

Western NY

# Regional Plan

July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2025

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## Regional Service Strategies

- a. Identify regional plan strategies and specifically provide detail on how regional plan strategies relate to the workforce needs of local businesses as well as the priority projects from the Regional Economic Development Council (REDC).

All Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) in the Western New York (WNY) region are committed to effective and efficient WIOA service delivery, striving for continuous improvement. It is our goal to provide seamless service delivery regardless of which local area in the region a customer is accessing services. The use of the One-Stop Operating System (OSOS) as a guide for all workforce staff is critical for information sharing and efficiency. Workforce staff throughout the region have been provided the OSOS guide to writing an effective case note and have online access to OSOS Guides through the NYS Department of Labor (NYS DOL) website. Through regular monitoring and communication, WDB Directors ensure that effective case notes are provided. All Local Workforce Development Areas agree to provide services to any customer accessing services at any Career Center in the region.

- b. Provide a list of executed cooperative agreements where applicable and define how local service providers, including additional providers, will carry out the regional strategies.

Please see attached Cooperative Service Delivery Agreement.

## Sector Initiatives for In-demand Industry Sectors or Occupations

- a. Identify in-demand industry sectors and occupations.

For many years, the workforce boards in the WNY Region have worked collaboratively to align their workforce strategies through regional planning.

The WNY Region's LWDBs have always and will continue to work with various partners including businesses and training providers to develop partnerships and clearly delineated career pathways in high demand sectors. Using the strategies implemented in our 2017 partner sectorships work, the WNY Region's LWDBs worked collaboratively to develop a template for career pathways in Advanced Manufacturing and Hospitality/Tourism. The overarching intent of this continuing regional partnership is to:

- Leverage and align resources quickly and effectively to respond to the hiring needs of businesses according to regional business demand.
- Develop strategic priority industry sector partnerships that can quickly assess the skills gaps in the workforce, develop appropriate training programs, and increase the supply of skilled workers for targeted sectors.
- Inform training and educational partners of the opportunities that exist in the region. Working together, these providers can target programs in elementary or secondary education, vocational training, and post-secondary education.

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- Identify career pathways and stackable industry-recognized credentials for occupational advancement leading to self-sustaining wages.
- Upgrade the skill sets and credentials of incumbent workers for career advancement, and backfill entry-level opportunities with trained workers.

- b. Identify and describe sector initiatives that address the needs of the identified in-demand industry sectors or occupations.

The WDBs will host sector specific roundtable discussions to gather information from businesses regarding industry specific skill needs and employment tracks, identify currently available trainings and resources that meet the industry's needs, identify the skills and training gaps, map the various career pathways, and develop simple tools for career guidance with job seekers. All steps in the sector partnership and career pathways development process will include stakeholders' input. Based on our initial Sector Partnership, the LWDBs will continue to work together to develop career pathways for other priority industries.

## Regional Labor Market Analysis

- a. Include an analysis of regional economic conditions incorporating the existing emerging demand sectors and occupations, the employment needs of businesses in those sectors and occupations, as well as noting if the information used in the analysis was provided by the New York State Department of Labor's (NYSDOL) Research and Statistics (R&S) Division (if not, provide what source was used for complete analysis).

Over the past year, private sector jobs in the Western New York region rose by 89,800, or 21.8 percent, to 501,800 in April 2021. The greatest gains were in leisure and hospitality (+29,100), trade, transportation and utilities (+19,900), professional and business services (+8,500), manufacturing (+8,400), natural resources, mining and construction (+8,200), educational and health services (+7,500), other services (+7,400) and financial activities (+1,100). Losses occurred in information (-300). Government sector jobs increased (+3,000) over the year. The data above was provided by the NYSDOL's Regional Labor Market Analyst through the Research and Statistics Division.

The regional economy continues to expand; however, it has been impacted in numerous unforeseen ways by the COVID-19 pandemic of 2019-2020. The region was experiencing a labor shortage pre-COVID and the pandemic has exacerbated that shortage. Inequalities in access to employment based on barriers including internet access or job readiness/soft skills attainment continue to negatively impact certain populations. While the number of jobs has increased, the number of available workers in the labor force has declined. An aging, declining labor force combined with increasing demand for labor, particularly in the advanced manufacturing, health sciences, logistics, and leisure and hospitality sectors has heightened shortages of workers across most occupations. These sectors have been targeted by the WNY Regional Economic Development Council's (REDC's) long-term strategy through exhaustive analysis. In collaboration with NYS DOL's WNY Labor Market Analyst, the regional demand list was compiled to support these sectors. The regional

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strategy's overall goals include the creation of opportunities, and increased labor force participation rates, for segments of the population that have been historically under-represented. Balancing the skills and abilities of the available labor force with the needs of businesses in these sectors requires a diverse approach. Training and skill sets ranging from soft skills, work readiness, and mathematical competency to highly specialized technical training is currently in demand in the WNY region.

- b. Describe the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to meet the employment needs of businesses in those sectors and occupations.

In the five counties that comprise the WNY region, over 91.0% of the adult population (25+) have a high school diploma or higher. However, the almost 9% that do not have a high school diploma represents an estimated 84,888 residents in the region. Of the WNY population for whom poverty status is determined, 14.7% are below the poverty level. Above data was provided by NYS DOL Regional Labor Market Analyst.

For many employment opportunities, a minimum of a high school (HS) diploma or high school equivalency is required. For health care, a certification or license is required for many positions. For advanced manufacturing, many positions require certification and, frequently, some experience as well. For hospitality and tourism, many customer service positions require a HS diploma or HS equivalency; however, management and supervisory positions may require an associate's degree. For transportation, the required license is needed. For skilled trades, the required certification is needed and, in many cases, some experience or acceptance into an apprenticeship program. For finance and accounting, any required certifications are needed and, frequently, an associate's or bachelor's degree. For computer related positions, any required certifications are needed and, in many cases, an associate's or bachelor's degree. For human services, an associate's or bachelor's degree is required. For engineers, an associate's or bachelor's degree is required. For child care workers, a HS diploma or HS equivalency, as well as any required certifications and/or experience, are required.

- c. Provide an analysis of the regional workforce.

The unemployment rate in the Western New York (WNY) Region was 6.2% in April 2021, down from a series high of 20.4% in April 2020, when most businesses shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The labor force rose from 621,100 in April 2020 to 637,700 in April 2021, up 16,600 over-the-year. The number of employed in WNY was 598,200 and the number of unemployed was 39,500. This information was provided by NYSDOL's Regional Labor Market Analyst.

The WNY region is experiencing a K-shaped economic recovery, in line with most of the nation. Industries that were able to take advantage of remote work options (i.e., information technology) have been able to rebound much faster than industries that cannot operate remotely (i.e., advanced manufacturing). This recession is unlike past recessions because it is both an economic crisis and a health crisis.

It is worth noting that the Unemployment Insurance rates above do not include discouraged workers, defined as people of legal employment age who are not actively

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seeking employment or who have not found employment after long-term unemployment, but who would prefer to be working. The data also does not delineate the large number of long-term unemployed individuals, i.e., individuals who have been unemployed for more than 26 weeks.

The current economic downturn is unlike others our nation has experienced. The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected working women. Among the factors affecting women are the need for at-home child care due to school closures/partial openings, family health concerns, and caregiver roles.

A 4/20/21 Time magazine article by Ciara Nugent states, "In the U.S. in March, women's labor-force participation had fallen to 57.4%, a level not seen since 1988. As the economy has rebounded from troughs of spring 2020, jobs have returned more slowly for women of color, with 10% fewer Black women and 9% fewer Hispanic and Latino women employed now than pre-pandemic, compared to 5% fewer white women. The World Economic Forum concluded in a March report that the pandemic had added 36 years to the estimated time it will take to close the global gender (pay) gap." Because COVID-19 is both a health crisis and an economic crisis, the negative impact on the workforce is difficult to determine. Another unknown is when formerly working women will return to the workforce.

The economic impact COVID-19 has more adversely affected minority populations and impoverished individuals than previous non-health related economic downturns. Minority populations had a higher COVID-19 infection rate, and both minority groups and those living in poverty were less likely to have the infrastructure to adapt to a pandemic, including wifi hotspots and laptops/tablets for online training and work.

The mass retirement of the baby boomer generation, known as the silver tsunami, has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with many boomers opting to retire instead of return to work. While some local businesses have begun training their next generation of workers, others will rely on local training providers and the LWDBs to prepare for future workforce needs.

The jobs of tomorrow will require skill sets that involve ongoing training and education. Our WIOA Youth programs are focused on improving both the soft skills and the in-demand workforce skills for eligible youth ages 14-26. Career Centers continue to upgrade their online offerings, as well as in-person workshops, to meet the needs of our region's youth.

Positive trends include the expansion of online training options, which will better serve those individuals who lack transportation or child care. Asynchronous online training will allow trainees to attend courses at the time and place that best suits their needs.

Another positive trend is that local employers are upskilling their existing workforce to fill vacancies caused by retirements and the pandemic. This upskilling has led to an increase in On-the-Job Training opportunities in some local areas as the vacated positions tend to be new hires in need of a month or more of training.

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The employment needs of businesses in demand sectors vary based on time of year, contract obtainment, retention, etc. Employment opportunities in all areas referenced above are posted on a regular basis, which is the basis for inclusion on the Demand Occupation List. When reviewing the Demand Occupation List, the WDBs' Training Committees are provided statistical analysis by the NYSDOL Labor Market Analyst and real-time feedback from American Job Center staff regarding jobs that remain unfilled due to a lack of trained job seekers. The Committees review and discuss the information provided to ensure that the proposed Demand Occupation List continues to meet the employment needs of the local community.

The WNY LWDBs continue to have ongoing conversations with local employers and training providers to address the current and future needs of our regional workforce.

## Regional Spending Plan

- a. Include a regional spending plan that includes administrative cost arrangements between LWDBs and the pooling of funds where applicable.

The LWDBs have established a regional spending plan that includes the pooling and sharing of training funding if one or more of the LWDBs runs out of training funding and/or one or more LWDBs is in danger of not spending their required 80% of WIOA funding. The regional spending plan also includes the ability to share administrative costs if a need or opportunity is identified by one or more of the LWDBs.

## Supportive Services

- a. Describe how supportive services will be coordinated throughout the region.

The LWDBs remain committed to coordinating supportive services if a need or opportunity is identified by one or more LWDBs. The LWDBs will share their supportive services policies for reference with all workforce staff in the region to ensure knowledge, consistency, and efficiency.

## Economic Development

- a. Describe how economic development and workforce investment activities will be coordinated in the region and specifically provide detail how continued coordination can further relationships between the region and its respective REDC.

LWDB initiatives and strategies are aligned with the WNY Regional Economic Development Council's (WNYREDC's) priorities, and LWDBs work closely with local chambers and Industrial Development Agencies. Through our collective efforts, we strive to further the WNYREDC's Implementation Agenda, including fostering a culture of entrepreneurship through referrals to the Small Business Development Agency, implementing smart growth through our support of such projects, preparing our

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workforce through career guidance and training opportunities, and utilizing our Demand Occupation List which is focused on WNYREDC identified areas such as Advanced Manufacturing, Health and Life Sciences, and Agriculture. Tourism is supported through customer service training initiatives as well as career pathway development and sector partnership building which is a continuing process. Additional work is planned in career pathway development and sector partnership building.

The WNY LWDB's goal is to continue to work closely with the WNYREDC, attend as many open WNYREDC meetings as possible, and actively participate on workgroups to ensure collaboration, seamless implementation, and coordinated initiative and program development in all aspects related to workforce development.

## Performance Accountability Measure Negotiation and Reporting Agreement

- a. Include an agreement concerning the Performance Accountability Measure Negotiation and Reporting. Performance Accountability Measure Negotiation and Reporting may be negotiated by LWDBs individually, involving strategies and methods collaborated on at the regional level. If this is the case for the region, include a statement that reflects that the measures were negotiated individually and any collaborative efforts devised and agreed to by the region.

The LWDBs agree to review quarterly performance reports with the goals of identifying performance issues, developing performance improvement plans, and implementing a unified approach. At the quarterly performance report review meetings, performance improvement plans will be reviewed for consistent implementation and effectiveness. Further guidance will be provided to workforce staff if needed. LWDBs will discuss Primary Indicators of Performance negotiations prior to the negotiation due date, ensuring coordination and collaboration.

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on performance indicators remains of great concern to the LWDBs. The region remains committed to achieving the performance indicators but recognizes the inevitable negative impact of the pandemic on performance outcomes.

## Public Comment

- a. Describe the process used by the region to provide a period of no more than 30 days for public comment and input into development of the plan by representatives of business, labor organizations, and education prior to submission.

Business representatives, NYSDOL Labor Market Analyst for the Western Region, WNY REDC, and local training providers were consulted where appropriate during Regional Plan development. The Regional Plan will be posted online on the local WDB websites for a period of no more than 30 days for public comment. Availability of the Regional Plan and the public comment opportunity may be advertised in local newspapers and/or posted on other media platforms. LWDB Board members and One-Stop Partners will be notified of the availability of the Regional Plan and public comment opportunity. After public comment opportunity has ended, each LWDB will review and respond to any comments.

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