs like paid work experiences, job shadowing, and workplace tours.

Businesses engage with education on a regular basis in multiple ways in the Southern Alleghenies. The Business-Education 'connection' is varied and includes but is not limited to:

- Employer participation on Career & Technology Advisory Councils.
- Employer participation on post-secondary institutions' Boards of Directors and Boards of Trustees.
- Employer participation in school-sponsored career days and industry tours.
- Provision of worksites for co-op and other work experience programs.
- Engagement in the region's Teacher in the Workplace Grants where teachers spend time with targeted employers and then incorporate their observations into classroom curriculum.
- Participation in county and regional committees like BASICS (Businesses and Schools Investing in Cooperative Solutions) and the CSB2 STEM Ecosystem. Members work together to address common issues and support work experiences for youth.
- The SAWDB, OSO and one-stops are revising the PA CareerLink® Scorecard to better serve employers. We this document will contain information related to local wages, on-the-job training and apprenticeships, and demographic information to include educational attainment, among other data that has now yet been determined.
- LWDB's will ensure BST members are provided the Registered Apprenticeship Desk Guide and the Apprenticeship Strategic Plan Guide for PA CareerLink® Staff.

Under the direction of the OSO, the one-stops will be setting measurable goals to include employer utilization metrics. The Scorecard will continue to be a valuable tool to educate the employer community and other stakeholders to the systems performance outcomes and the value provided by the one-stop.

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### ***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.***

In support of continuous improvement and performance management, the SAWDB has implemented a system that includes the acquisition and dissemination of performance data. The sources of this data include:

- Commonwealth Workforce Development System - the system of record for the tracking of customer services and performance for the one-stop delivery system in the SAWDA. PA CareerLink® and SAWDB staff have been trained and regularly draw performance-related reports from both the Commonwealth Workforce Development System (CWDA) and those provided through Pennsylvania CWIA. The reports have been especially useful for management of Title I performance.
- Training service utilization including course of study, training provider, completion information, employment upon graduation (and if placement is in the customer's field of study), and wage at placement. This data is reviewed regularly by the SAWDB; particularly important in the review of high priority occupations and placement success rates and trends. Likewise, this information is used to help guide the investment of WIOA Title I training funds and to determine the return on investment of these funds.
- WIOA Title I Quarterly Performance Report - developed by the SAWDB for WIOA Title I - Specific information that includes number of new and returning customers, job placements, wage at placements, placements into training programs, OJT contracts. WIOA Title I providers also identify outreach efforts, challenges and opportunities related to service provision.
- PA CareerLink® Scorecards- The OSO, site administrators, and SAWDB staff are currently revamping the PA CareerLink® Scorecard so that it better meets the needs of employers and job seekers and also provides service-related data for use by the SAWDB. The information it will contain, by county, includes:
  - Unemployment Compensation data including rate, labor force, and new claims by industry
  - PA CareerLink® foot traffic
  - Number of job seekers served and number of services provided
  - Number of recruitment events held
  - Number of job postings and number of applications
  - Number of employers serviced and number of services provided

This information will be provided to customers, including employers, and stakeholders each quarter.

- A comprehensive monitoring/quality assurance/continuous improvement system that incorporates a performance monitoring component, utilized to ensure high quality service provision. This model incorporates a combination of written instruments, site visits, service observations and customer interviews, represents a coordinated team effort and includes numerous partners, each with a distinctive role. The performance management system is led by the SAWDB and its staff, in partnership with the region's OSO. The SAWDB has empowered its

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local PA CareerLink® sites to be active participants and share in responsibility for performance management at the local level. This is handled by each PA CareerLink® Management Team and site administrator. In addition, each of the region's one-stops has a performance point of contact (POC). These individuals serve as liaisons between their site, the SAWDB and the OSO. The site monitoring visits are conducted by SAWDB staff on an annual basis. The process includes the utilization of a locally created instrument that integrates elements aligned with the SAWDB's vision and goals and PA CareerLink® Scorecards. The instrument was designed to evaluate integral elements related to overall PA CareerLink® operations including governance, service mix and provision, site administration, staff qualities, and performance. Reports that summarize review results are shared with the site administrator, the OSO and SAWDB Chair immediately following the site visits; the reports are shared quarterly with the full Board. Each PA CareerLink® is expected to share its performance with the public; this is reviewed during SAWDB annual monitoring.

The SAWDB has historically dedicated significant financial resources to support training and increased educational attainment for the region's residents. Consequently, performance accountability figures significantly when it considers programs for inclusion in the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) and Local Training Provider List (LTPL). Before a request for inclusion on the list is submitted to Harrisburg, SAWDB members and staff carefully review the performance-related data and ensure that it meets the standards outlined in the WIOA and the PA Department of Labor and Industry *Workforce System Policy No. 04-2015, (Change 1) Eligible Training Providers and Pennsylvania's Eligible Training Provider List, revised 5-10-22*. Monitoring of provider effectiveness continues beyond placement on the ETPL and LTPL. The SAWDB tracks outcomes for training participants to assess return on investment of training dollars. While program completion and placement rates are important, of equal or greater relevancy to the SAWDB is completion and placement in the field of study rates and associated earnings. This performance information is calculated by staff and shared with the SAWDB, PA CareerLink® staff, OSO, and workforce partners on a regular basis; the information is utilized by career planners as they assist customers in making informed choices regarding careers and training opportunities. The SAWDB has aggressively sought to include high quality programs on the ETPL/LTPL and continues to work with the region's educational institutions to place a significant number of relevant programs on the lists. the Southern Alleghenies region boasts the 4th highest number of courses/programs on the ETPL. Currently 11 schools, ranging from career and technology centers to private proprietary schools and a state-sponsored community college and member of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) make up the ETPL for the region and offer 91 different programs in support of high priority occupations.

Employer and stakeholder input figures prominently in the SAWDB's continuous improvement model. The High Priority Occupation List (HPO) is shared with system partners and stakeholders to ensure that it accurately reflects employer hiring demands. In cases where greater demand is projected, or emerging occupations are noted, the SAWDB will petition for specific occupations to be added to the ETPL. Industry support, in the form of 'commitment' letters form the basis for the petition.

The SAWDB utilizes its Request for Proposal (RFP) procurement process to promote continuous improvement in the WIOA Title I services it supports. In 2017, the Board completed a competitive procurement for all Title I services. Procurement notices were sent to roughly 200 bidders from across

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the region, state and country, ads were placed in papers of record, and the solicitation was included on the Pennsylvania Development Workforce Association website. All of this was done to encourage responses from qualified organizations with a strong history of providing quality workforce services. After a rigorous board-driven review process, two of the region's six counties have a different service provider, effective July 1, 2017. All contracts are considered annually and renewed based on provider performance. The SAWDB went through a similar process to competitively procure its OSO. Performance reviews of the consortium were conducted first at six months and then annually.

Measurement of customer satisfaction is another continuous improvement tool and one utilized aggressively, and across all partners and funding streams. Currently employer satisfaction is measured as part of OJT monitoring, and customers (employers and jobseekers) participating in certain services, i.e., training, work experience for youth, core workshops, are monitored for service satisfaction. The OSO and PA CareerLink® site administrators, in partnership with the SAWDB, are utilizing customer satisfaction surveys that are presented in a digital format and include participants in Basic and Individualized Career Services and Training and employers.

With the data, both quantitative and qualitative, derived from the activities and instruments referenced above, the SAWDB, OSO, and its service delivery partners will continue to assess the effectiveness of the services offered, identify service gaps, and apply continuous improvement strategies.

### ***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?***

The WIOA has placed increased emphasis on expanding access to and serving those who are most in need of assistance. As a result, strong partnerships with community and faith-based organizations are more important than ever. The SAWDB includes the executive directors from two Community Action Agencies (CAAs) and with their assistance, the referral network between the one-stops and CAAs has been strengthened. As is often the case, those who come to the CAAs seeking assistance with housing and transportation, or drug and alcohol counseling are also in need of a job. Similar relationships are being developed or reinforced with other entities that include:

- Juvenile and Adult Probation Offices
- Transitional Re-Entry Advisory Councils
- County Housing Authorities
- Food Banks
- Literacy Providers
- County MH/ID Offices
- County Assistance Offices
- Human Services Councils

The SAWDB's Special Population Committee includes representatives from the majority of the entities noted above. The committee has been engaged in service gap and barrier identification with the PA CareerLink® site administrators and SAWDB staff. The OSO is working with all parties to improve



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outreach, access and service to these target populations. As one-stop staff and representatives from these agencies gain a greater understanding of each other's resources, clients and service needs/gaps, the opportunities for cross-referrals and leveraging of additional resources is heightened and ultimately clients/customers have access to a broader range of services designed to meet their needs.

With another section of the Plan identifying the one-stop partners and their roles, it is important to note that all partners are not physically co-located in the region's PA CareerLink® sites. This is especially true for rural areas where we have found that many program resources are centered in more urban/suburban areas. For this reason, an electronic and ever-expanding referral network is utilized to connect one-stop customers to these important resources. PA CareerLink® staff frequently refer customers to off-site partner staff for programs that include but are not limited to Family Self-Sufficiency (available only in Altoona, Blair County), Job Corp (with representatives in the Pittsburgh area), Indian and Native American Job Training Assistance and Employment (with representatives in western Pennsylvania), and Second Chance Act. Through their coordinated system of referral and follow-up, one-stop staff work to ensure that the referral is acted upon by both the customer and referred-to partner and ultimately, the customer is able to access needed on-site services.

Goal setting and performance benchmarking, above and beyond Common Measures, have been the hallmarks of service delivery in the Southern Alleghenies. Part of expanding access to workforce services is to first understand current 'market share' and recognize who is using our system. The SAWDB and its workforce partners draw on PA CareerLink® service utilization reports to better understand demand and customer demographics. From this data, the SAWDB, the OSO, and PA CareerLink® site administrators and management team members continue to set measurable goals. These goals will also incorporate the Department of Labor and Industry's benchmarks associated with serving low-income individuals and those with barriers to employment. These targets are included in the individual PA CareerLink® strategic plans and performance Scorecards and reviewed monthly to ensure that staff are working toward the goals.

In addition to providing needed services, the SAWDB has made significant efforts to 'take the services to the customer.' This has been especially important given the geographic expanse of the region. In addition to 5 comprehensive PA CareerLink® sites and 4 affiliate sites, one-stop staff have developed strong working relationships with community centers and public libraries; information on the public workforce system is made available at these locations. Since late 2018, the region's two largest comprehensive sites have co-located into the prominent public libraries in Johnstown and Altoona. These locations are considerably more accessible to many of our target populations. This has been a natural outgrowth of the SAWDB and its one-stops' relationships with public libraries. Staff and volunteers are shown how to navigate PA CareerLink® and refer their job seeking customers to the closest one-stop. The SAWDB, OSO and one-stop staff have also made great strides in placing 'PA CareerLink® in Your Community' by deploying staff to the offices of workforce partners including housing authorities, community action agencies, prisons, foodbanks, and similar locations. This will further facilitate outreach to those unable to travel to a one-stop. The investment in technology that facilitates remote service provision enabled the region's one-stops to move seamlessly to virtual service provision during the pandemic. Also, in support of remote service delivery, and to further help keep customers and staff safe, our one-stops have had their Wi-Fi expanded from the buildings into the PA CareerLink® parking lots. When necessary, staff can meet customers in the parking lot with a laptop or

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tablet and assist the customer directly without them having to physically enter the building. We believe that there will be a continued demand for services to be provided virtually, and in this manner long after we are able to fully reopen the one-stops to in-person services.

The SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® sites and staff make every effort to ensure that services are accessible to all. This includes the following:

- A TTY telecommunication device and amplified telephone receiver speakers, as well as the provision of a PA certified American Sign Language Interpreter, available upon advance request, are available for Deaf and for individuals who are hard of hearing.
- Designated computers have ZOOM text that enlarges written materials for those with a visual impairment and JAWS software that reads the information to the individual. Orientation information and service-related materials are available in Braille.
- The Language Line is available for those with limited English literacy. This line enables the PA CareerLink® staff to connect, via telephone, with translators capable of speaking to customers in over 80 languages. The one-stops also maintain a LEPP or Limited English Proficiency Plan that addresses how staff will provide services and support to individuals who are unable to communicate fluently in English.

These materials and technology are reviewed by the SAWDB staff during each PA CareerLink® monitoring visit to ensure that materials are available, and the technology is in good working order.

The SAWDB recognizes that technology can be an important and useful tool; computer literacy is necessary to navigate the PA CareerLink® and increasingly employers are utilizing on-line job applications. With SAWDB support, PA CareerLink® sites have been offering basic, and on a limited basis, intermediate computer classes for jobseekers. Through this instruction, individuals learn how to effectively use the workforce's information technology systems to conduct a job search. These classes have been especially beneficial in the region's more rural areas and for those older jobseekers who have had little exposure to computers. In addition, the Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment is available in all the region's one-stops. Customers have the capability to earn electronic badges as they advance through the assessment and earn credentials awarded to those who pass the various assessments in our proctored setting. The use of technology can open doors to many but the SAWDB, through research and analysis, learned early on that technology cannot take the place of face-to-face assistance provided by a skilled career planner. Much of the six-county region has no access to highspeed internet; basic cellular telephone service is lacking in many areas as well. The workforce, and consequently the jobseekers, are aging with many lacking even basic computer literacy. To expect individuals to conduct job search remotely, from a home computer or smart phone, is unrealistic. As referenced above, the SAWDB supports physical locations and staff trained to assist all jobseekers in their employment search.

The tracking of services, and the measuring of performance outcomes, are essential to service provision. PA CareerLink® is recognized as the system of record; non-commonwealth information systems are not utilized by contracted service providers. In many cases, information is entered by the jobseeker or employer, especially onto PA CareerLink®. PA CareerLink® staff assist in the entry of information for jobseekers at the time they are determined eligible and enrolled into services. All service is recorded on PA CareerLink® and input at the time-of-service enrollment, in real time. Employer-related information,

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i.e., job orders are placed on PA CareerLink® no later than 24 hours after receipt, but all efforts are made to input the information as soon as it is received by the employer. Enhancements to PA CareerLink® allow for electronic referrals between internal as well as external community partners. We believe this update will greatly facilitate service provision between the PA CareerLink® partner staff and the many community-based organizations that are well-positioned to assist the one-stop customers.

The SAWDB recognizes that other commonwealth-owned information systems are utilized with the public workforce system and include the following:

- Adult Education- e-Data system captures all service and outcome related information. The information is input by program staff on a weekly basis and is kept up to date.

Every effort is made to co-enroll jobseekers with WIOA Title I when they are eligible and suitable for such services. In cases where individuals are not receiving Title I or Title II career or training services but are enrolled in other WIOA programs through Adult Education or OVR, participants' services records are updated as services are received or on a weekly basis, depending on the provider. Program staff, including clerical staff, are responsible for this data entry.

As outlined in other sections of this Plan, the SAWDB maintains a close working relationship with the providers of Title II Adult Education, the initial developers and drivers of Career Pathways in the region. The SAWDB's connection and access to employers has helped to facilitate the development and expansion of these pathways, as the employer community provides their confirmation. With participants often co-enrolled in Title I and Title II services, access to employment and training has been greatly facilitated.

The SAWDB and its workforce partners ensure access to services through the utilization of human and technology resources. Each one-stop is equipped with technology to assist those with hearing and vision challenges. Adaptive equipment includes JAWS screen reader and software, ZoomText magnifier and reader and a fully integrated magnification and reading program tailored for low-vision users. On-site Sign language specialists and translation services out of Johnstown were utilized for a hearing impaired customer. For customers who are unable to communicate in English, staff utilize the language line, Google Translate and local interpreters to share workforce-related information and make appropriate referral. Language requests received and PA CareerLink® responses include the following:

- Spanish speaking customer in Huntingdon- staff use of Google Translate in both voice and text mode. The use of over-the-phone interpreting Propio system was also used.
- Language line and Google Translate used in Blair County for Spanish speaking customers.
- Google Translate utilized in Somerset to speak with a customer who spoke Mandarin. Bi-lingual PA CareerLink® staff spoke with customers in Spanish and German.

The one-stop partners work closely with the County Assistance Offices and local EARN program to dual enroll eligible participants so that they can benefit from available program resources.

**Staff will be trained to provide services to all, regardless of the range of abilities, mobility, age, language, learning style, comprehension, or educational level.**

All accommodation requests must be addressed, and reasonable accommodation will be made available

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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 unavailable, 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 Altoona Area School District Adult Education Program leverages a combination of learning management platforms, virtual instruction, and digital tools to provide accessible and effective distance learning for adult learners, particularly those preparing for high school equivalency, improving English language proficiency, or strengthening foundational literacy and numeracy skills. The Altoona School District uses state-approved digital learning platforms to support remote instruction and independent learning.

### ***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 services in the local area?***

The SAWDB will continue to consistently make supportive services available to target populations engaged in training (OJT and ITA), work experience and adult literacy services. Local policy requires the coordination of these services with other agencies including OVR, community and faith-based organizations, incarceration re-entry programs, Community Action Agencies, United Way, Child Development Corporations, TANF and EARN providers, Dress for Success programs, legal aid services, and other agencies dedicated to serving many of the workforce system's target populations or to ensure that WIOA/Rapid Response funds supplement rather than supplant other funding sources. During formal and informal customer assessment, the career planners identify any barriers that might affect a customer's ability to participate in and successfully complete planned WIOA-funded services. Once identified, these are noted in the Individual Employment Plan (IEP) and the career planner works with the customer and partner, and non-partner programs to address these barriers and coordinate services. Funding is used to cover:

- High School Equivalency testing fees. Title II partners have shared cases of individuals who were prepared to take the High School Equivalency test but could not afford the \$120 testing fee. Through SAWDB support, these costs are covered and High School Equivalency is earned.
- Mileage reimbursement to and from school, OJT and other work experience worksites. This helps to reduce barriers to participation and successful program completion.
- Childcare assistance to help offset the cost of daycare. Though available, it has not been used; the average age of our participants has increased and securing childcare has not been an issue.
- Clothing (for interviews, job-specific requirements), tools (job specific), and professional or commercial certifications. All services are intended to enhance the marketability of the customer and/or facilitate participation in a work experience program.

The supportive services referenced above are tracked carefully by WIOA Title I case managers and closely coordinated between those partner programs that also offer supportive services to ensure that customers do not receive duplicate services. The customer IEP and PA CareerLink® are utilized to note

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the provision of such services. Solid lines of communication between partner program staff, and involvement in coordinated customer-focused service meetings, i.e., Direct Service Team meetings, TRADE/WIOA staff meetings related to co-enrolled customers, have helped to ensure that program funding for needed support services is coordinated between providers and not supplanted.

Access to transportation, especially in the region's rural areas, can create challenges for job seekers. Efforts are currently underway, by the SAP&DC as the Rural Planning Organization, to secure funding to address the issues identified in its transportation plan, to include greater access to transportation resources for the low-income job seekers.

The region's county-based Community Action Agencies (CAAs) are natural partners in supportive service coordination. So many of the common customers have needs far beyond employment; basic needs including access to safe housing and food, appropriate childcare, therapeutic care for mental health issues, and more. Many of these issues must be addressed before the individual is positioned to conduct a dedicated job search. PA CareerLink® staff will work with CAAs and other similar agencies to assess the needs of the customer and determine which agency or partner is best positioned to provide the essential services. The customer's Individual Employment Plan will serve as the road map to identify their workforce goal and the many and varied services needed to achieve that goal. The services will also be recorded on PA CareerLink® to facilitate coordination between partner agencies. Ultimately, the needs of the customer will be identified and addressed through supportive service and resource coordination, and barriers to employment will be reduced or eliminated.

### ***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?***

The staff of the SAWDB, PA CareerLink®, WIOA Title I, and Rapid Response have a strong and effective working relationship. This partnership has been essential to service provision in our region where large dislocations have unfortunately been a part of the economic history and continue to plague the Southern Alleghenies. Rapid Response support is offered to employers facing worker dislocations. All efforts are coordinated, and the Rapid Response team includes not only PA CareerLink® and Rapid Response staff but also representatives from community-based organizations and economic development; team members are selected based on the needs of the affected workers. When appropriate, SAWDB staff have participated in Rapid Response events, most recently to promote the National Dislocated Worker Grant targeted at individuals displaced from the retail and service sectors. Larger dislocations have led to the formation of Transition Teams, former co-workers who come together to help organize special activities on behalf of their fellow dislocated workers. These teams receive support from a variety of workforce partners including the SAWDB and SAP&DC who provide fiscal support. Information related to Rapid Response is provided by the regional coordinator and shared quarterly with the SAWDB, Local Elected Officials, workforce partners and system stakeholders.

Guidance provided by the State Operations Division in 2017 is used as it outlines Rapid Response Team and PA CareerLink® staff responsibilities as well as details related to the provision of Rapid Response Services, including the step-by-step process for Early Intervention and the Benefits Rights Interview (BRI). With SAWDB support, during the BRI, affected workers not only receive Trade-related information

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but are also co-enrolled in partner programs, especially WIOA Title I. The SAWDB, Rapid Response Team members, and partner programs will continue to use this guidance to ensure that Rapid Response services are provided in a coordinated manner to provide the greatest benefit to the dislocated workers.

During 2020, our region participated in expanded outreach efforts to encourage greater worker participation in Rapid Response events. Due to the pandemic, large, in-person events could no longer be supported. Rapid Response meetings, using virtual platforms like Zoom, met with limited success in terms of attracting significant participation. PA CareerLink® staff developed a process of enhanced outreach to affected workers to include individual telephone calls and personalized emails. These efforts will continue and be expanded in 2024 and beyond.

In the past, the SAWDB has requested and utilized Rapid Response Additional Assistance (RRAA) funding to provide career, training, and supportive services to dislocated workers when special circumstances have arisen and the Board's WIOA Title I allocation was insufficient to handle the demand for services. Currently, the SAWDB has sufficient resources (WIOA Title I Dislocated Formula Funds and state-provided Rapid Response Funds) to handle current requests for training and supportive services. However, should the demand for funds outstrip available local resources, the SAWDB will request RRAA as needed.

### ***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?***

The SAWDB and the region's PA CareerLink® sites are committed to serving all those who want and need assistance. However, increased emphasis and priority of service will be placed on outreach and service to those with the greatest barriers to employment. These include:

- Displaced homemakers
- Low-income individuals
- Indians, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiians
- Individuals with disabilities, including youth with a disability
- Older individuals
- Ex-offenders
- Homeless individuals, including homeless children and youth
- Youth who are in or have aged out of the foster care system
- Individuals who are English language learners, individuals who have low literacy levels or are facing substantial cultural barriers, including refugees
- Eligible migrant and seasonal farmworkers
- Individuals who are within 2 years of exhausting lifetime eligibility under part A of Title IV of the Social Security Act
- Single parents, including single pregnant women
- Long-term unemployed individuals
- Others groups the Governor determines to have barriers to employment

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The SAWDB has set the direction and tone for service delivery through the formation of its Special Populations standing committee; this group focuses on assistance to the target populations identified above. This committee includes representatives from OVR, Corrections, Public Assistance, Senior Employment, Title II Adult Education, a Community Action Agency, the Highlands Health Free Medical Clinic, a provider of mental health services to individuals with intellectual disabilities, and others with a commitment to assisting those who face some of the most significant barriers to employment. This committee is currently engaged in working with PA CareerLink® site administrators in identifying service gaps and outreach strategies to better connect these individuals with one-stop and partner services with demand occupations. With significant input from this committee, the public workforce system will continue to develop and deploy unique strategies designed to provide employment opportunities for those with barriers.

The region's PA CareerLink® staff utilizes a consistent and methodical process when working with customers. This begins with the very first visit. When an individual enters the PA CareerLink® to begin their relationship with the public workforce system, they meet with a member of the Welcome Team to complete an initial needs assessment. This allows the customer to identify their goals, any special needs they may have, and any potential barriers that might keep them from attaining their goals. They can also self-identify if they fall under one of the categories referenced above and entitled to a priority of service. However, regardless of an individual's 'status' the one-stop staff work with the customer to identify all their needs and seek to provide assistance, either through direct service provision or referral to a partner or non-partner program. Staff and customers have found this process most beneficial in early identification of employment barriers.

In the initial meeting with a member of the Welcome Team, information specific to the individual and their needs is provided. This represents a departure from the PA CareerLink® orientation, when a detailed review of the many resources that will be made available to them as they engage in their job search. While services are provided in a non-siloed manner, customers are made aware of the many special programs and resources that are provided by the one-stop partners. After meeting with a member of the Welcome Team, the individual is introduced to an appropriate one-stop staff member who is best positioned to begin helping the customer to meet their vocational goal. If the individual's barriers are such that they are not able to begin an effective job search, they are connected to the county's community action agency or other appropriate community-based organization. Once barriers have been remediated to the point that the individual is 'stabilized,' they will be referred back to the one-stop and the job search can begin. The enhanced PA CareerLink® referral system is used to record and track referrals to partner agencies.

As with its methodical customer flow process, the PA CareerLink® system utilizes a coordinated approach to customer outreach and includes printed materials, in-person opportunities, and social media to promote one-stop services. Under the leadership of the site administrator and management team, promotional materials that outline jobseeker and employer services are prepared for distribution. These materials are reviewed by the OSO and SAWDB staff to ensure quality, accuracy, and alignment with materials provided elsewhere in the region. These materials are widely distributed to off-site partner agencies and other locations where jobseekers may live (housing authority offices and public housing), visit (libraries, community centers), shop, or receive related services (county assistance offices, Department of Human Services agencies, EARN centers, community action agencies, Veteran's

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Assistance Medical Center and other veterans' service and social organizations and agencies, medical clinics, probation offices, Day Reporting Centers, food banks). One-stop staff also ensure that staff at these partner agencies or locations have a basic understanding of the services being referenced/promoted to further encourage individuals to connect with the PA CareerLink®. The OVR and other partner programs utilize their significant relationships with vendors and supporting agencies throughout the state, as a means of outreach to potential customers.

The one-stop staff have also begun using social media as a means of outreach to potential customers. From LinkedIn® to Facebook® and Instagram®, many individuals are utilizing electronic means to stay in touch with one another and connect with resources. It is vital that the public workforce system use similar tools to connect with potential jobseekers and employer customers. The OSO encourages individuals to take advantage of SkillUp® Southern Alleghenies ([southeranallegghnies.skillupamerica.org](http://southeranallegghnies.skillupamerica.org)), a free web-based training platform designed to support skill development, career changes, and job advancement. Whether individuals are seeking to enter a new field or enhance their current employment prospects. This platform features a direct link to the Commonwealth Workforce Development System ([www.cwds.pa.gov](http://www.cwds.pa.gov)), providing easy access to local job opportunities and additional workforce services within the Southern Alleghenies Region. The OSO and site administrators are currently engaged in an initiative to expand outreach using social media and will be tracking outcomes.

One-stop staff also engage in 'in-person' outreach that includes taking informational presentations that utilize PowerPoint to off-site locations, many of which were identified in the above paragraph. This is another example of taking services, or information on available services, to the customer. The one-stop staff, in conjunction with on-site partner and affiliated organizations, also hold special events like resource, education and career fairs and even county fairs to promote workforce services. The PA CareerLink® booth is often seen at community events where large gatherings are expected. Though the list of venues is extensive, the OSO will be charged this year with identifying additional outreach opportunities and expanding the use of technology to reach those in need of assistance.

Sections 4.6 and 4.8 of the Plan identify the wide variety of services that are made available to all job seekers; those with barriers to employment receive priority access to these services. In addition, the SAWDB and the public workforce system will deploy strategies and support enhanced services and activities to provide special assistance to those with barriers to employment. These include but are not limited to:

- Promotion of Apprenticeship Fairs - these events have fostered closer working relationships with companies that support apprenticeships and improved partnerships with those labor councils that provide apprenticeships. The fairs will be aggressively marketed to dislocated workers, especially the long-term unemployed and those with readily transferable skills, individuals on public assistance including EARN program participants, and young adults in hopes of addressing pipeline issues.
- Career Fairs for Target Populations - building on a successful recruitment tool, the SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® sites will support events designed to enhance employment opportunities for special, target populations including individuals with disabilities, senior workers, low-income residents, young adults, refugees, and others in need of service.



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- Enhanced Business Service Team Membership - efforts will be made to ensure that representatives from the EARN program, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Senior Employment Service, and Corrections have every opportunity to actively participate on these teams and coordinate employer outreach efforts on behalf of all jobseekers. The state-wide business services staff can also serve as a resource to help the Committee identify strategies to promote workforce diversification and inclusion.
- YouthBuild – a transformative program that combine academics, to support secondary diploma or equivalency receipt, with hands-on occupational skills training. Program participants are ages 17-24 who have dropped out of high school or have dropped out and subsequently re-enrolled and are also from a low-income family, or in foster care, an offender, an individual with a disability, child of a current or formerly incarcerated parent, or a migrant youth.
- STEPS (Steps Toward Employment-Progress-Success) - this innovative program developed by the Community Action Partnership for Somerset County, the WIOA Title I provider in Somerset County, helps participants address three specific barriers to employment: criminal backgrounds, mental health issues and substance abuse. During weekly sessions, participants tackle the issues, receive support and additional referrals to relevant agencies, and ultimately graduate to a Job Club and mainstream job search services.
- Individuals with Disabilities- WIOA Title IV eligible OVR customers receive multiple services from qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors that may include, but are not 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.

The SAWDB anticipates that the continued work of its Special Populations Committee will translate into additional special initiatives and services designed to move those with barriers to employment into jobs that provide self-sustaining wages.

The provision of services to all jobseekers begins with an assessment of individual needs. When a person enters the one-stop, they are encouraged to complete an initial needs assessment. This 'customer friendly,' simple form allows the individual to identify some of their basic needs and goals and permits them to 'self-identify' any barriers to employment. From the responses, staff can initiate referrals to in-house and community partners who are best positioned to help the jobseeker. Additional information, and confirmation of a barrier, if necessary, is gathered by WIOA Title I and Title III staff at the time of service enrollment. Throughout this process, staff are committed to providing a customer-focused, customized approach and work with all individuals regardless of barriers, in a non-discriminatory manner while providing equal access to all. Non-discrimination requirements are outlined in greater detail in the SAWDB/LEO/Partner Memorandum of Understanding; an agreement signed by all PA CareerLink® partners.

Customers with disabilities eligible for services under WIOA Title IV will receive additional assistance from the OVR that may include but not be limited to diagnostic, vocational counseling and guidance, vocational evaluation, restoration, training, job placement and pre-employment training.

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Of even greater importance, especially in service to the target populations, is utilizing effective outreach strategies to take services out into the community. Sections 4.3 and 4.4 of the Plan identify some of the unique partnerships that have been developed, including the close working relationship with Community Action Agencies. Referrals between these partner agencies and the one-stops have enabled a greater variety of services to be provided to customers, going beyond those workforce-related and provided through the PA CareerLink® system. Off-site system partners including libraries, social service agencies, housing authorities, food banks, juvenile and adult probation offices, county MH/MR offices and county assistance offices have readily accepted one-stop materials including service-related information and calendar of events. Under the direction of the OSO, the SAWDB will be encouraging PA CareerLink® staff to meet customers in these facilities and other community locations, where possible, to reduce any travel challenges and provide initial services to these individuals in a more familiar setting.

Given the significant number of individuals with low literacy levels, as illustrated by the significant number of those who are basic skills deficient and lack a high school diploma, will be greater opportunity for engagement with the region's Title II adult basic education providers. The SAWDB, OSO and one-stop partners will continue to monitor service levels to the target populations and use this information to gauge the effectiveness of the outreach strategies.

#### ***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?***

Continued support and involvement from the OVR staff, along with PA CareerLink® management and oversight by the OSO and SAWDB, will help to ensure that the facilities are fully accessible, have the necessary technology, and materials in alternative formats for use by individuals with disabilities. Services will be provided in a seamless manner and referral to appropriate partner programs will be facilitated through increased communication and cooperation between one-stop partners. The Board's Special Populations Committee is dedicated to identifying, promoting, and assessing services for special populations, including individuals with disabilities. OVR and PA CareerLink® staff will continue to develop and coordinate services designed to promote disability inclusion including joint workshops and career fairs. A consent form has been implemented to allow greater sharing of customer information and improve communication between the vocational rehabilitation counselors and WIOA Title I career planners. Much has been accomplished and OVR, Board leadership, and PA CareerLink® staff will continue to identify ways to expand and enhance workforce services to individuals with disabilities. OVR staff are also positioned to assist other PA CareerLink® staff to better understand and appreciate the unique challenges faced by jobseekers with disabilities. As a local and 'in house' expert, OVR staff are well positioned to help ensure that the one-stop facilities comply with state and federal ADA requirements and assist other PA CareerLink® staff to better understand and appreciate the unique challenges faced by jobseekers with disabilities. OVR staff as well as other partner staff, i.e., WIOA Title I provider Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies, are well positioned to and have provided staff training workshops on how to provide enhanced services to individuals with disabilities. The SAWDB's Special Populations Committee also includes individuals who serve those with intellectual disabilities. Service to this growing segment of jobseekers requires special skills and we look to these partners and board

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members to help educate one-stop staff on effective service delivery strategies.

Coordination of outreach to employers has improved with OVR's hiring of Business Services Representatives; they are active members of the PA CareerLink® Business Service Teams. Never have there been greater efforts toward disability inclusion. OVR and other PA CareerLink® staff have been coordinating the development of joint workshops and career fairs and the regional OVR office has set benchmarks for customer participation in these events.

In addition to the sites being physically accessible, the one-stops utilize key technology and materials to assist in service delivery to individuals with disabilities. These include the availability and use of TTY lines for those with a hearing disability. Also, designated computers have ZOOM text that enlarges written materials for those with a visual impairment and JAWS software that reads the information to the individual. Orientation information and service-related materials are also available in Braille.

A two-pronged approach is used to address the needs of those with limited English proficiency. The PA CareerLink® sites utilize the Language Line to connect with translators who will help to bridge the language barrier between staff and customers. Each one-stop maintains an up-to-date LEPP or Limited English Proficiency Plan that outlines the staff that will effectively serve those with a language barrier. The WIOA Title II provider also plays a key role as the partner best positioned to assist those with English literacy challenges. While there has not been a significant demand for translation services or adult education for those whose primary language is not English, the region's PA CareerLink® are positioned to provide services to these jobseekers or employers.

The SAWDB, OSO and workforce partners place considerable emphasis on supporting professional development opportunities, especially those that enhance staffs' ability to serve those with multiple barriers to employment. The OSO has taken the lead to identify and promote professional development opportunities for PA CareerLink® staff. The following outlines some of the trainings; that have taken place in the region. These trainings have also been conveyed to the Commonwealth's office of Equal Opportunity as part of the office's monitoring:

- PA CareerLink® Huntingdon County and Fulton Employment and Training (affiliate site):
  - EEO Liaison Training provided by EEO Office
  - Disability Sensitivity Training provided by OVR for all staff
  - Blind and Visual Services provided by OVR
  - Courageous Conversations, OVR Services, Working with the Hearing Impaired
  - QPR and Drug Abuse Recovery Sensitivity

The ADA equipment including the Zoom Text and Jaws software is tested monthly. These testing dates provided all staff with the opportunity to refresh their knowledge on the usage of the equipment.

- PA CareerLink® site Blair County:
  - EEO Liaison Training Provided by EEO Office
  - Gender Transition Sensitivity
  - Guide Dog Foundation and Resources for the Blind
  - QPR and Drug Abuse Recovery Sensitivity
- The ADA equipment including the Zoom Text and Jaws software is tested regularly and staff

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receive refreshers on use of the equipment.

- PA CareerLink® Bedford County:
  - EEO Liaison Training Provided by EEO Office
  - Gender Transition Sensitivity
  - Guide Dog Foundation and Resources for the Blind
  - QPR and Drug Abuse Recovery Sensitivity

The ADA equipment including the Zoom Text and Jaws software is tested regularly and staff receive refreshers on use of the equipment.

- PA CareerLink® sites Cambria and Somerset Counties:
  - EEO Technical Assistance Training by OVR for all staff
  - Intersectionality: A Foundation of Who We Are
  - Courageous Conversations that Matter
  - OVR Bureau of Blind and Visual Services
  - Technical Assistance Training and Limited English Proficiency
  - OVR Disability Sensitivity Training
  -
- The ADA equipment including the Zoom Text and Jaws software is tested regularly and staff receive refreshers on use of the equipment.

As outlined above, the PA CareerLink® staff receive a wide variety of training. These are normally held during office-wide partner staff meetings and include participation by staff representing:

- WIOA Title I
- WIOA Title II, Adult Education
- Wagner-Peyser and BWPO
- Carl Perkins Post-Secondary Education
- OVR
- Community Service Block Grant
- TANF and SNAP
- Senior Community Service
- Trade Adjustment Assistance

The OSO and one-stop staff are taking a proactive approach as they work with the OVR to receive additional sensitivity training that will better prepare them to effectively serve individuals with disabilities. The SAWDB has placed increased importance on outreach and service to low-income individuals. The Board believes that the public workforce system must be positioned to help these individuals move out of poverty. The OSO have organized region-wide professional development training open to all PA CareerLink® staff. The most recent training, held in September 2022, included information on working with individuals with addictions and referral to the region's FAVOR (Faces and Voices of Recovery) program and also QPR training related to suicide prevention.

The SAWDB and the PA CareerLink® and OSO recognize the importance of targeted and effective affirmative outreach to individuals from different racial and ethnic/national origin groups, religions, and

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individuals with limited English proficiency, disabilities, and ages. Effective outreach begins with providing appropriate professional development opportunities to one-stop staff so that they are better positioned to engage with individuals from these targeted populations. As identified in the 2020, PA CareerLink® training above, one-stop staff receive professional development on disability sensitivity, gender identity and expression, diversity training, English as a Second Language, and age discrimination. The SAWDB and one-stop staff work closely with a variety of organizations and agencies that serve these populations and include but are not limited to the NAACP, community action agencies, neighborhood churches, Centers for Independent Living, and our PA CareerLink® partner staff from the Senior Community Service Employment Program, and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. The one-stops work closely with Associates for Training and Development (A4TD) and the AARP Foundations to create awareness of their training and job opportunities for workers over 55. The region's PA CareerLink® sites have also served as host sites for those workers where they learn skills needed to apply for and secure jobs in today's market.

There is also a strong partnership between the public workforce system and the NAACP. Together they support an annual Apprenticeship Fair, work with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation OJT program for minorities and the Highway Trade Unions. Local NAACP leadership also regularly refers individuals to the PA CareerLink® for workforce services. In Cambria County, the Title I youth staff place youth work experience participants in a learning pod for the Johnstown School District, where they assist and mentor the younger youth.

Affirmative outreach is also carried out by one of our one-stop's key partners in Cambria County, the economic development agency Johnstown Area Regional Industries (JARI), in partnership with the PA CareerLink® Cambria County. The Neighborhood Assistance Tax Credit Program (NAP) is offered by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development and gives businesses with state tax liability the option to make a donation to the JARI Workforce Program and receive a 55% tax credit in exchange for the donation. The funding is used to provide customized training programs for low skilled, low-income residents living in area with the following criteria: high unemployment, low labor participation rates, high rates of poverty and an area that is in Act 47 status. The City of Johnstown meets that criteria. The programs offered are determined by local employers as critical for specific high priority occupations. Trainings have included welding, CDL, construction technology, electrical technology, basic machining, and medical office assistant. The objective is to offer a short-term training program to provide individuals with the basic skills they need for an entry level position, with the understanding that employers will then continue with on-the-job training. Companies provide input into the curriculum and letters of support that state their need and that they will consider graduates for employment. This process helps to get qualified candidates to employers in a short period of time. Seventy-five individuals have graduated and been placed over the past five years.

The PA CareerLink® assists with outreach, making referrals, providing job search assistance and then provides financial support for on-the-job training contracts to those companies who will hire the graduates and continue with the training process. All potential participants are required to enroll with the PA CareerLink® and are referred to other eligible and appropriate programs. Program participants also perform some type of community service as a pay it forward.

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## 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 of and access to the entire set of services available in the local area one-stop delivery system.*

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

The SAWDB and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) have strengthened and expanded the partnership between the Board, OVR, and the region's PA CareerLink® sites. The relationship between Board and local OVR leadership is strong, a direct result of increased communication and collaboration between the offices. On many occasions, the SAWDB director has met with OVR administrators and vocational rehabilitation counselors and participated in OVR-sponsored public meetings to discuss the WIOA and opportunities for enhanced service provision including strengthening the referral process and leveraging Title I and OVR resources to support occupational skill training for individuals with disabilities. Likewise, an OVR District Administrator (OVR DA) is an active and valued member of the SAWDB.

While always a key partner in the local workforce development system, the SAWDB and OVR leadership recognize the opportunity for greater involvement in PA CareerLink® initiatives. As a local and 'in house' expert, OVR staff are well positioned to help ensure that the one-stop facilities comply with state and federal ADA requirements and assist other PA CareerLink® staff to better understand and appreciate the unique challenges faced by jobseekers with disabilities. Coordination of outreach to employers has improved with OVR's hiring of Business Services Representatives; they are active members of the PA CareerLink® Business Service Teams. There have never been greater efforts toward disability inclusion. OVR and other PA CareerLink® staff have been coordinating the development of joint workshops and career fairs and the regional OVR office has set benchmarks for customer participation in these events. A 'consent form' has been implemented to allow greater sharing of customer information and improve communication between the vocational rehabilitation counselors and WIOA Title I career planners. Much has been accomplished and OVR, Board leadership, and PA CareerLink® staff will continue to identify ways to expand and enhance workforce services to individuals with disabilities.

The 2020-2024 Memorandum of Understanding/Infrastructure Funding Agreement (MOU/IFA) between the LEOs, SAWDB, Fiscal Agent, and One-Stop Partners (mandated and non-mandated) represents the most significant and collaborative cooperative agreement established for and by the public workforce system. It clearly lays out the 'who,' 'what,' 'when,' 'where' and 'why' of the region's public workforce system and takes the earlier One Stop Partner and Resource Sharing Agreements to a much higher level. It lays out in detail, the following:

- Vision and Mission of the SAWDB
- Partner services, roles, and responsibilities
- Service integration to include data sharing, confidentiality requirements, referrals, accessibility and outreach

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- Dispute resolution
- Monitoring
- Special terms and conditions
- Operating budget and outlines PA CareerLink® costs

This agreement serves to bind the Partners together programmatically and fiscally and creates the commonly accepted and approved governance document. The Infrastructure Funding Agreement is included in the MOU and further outlines and defines the financial contributions of each partner, whether they are cash or in-kind contributions. The 2020-2024 MOU/IFA can be found at <https://sapdc.org/workforce-development-board/>.

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

The SAWDB and Fiscal Agent staff conduct regular monitoring of services and fiscal operations to ensure that sub-recipients provide services to eligible participants and that financial operations comply with the SAWDB Cost-Reimbursement Contract for Title I Services, Workforce System Policy (WSP) No. 3-2015, dated 12/22/15, and ultimately the OMB Uniform Guidance. If/when disallowed costs are identified, the SAWDB and the SAP&DC, as Fiscal Agent, will utilize its aggressive debt-collection process to recoup these costs.

If disallowed costs are identified, the sub-recipient will be notified in writing of the miss-expenditure, including the nature of the disallowed cost, contract/governance citations, the amount due to be returned, and the process for the return of the misspent funds. The SAWDB and Fiscal Agent expect that restitution will be made in a single lump sum repayment from the agency's General Fund or other non-restricted accounts. If the sub-recipient petitions to make payment in short-term installments, the SAWDB will contact the Bureau of Workforce Development Administration (BWDA) to confer on the matter and seek approval to accept short-term installment repayments. However, as noted in WSP 3-2015, immediate lump sum repayment of the debt is mandatory, and funding will be immediately returned to the BWDA if local monitoring has determined:

- Willful disregard of the requirements of WIOA, gross negligence, or failure to observe accepted standards of administration
- Incidents of fraud, malfeasance, or misfeasance, and
- Illegal actions or irregularities that must be reported under OMB Uniform Guidance.

In the event the sub-recipient is not able to make restitution, the Chief Local Officials are considered liable for repayment of the disallowed costs. This repayment of disallowed costs is also referenced in the Southern Alleghenies Local Elected Official Agreement, dated November 18, 2015.

The SAWDB and Fiscal Agent maintain strict monitoring processes and offer and provide considerable technical assistance to reduce the likelihood of disallowed costs being incurred by a sub-recipient.

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

The SAWDB has set high performance expectations for its PA CareerLink® sites, OSO and WIOA Title I providers but even higher expectations for itself as the leader of the region's public workforce system. It considers the outcomes achieved by the system a direct reflection on the SAWDB and its strategic direction and investments.

The SAWDB looked to the Commonwealth's Combined Workforce Plan as it identified its strategic goals and objectives. The Governor's goals were reviewed considering local conditions, and regional goals and objectives were established to support the Commonwealth and at the same time address unique challenges present in the region. Likewise, the region's goals were established with an eye on meeting and exceeding the negotiated federal performance measures. Greater detail on the SAWDB's goals and their alignment to and support for the Governor's goals and federal performance measures are found in sections 2.3 and 2.4 of the Plan.

The SAWDB places significant importance on its monitoring responsibilities and likewise places great importance on receiving clean monitoring reports from the BWDA monitors. The Fiscal Agent employs knowledgeable staff who seek out professional development opportunities to be well-grounded in state and federal accounting requirements, especially the Uniform Guidance. The SAP&DC prides itself on having strong internal controls in place and regularly receives clean Commonwealth and independent audits, free of issues or concerns.

The Fiscal Agent has developed several 'best practice' accounting reports that are designed to provide the Board with a 'snapshot' that illustrates where the Board and region stand regarding the training expenditure targets, 20% youth work experience requirements, 75% out-of-school youth service requirements, and 80% expenditure/obligation requirements. This allows the SAWDB to be proactive and make fiscal adjustments throughout the year to meet these state and federal expenditure requirements.

The SAWDB is constantly engaged in best practice identification, both within the region and across Pennsylvania and the United States and looks to its Title I providers, OSO, PA CareerLink® partners and system stakeholders to be constantly identifying new and improved methods of service delivery.

With SAWDB support, two of the region's comprehensive one-stops have co-located into the area's largest public libraries and a third is located in the same facility as a public library. This has garnered the attention of workforce leaders from across the country and can serve as a model for other one-stops.

SAWDB leadership has set the bar even higher regarding one-stop benchmarking. The OSO, site administrators, and SAWDB staff are modifying the current PA CareerLink® Scorecard to better provide information of significant importance to employers. They are also working on a new document that serves to illustrate service delivery levels and provide relevant information to jobseekers and stakeholders. Under the guidance of the OSO, the PA CareerLink® site administrators, Management and Business Service Teams have established goals around jobseeker and employer services and satisfaction



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including placements, training participants, and employer outreach and service utilization.

The SAWDB looks forward to the opportunity to work with the Bureau of Workforce Development and Administration in the development of high-performance standards, a role it played many years past when the PA Department of Labor and Industry first created the designation 'High Performance Board.' It remains committed to being the leader and active partner in the region's workforce development system and the SAWDB will take actions necessary to maintain or obtain that important designation.

## ***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?***

The Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Board (SAWDB) follows a transparent and inclusive process to ensure that the Local Plan reflects the needs and priorities of the diverse stakeholders that make up the region's workforce development system. This includes providing a 30-day public comment period and creating multiple opportunities for input and collaboration from key system partners.

### **30 Day Public Comment Period**

Following approval by the SAWDB to release the Plans for public comment, the Plans and all accompanying documents were placed on the SAWDB/SAPDC website. At the same time, notifications were sent to stakeholders directing them to the website and encouraging their review and comment. The Plans were also referenced during meetings with stakeholders and participants were encouraged to review the posted plans and submit comments. Public notice was posted in the region's newspapers of record. This notice directed interested parties to the SAWDB/SAPDC website and electronic copies of the Plans. Hardcopies of the Plans were placed in each one-stop as well so that PA CareerLink® customers and partners would have the opportunity to review and comment on the document. All comments were to be submitted in writing and directed to Jennifer Sklodowski, SAWDB Director, via email at [jsklodowski@sapdc.org](mailto:jsklodowski@sapdc.org).

### **Stakeholder Input and Engagement in Plan Development**

The SAWDB takes a collaborative approach to the development of the Local Plan by engaging a broad range of stakeholders across the six-county region. Stakeholder input is solicited through meetings, surveys, planning sessions, and ongoing dialogue. This includes:

- Business and Industry Representatives: Input is gathered from board members representing key industry sectors, as well as through employer engagement activities and sector partnerships.
- Education Partners: The board includes representatives from secondary and post-secondary institutions and Title II Adult Education Coordinator, ensuring alignment between education and workforce strategies.
- Labor Organizations: Union representatives participate in planning efforts to ensure that workforce strategies support good jobs and worker rights and reflect organized labor priorities.
- WIOA Core and Required Partners: Including Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Program

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providers, Title II, Title III, and Title IV among others such as TANF, SNAP and other community-based organizations.

- Public and Human Services Agencies: Agencies providing services to individuals with barriers to employment – such as local human services departments, public housing authorities, and behavioral health providers - are included in planning discussions.
- Community-Based and Non-Profit Organizations: Local nonprofits that serve Veterans, individuals with disabilities, opportunity youth, and other priority populations contribute insights to ensure services are responsive and equitable.

### **Ongoing Collaboration**

Throughout the planning process, the SAWDB maintains an open-door policy for stakeholder input and encourages continuous engagement, not only during formal plan development but also through its quarterly board meetings, committee structures, and regional initiatives. The Board views stakeholder engagement as an ongoing responsibility rather than a one-time event, ensuring the Local Plan remains a living document that evolves to meet the region's changing workforce needs.