

Niagara County Workforce Development Board (LWDB)

# Local Plan

July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2025, Modified April 2023

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## Strategic Planning Elements

Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs) and Regional Demand Lists are now maintained [online](#). Changes to the Demand Lists can be made by following the directions on the webpage.

I attest that the priority ranked list of the LWDA's demand occupations was last updated on [specify date in the text box below].

4/16/2021

How is this information shared with the Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB)? What was the last date on which it was shared?

The LWDB requested an updated Demand Occupation List from the NYSDOL Regional Labor Market Analyst, which was received 4/16/21. Updates to the NYSDOL website to reflect additions to the Demand Occupation List were requested 5/11/21. The Demand Occupation List is discussed at quarterly WDB meetings as changes occur. This information was last shared with the LWDB on 1/28/2020 when Demand Occupations were updated. The 4/16/21 updated Demand Occupation List will be shared at the next LWDB meeting on 6/9/21. Paper copies of the Demand Occupation List are also available at the One-Stop Career Center front desk upon request. The LWDA and Regional Demand Lists can be found online at [dol.ny.gov/lmi-workforce-planning](http://dol.ny.gov/lmi-workforce-planning).

a. Provide an analysis of regional economic conditions, including:

i. Existing and emerging in-demand sectors and occupations; and

In-demand sectors and occupations for Niagara include hospitality and tourism, retail, health and life sciences, advanced manufacturing, information technology, and transportation. These sectors encompass health occupations with ready-made career paths (such as HHA, CNA, LPN, RN, BSN and Masters in Nursing) as well as transportation occupations in which the career path will vary from employer to employer (such as CDL-A drivers, who may gain HazMat, forklift, or other extensions to advance in their career field). Emerging in-demand sectors and occupations in advanced manufacturing include those that require both manual skills and computer skills (such as CNC Machinist or Supply Chain Management). Emerging in-demand sectors and occupations in the health field include Pharmacy Technician, for which two local training providers offer training; and telehealth, allowing for remote treatment of certain patients. The health field has been highly impacted by the need to address COVID-19 concerns including contact tracing, COVID testing, treatment of COVID patients, and the use of telehealth to address the mental and physical health needs of our local community. Emerging information technology fields have arisen as a result of remote work, including new software applications and the increased need for secure websites and data strongholds. Retail stores have had to pivot to offering online ordering, vehicle pickup or delivery services, and acceptance of online payment methods. In the long term, it is anticipated that automation and Artificial Intelligence (AI) will impact demand sectors and occupations.

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Technological changes will lead to a growth in the customization of online applications for office work, retail work, and telehealth. Growth is anticipated in green energy and renewable energy occupations as both state and federal grants become available.

ii. The employment needs of businesses in those sectors and occupations.

Niagara 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.

Overall, there is a need for workers at all stages of the workforce, from entry level to professional level. The local area has seen an uptick in the number of On-the-Job Training contracts as employers are willing to hire individuals with little or no experience.

Niagara Falls is a world-renowned tourist attraction. The hospitality and tourism industries such as hotels and motels, tourist attractions, and tour guides have been hard hit by pandemic related job losses and are experiencing difficulty filling their current job openings. The closing of the Canadian border has negatively impacted the restaurants, retail stores, and shopping malls in border areas such as Niagara Falls, New York because Canadian citizens can no longer travel to shop.

The LWDB and Career Center staff recently hosted an outdoor Health Care Job Fair, which was sparsely attended despite outreach to over 1,000 UI recipients, hundreds of social agencies that assist job seekers, and advertising on various social media outlets. The 14 businesses in attendance concurred that they are receiving fewer applications, scheduling fewer interviews, and having only about 50% of those scheduled for an interview actually appear for their interview.

Per a 5/7/21 Buffalo News article by Christopher Rugaber, reasons for the dearth of job seekers include health concerns for job seekers with co-morbidities, the need for parents to provide home schooling and child care for their children, and a reluctance to return to work during a pandemic when UI and PUA funding meets their economic needs. As a result, some local employers are offering \$1,000 sign-on bonuses for Entry-level jobs. Other local employers have increased wage rates for those willing to report to work during the pandemic. It is unknown whether these worker shortages will have a lasting effect on the local economy.

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

The local area is well positioned to meet the needs of local businesses once the pandemic threat subsides. The local area has 15 approved training providers ready to address the training needs of local employers in in-demand occupations such as hospitality and tourism, retail, health and life sciences, advanced manufacturing, information technology, and transportation. The Demand Occupation List, List of Approved Training Providers, and the WIOA Classroom Training Funding application are available online at [www.worksource1.com](http://www.worksource1.com) and in the Career Centers.

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A regional partnership with Erie, Allegany, Cattaraugus, and Chautauqua has led to the development of a career path for the hospitality, retail, and tourism industries. WIOA classroom training funding is available for eligible individuals to upgrade their skills in this career pathway. For the retail industry, entry-level openings typically do not require training or prior educational attainment beyond high school or its equivalent. On-the-Job Training or classroom training are available for individuals preparing to advance to middle-skill and high-skill jobs in these sectors.

The health and life sciences fields have well established career pathways locally. WIOA funded classroom training is available for online, hybrid, and in-person training in a variety of health care and life sciences occupations.

Advanced manufacturing careers require both manual skill and classroom training. Both On-the-Job Training and classroom training funding are available for eligible job seekers.

Information technology careers require classroom training, and WIOA funding is available for eligible job seekers. Entry-level training is also offered at no cost through the SUNY ATTAIN Lab, including Microsoft Office Specialist, Microsoft Technology Associate, Microsoft Digital Literacy, and Intuit QuickBooks.

Transportation career opportunities have increased greatly during the pandemic. There continues to be an increased need for CDL-A drivers to deliver goods for consumer pickup or directly to consumers' homes. Two local training providers are approved for WIOA funding for this purpose.

c. Provide an analysis of the regional workforce, including:

i. Current labor force employment and unemployment numbers;

As of March 2021, the labor force employment for Niagara County is 97,000 versus 98,000 for March 2019 (pre-COVID-19 pandemic). There are 89,600 individuals employed in March 2021 as compared with 93,000 for the same month in 2019. The unemployment rate in March 2021 remains high at 7.7% versus 5.4% for March 2019.

ii. Information on any trends in the labor market; and

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 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

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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 working women will return to the workforce.

The local area is already experiencing an increase in closures of small businesses. There is also a decrease in earnings due to state restrictions on indoor business capacity levels for certain demand occupations such as hospitality, retail, and tourism.

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 as the vacated positions tend to be new hires in need of a month or more of training.

iii. Educational and skill levels of the workforce in the region, including individuals with barriers to employment.

(Statistics are based on 2020 EMSI data and 2019 American Community Survey data.) In 2020, 33% of Niagara County residents had a high school diploma or equivalent. In 2019, 11% of Niagara County residents had less than a high school diploma or equivalent. Another 20% of Niagara County residents had "some college" in 2020, with 14% attaining Associate's Degrees, 14% attaining Bachelor's Degrees, and 11% with Graduate Degrees or higher. More than 1/3 of our local residents do not have a high school diploma and another 1/5 do not have a college degree. White residents are 10% more likely to graduate from high school than Black residents. The disparity in high school graduation rates widens for other ethnicities as well, as seen in the chart below:

Niagara County Residents: Race and Hispanic or Latino Origin  
 % High School Grad or Higher in 2019 / % Bachelor's Degree or Higher in 2019

White alone	92.3 / 25.2
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	92.4 / 25.3
Black alone	82.4 / 13.5
American Indian or Alaska Native alone	78.9 / 12.4
Asian alone	80.6 / 46.8
Some other race alone	82.4 / 24.9
Two or more races	79.7 / 23.1
Hispanic or Latino Origin	83.0 / 23.8

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The implications for our local workforce are clear. The jobs of tomorrow will require skill sets that involve 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. The Career Centers continue to upgrade their workshop offerings, tailoring the content based on the needs of both job seekers and employers. Where appropriate, job seekers are referred to our Partner Agency, ON-BOCES (a designated NYS Literacy Zone) to improve their employability. Prior to WIOA classroom training sponsorship, math and reading literacy levels are assessed to ensure the trainee will be successful in their training of choice. Where appropriate, individuals are referred to Partner Agencies (ON-BOCES or NCCC) for remediation prior to training sponsorship. In the past two years, the LWDB Executive Director has actively participated in work groups and social justice committees to improve the economic opportunities for local residents, including: City of Niagara Falls Economic Justice Committee, Niagara County Restart Committee, Niagara Falls Food Action Plan, WNY REDC Remote Workforce Attraction Task Group, the weekly Niagara Open Coffee Chat, and the Slack WNY Startup Group. Continued participation will allow our local area to address the needs of both job seekers and employers as they emerge.

- d. Provide an analysis of workforce development activities, including education and training, in the region.
  - i. Identify strengths and weaknesses of these workforce development activities.

Strengths: Development of online and remote services, online training options.

Weaknesses: There is a need for a dedicated funding source for technology upgrades and the purchase of virtual recruitment/career fair software for local area usage. These upgrades will be necessary to keep pace with virtual service provision.

The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the disparity between job seekers possessing the resources and abilities to participate remotely in work search activities and/or training, and job seekers who do not have the adequate resources, skills, and/or knowledge to do so. The LWDB has advocated at both the federal and state level for programs that would provide equitable solutions such as affordable high-speed broadband internet, broadband subsidies, provision of wifi hotspots (currently \$15/month) to those who need them, and NYS DOL inclusion of low-cost laptops or computer tablets as an allowable WIOA training expense. Much like the textbooks students need, internet access and affordable laptops should be considered School Supplies for WIOA sponsored trainees. As the need for technology software, hardware, and related internet expenses becomes more crucial to opening the door to employment and training, the need to level the playing field becomes more urgent.

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- ii. Does the local area have the capacity to address the education and skill needs of the local workforce, including individuals with barriers to employment, and the employment needs of businesses? Please explain.

The 15 training providers and current labor market information will allow the local area to be positioned to meet the educational and skill needs of the local workforce and the employment needs of local businesses. The LWDB continues to pursue opportunities to expand WIOA training options, including assisting a local skilled trades training provider in gaining ETPL status. It is anticipated this training provider will offer skilled trades training that is not currently offered in the local area. The LWDB has reached out to local apprenticeship programs and attends SUNY apprenticeship remote meetings to learn ways to increase local business and job seeker engagement in these programs. The mass retirement of the baby boomer generation, known as the silver tsunami, has been discussed with local businesses. While some have begun training their next generation of workers, others will rely on local training providers and the LWDB to prepare for future workforce needs.

As detailed elsewhere in this plan, the local area has specific programs and grants to serve individuals with barriers to employment such as a Niagara County Probation Grant to serve ex-offenders, a DRC grant to serve individuals with disabilities, and a Literacy Zone partner to address literacy and numeracy barriers to employment.

The local area is in need of assistance to meet the needs of individuals whose barrier to employment is technological in nature, i.e., lack of reliable internet and lack of a device on which to access classroom training or complete training assignments.

- e. Describe the LWDB’s strategic vision and goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce, including youth and individuals with barriers to employment.

The LWDB's strategic vision/mission statement is: The goal of the Workforce Development System is to increase the employment, retention, and earnings of participants, and increase occupational skill attainment by participants, and as a result, improve the quality of the workforce, reduce welfare dependency, and enhance the productivity and competitiveness of the nation.

The LWDB employs WIOA Customized Training, Incumbent Worker Training, and On-the-Job Training to meet the needs of local employers for a skilled workforce today.

The LWDB employs WIOA Classroom Training and Youth Programs to meet the needs of local employers for a skilled workforce in the future.

Our partner agencies and training providers are adept at working with local employers to create employment and training opportunities tailored to the employers' future needs. For example, NCCC has convened local industry clusters to find out the skills needed for that industry and is tailoring their courses to meet those needs. ON-BOCES is in constant contact with local employers and new businesses to determine training options to be offered in the future. Green and clean energy training options are being explored by local training providers based on future business needs.

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WIOA providers are familiar with the services offered by the DRC, ACCES-VR, NYS Commission for the Blind, and various mental health providers in the local area. WIOA Youth with barriers are routinely referred to the agency best equipped to meet the needs of that particular youth.

- i. How do the local area’s workforce development programs, including programs provided by partner agencies, support this strategic vision?

Preparing an educated and skilled workforce is the focus of the LWDB and its partner agencies. ACCES-VR provides work supports and wrap-around services for individuals with disabilities while they access training or employment as well as On-the-Job Training. NCCC and ON-BOCES provide literacy and numeracy testing and remediation to prepare individuals for future training and employment, and offer training in in-demand occupations. Niagara Community Action Program provides supportive services such as a food pantry, weatherization assistance, child care resources, and supports for immigrants. Niagara County Department of Social Services (DSS) provides On-the-Job Training, transportation and child care assistance, and work readiness classes and routinely refers job seekers to the Career Centers. Native American Community Services of Erie and Niagara Counties provides a food pantry, TASC distance learning classes, an after-school program, and counseling services. Iroquois Job Corps provides skilled trades learning opportunities and wrap-around services for local youth. Niagara County Employment & Training Department administers WIOA programs and business services. NYSDOL administers Wagner-Peyser and UI related services. Niagara County Office for the Aging administers the Meals to Wheels nutrition program for seniors and provides non-credit courses to enhance the lives of senior citizens. Pathstone, Inc. offers career, employment, health and education services in the local area. A full description of the services offered locally can be obtained by visiting the partner agency links found at [www.worksource1.com/about/partners](http://www.worksource1.com/about/partners).

Together, these partner agencies allow us to provide a seamless array of services to meet the needs of both job seekers and businesses in our local area.

- ii. How will the local area, working with the entities that carry out the core programs, align available resources to achieve the strategic vision and goals?

The Local Service Delivery and Infrastructure MOU addresses the alignment of available resources and the implementation of the core programs. The One-Stop System Operator convenes One-Stop Partner Agency meetings every quarter to discuss ways to improve service delivery and ensure all partners are up to date on service offerings and local performance.

- f. Describe the LWDB’s goals relating to performance accountability measures. How do these measures support regional economic growth and self-sufficiency?

The LWDB has consistently met or exceeded its performance accountability measures in recent years. When performance data is provided by NYSDOL, it is reviewed by LWDB staff. Outcomes and areas in need of improvement are then communicated to WIOA

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staff. Ensuring proper data entry into the statewide database, OSOS, has been crucial to ensuring performance measures are met. The LWDB has implemented a mandatory WIOA Youth service provider orientation session to ensure provider staff are aware of the OSOS Services, Activities, Achievement Objectives, 14 Program Elements in the Design Framework, and appropriate Comments to ensure credit is received for the work they perform.

On the whole, current performance measures relate to improving the skill levels of individuals, increasing their employability, assisting them with job retention issues, and increasing their earnings to support self-sufficiency. Future economic development requires workforce development. Regional economic growth will require a well trained workforce possessing the skills and knowledge to meet the needs of employers.

## Local Workforce Development System

- a. Identify the programs, whether provided by the Career Center or any partners, that are a part of the local area's workforce development system, including:

- i. Core programs;

Niagara has the following core programs: WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth; Wagner-Peyser; and Trade Adjustment Act (TAA).

- ii. Programs that support alignment under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006; and

In addition to the core programs above, adult basic education services also integrate the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 funding. Orleans-Niagara BOCES, a local One-Stop Partner, is a designated Literacy Zone and provides literacy/numeracy testing, remediation, for-credit and non-credit training, and TASC/GED testing for both adults and youth. Niagara County Community College (NCCC), also a local One-Stop Partner, provides for-credit and non-credit training, literacy/numeracy testing, and remediation for both adults and youth. Iroquois and Cassadaga Job Corps provide educational services for youth and young adults. As of 2020, Job Corps is co-located in the Niagara Falls Career Center's partners' corridor.

- iii. Other workforce development programs, if applicable.

Niagara participates in the Disability Resource Navigator and NYESS Ticket-to-Work program. The Disability Resource Coordinator is co-located in the Niagara Falls One-Stop Career Center to serve individuals with disabilities.

Niagara also participates in a non-WIOA grant program through the Niagara County Probation Department to address the work readiness and employment needs of ex-offenders currently on probation. The local program meets or exceeds all performance measures in this pay-for-success grant.

- b. Describe how the local area will ensure continuous improvement of services and service providers.

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The LWDB actively participates in One-Stop Partner meetings and Workforce Development Group meetings. This allows monitoring of developing issues and opportunities to better align service provision. Strong partnerships have been established among the Partner Agencies by identifying common goals and values, and defining and instilling the joint vision of the Niagara One-Stop system. Ongoing cross training of staff, and multiple agency work teams, enable the One-Stop system to provide an integrated array of services that is responsive to business and job seeker needs. The primary indicators of performance and continuous improvement strategies have been internalized by Partner agencies to become a standard mode of monitoring progress toward goals. Partner agencies recognize the need to provide seamless service for job seekers and businesses, and to allow each customer to realize that they "have come to the right place" whenever they access the system. Frequent Partner meetings permit an ongoing dialogue regarding strategic direction, the needs of our customers, and the services offered by individual Partner agencies.

- c. Describe how eligible providers will meet the employment needs of local businesses, workers, and jobseekers.

Eligible providers have been meeting with local employers and have accessed labor market information through the LWDB to ensure they are meeting the future needs of our local economy. ON-BOCES has expanded its capacity to serve all geographical areas within the County by opening additional training facilities in Niagara Falls and Lockport. NCCC has expanded its course offerings to include 100% online training options and new technical training options including Machining, Welding, and Mechanical Technology. NCCC has also developed stackable microcredentials paired with internships and paid work experience; these offerings are on Niagara's ETPL and are eligible for WIOA classroom training funding. Several training providers are also exploring the benefits of pre-apprenticeship programs. The LWDB has worked in conjunction with the Niagara County Center for Economic Development, Niagara County Employment & Training Department, and the City of Niagara Falls Economic Development to assist Craft Technical Institute (CTI) with opening a training site in the City of Niagara Falls. WIOA classroom training sponsorship is anticipated once NYSED finalizes its approval of the new training facility. CTI intends to offer construction, heavy equipment operation, and other in-demand training at its Niagara Falls facility. CTI has partnered with the Niagara Falls City School District to offer pre-apprenticeship training to high school juniors and seniors in the near future.

- d. Describe the roles and resource contributions of the Career Center partners.

The resource contributions of Career Center partners are outlined in the Local Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Partner contributions are either in-kind contributions of staff or supplies for the Career Center (such as copy paper), or are monetary contributions according to the Local MOU. The roles of the Career Center partners are established by their funding entity. Regular Partner meetings ensure that all Career Center staff are well versed in the programs and offerings of the partner agencies. The Partner Referral Guide allows staff easy access to the programs and offerings of partner agencies. The Partner Referral Guide is updated regularly and distributed to all

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Partner agencies. A copy of the guide is readily available in the Career Center for easy access. The Partner agencies convene regularly for meetings conducted by the One-Stop System Operator. These meetings provide the opportunity to ensure service alignment and an ongoing understanding of the various services each Partner offers.

## Workforce Development and Career Pathways

- a. Describe how the LWDB will facilitate the development of career pathways, including co-enrollment in core programs when appropriate.

Niagara has entered into a Regional Sector Partnership with the Buffalo and Erie County WIB (BECWIB), Chautauqua County, Allegany and Cattaraugus Counties, with BECWIB as the lead agency, to pursue Career Pathways development opportunities. The local area has met with BECWIB to review findings on Career Pathways for the Hospitality and Tourism industries. This Regional Sector Partnership coordinates the development of career pathways in Advanced Manufacturing and in Hospitality and Tourism, convening regional sector partnership meetings in Western New York. The local board and local area plan to facilitate the development of career pathways in the Hospitality and Tourism industries as a first course of action.

The LWDB has conducted outreach to local training providers to encourage the development of career pathways, portable and stackable credentials, and microcredentials. The ETPL now includes programs that meet these criteria.

- b. Describe how the LWDB will improve access to activities leading to recognized postsecondary credentials.

The local board has an active Inclusion Committee to address the specific needs of "targeted Special Populations, serving targeted groups of customers such as veterans, individuals with disabilities, and other groups of individuals with a barrier to employment under WIOA". This committee and the board continue to evaluate and potentially expand the education and workforce services currently provided.

Niagara's Disability Resource Coordinator (DRC) service continues to be an expanding resource for center and system customers self-identifying as having a barrier disability. Through an expanded Ticket-to-Work/NYESS partnership and the LWDB's DRC, customers have access to benefits advisement, intensive case management, SSI/SSD work incentives and benefits education, job readiness planning, and training programs.

The LWDB has cultivated strong relationships with ACCES-VR and the NYS Commission for the Blind. Both entities regularly interact with the LWDB and Career Center staff and meet with their customers in the Career Centers. The LWDB's Inclusion Committee is chaired by ACCES-VR personnel.

In the past two years, the LWDB Executive Director has actively participated in work groups and social justice committees to improve the economic opportunities for local residents, including: City of Niagara Falls Economic Justice Committee, Niagara County Restart Committee, Niagara Falls Food Action Plan, SHRM Panel on Virtual Recruitment

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and Diversity, WNY REDC Remote Workforce Attraction Task Group, the weekly Niagara Open Coffee Chat, and the Slack WNY Startup Group.

- i. Are these credentials transferable to other occupations or industries (“portable”)? If yes, please explain.

Portability of credentials is one of the criteria for the Regional Sector Partnership Career Pathways. The microcredential courses on the ETPL meet the portability requirement, as do those courses with industry certifications such as Surgical Technology, Radiological Technology, Computerized Medical Billing, LPN, RN, CDL-A, HVAC, Phlebotomy, and Registered Apprenticeship programs in the region.

- ii. Are these credentials part of a sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over time (“stackable”)? If yes, please explain.

The new microcredentials that are on the ETPL are both portable and stackable. Credentials for the health care field, as well as credentials for hospitality and tourism, are stackable toward a degree through local training providers.

Credentials for the regional Hospitality and Tourism training are stackable toward a degree through local training providers including the University of Buffalo, Erie 1 BOCES, and community colleges. Regional sector planning included collaboration with Erie 1 BOCES and outreach to local businesses to ensure programs incorporate elements to meet the needs of local businesses and industries.

## Access to Employment and Services

- a. Describe how the LWDB and its partners will expand access to employment, training, education, and supportive services for eligible individuals, particularly individuals with barriers to employment.

The LWDB continues to collaborate with our partner agencies to develop solutions to increase accessibility of services for both job seekers and businesses. Through the MOU process, it is our goal to provide seamless service delivery to our customers. The LWDB has an experienced Disability Resource Coordinator in the Niagara Falls Career Center available to meet with individuals with disabilities and assist them with appropriate services for successful training and employment outcomes. The LWDB partners with the Workforce Development Group including ACCES-VR to host three annual career fairs. This year, the LWDB anticipates hosting at least four outdoor career fairs -- one in each of the three major cities and one in a large outdoor area -- to accommodate businesses and individuals during COVID-19.

Transportation is a perennial barrier to employment in the local area. The LWDB has revised its policies to allow transportation assistance including ride-sharing gift cards, bus passes, and a daily transportation allowance for those attending WIOA training. Ride-sharing gift cards and bus passes are also offered to regular Career Center customers who need transportation to/from a job interview or to/from a new job.

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Child care is another perennial barrier to employment in the local area. The LWDB has expanded its policies for WIOA Youth to include supportive services for both transportation, child care, and dependent care to meet this need. The Supportive Services Policy also addresses child care, dependent care, and transportation needs for Adults and Dislocated Workers in the local area.

Ex-offenders often struggle to connect with the workforce. Niagara County Employment & Training, one of the Partner agencies, participates in a pay-for-success grant through the Niagara County Probation Department. This grant allows NCET to assist ex-offenders who are on probation with accessing work readiness activities and gaining employment. NCET has been highly successful in this endeavor, meeting or exceeding all program goals.

Monthly Workforce Development Group meetings are held which include DSS, NCCC, BOCES, NCDED, ACCES-VR, NCET, and NYSDOL representatives as well as other agencies that serve local businesses and job seekers. These meetings address the future needs of the local business community and ensure that future workforce trends are addressed.

- b. Describe how the local area will facilitate access to services through the One-Stop delivery system, including remote areas, through the use of technology.

The LWDB has taken steps to ensure services are accessible remotely using virtual software applications, closed captioning functions, electronic signatures, and fillable forms posted online. This ensures accessibility for both business and job seeking customers in remote areas. The LWDB has revised its policies to allow for 100% online remote training. This policy encompasses synchronous, asynchronous, and hybrid (part online, part in-class) training options. Fillable forms and e-signatures are available for Classroom Training, On-the-Job Training, Customized Training, Incumbent Worker Training, and WIOA Youth programs.

Customers have the option of meeting with WIOA services staff in person or remotely via Zoom. The career center has created YouTube instructional videos for job seekers and has expanded its offerings on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter to attract customers using the technology with which they are most comfortable. Customers also have the option of visiting the career center in person.

The LWDB was an early adopter of Coursera online training when COVID-19 struck. Coursera offered free usage prior to NYSDOL's Coursera purchase. Local job seekers were able to access online training to upgrade their skills during the pandemic. The LWDB created custom emails to connect Coursera trainees with Career Center services such as resume updates to reflect their new training, or access to career counselors for assistance in re-connecting to the local workforce.

- c. Describe how Career Centers are implementing and transitioning to an integrated technology-enabled intake care management information system.

The career centers have streamlined the application process to ensure that job seekers or businesses are able to access information online or in person. Application forms for business and job seeker training are available in fillable forms, or by visiting the career

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centers in person. Career centers regularly share event calendars via email and on the website [www.worksource1.com](http://www.worksource1.com) to ensure the staff at each location can provide accurate information about availability of services.

Due to policy changes and technology purchases made early in the pandemic, most services for both job seekers and businesses can be accessed remotely. This includes initial assessments, career counseling, workshops, POD Group meetings, interviews with local businesses, and Meet the Employer events. Electronic signatures through DocuSign have proven to be invaluable for job seekers who do not have a scanner or printer, and for businesses to accelerate processing for training programs. Virtual Career Fairs are now offered through our partner agency, NSYDOL. The LWDB anticipates enhancements in virtual services once the NYS DOL Virtual Career Center software is accessible by One-Stop Career Center staff.

The Niagara Falls Career Center anticipates the installation of newly purchased ADA-compliant self check-in kiosks to streamline the customer experience and ensure greater security for personal identifiable information. Software has been developed by the Niagara County Information Technology Department to tailor information to the needs of Career Center staff. The Career Center is awaiting installation of two kiosks in the near future.

- d. Provide a description and assessment of the type and availability of programs and services provided to adults and dislocated workers in the local area.

The following programs and services are available to Adults and Dislocated Workers in the local area:

**Outreach, Intake, and System Orientation:** Outreach and education is conducted to promote awareness of the services available to local job seekers and businesses. Intake and System Orientation are conducted to determine the program(s) appropriate for the job seeking or business customer.

**Eligibility Determination:** Career Center or partner staff determine whether a customer is eligible to receive services from WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, or Youth programs. Documentation of program eligibility is placed in case file and OSOS.

**Initial Assessment:** Information is collected and assessed regarding a customer's current skill levels including literacy, numeracy, English language learning, work history, potential barriers to employment, employment goals, and supportive service needs. Options such as classroom training, OJT, incumbent work training, and soft skill training are discussed with customers during initial assessment. Where appropriate, customers are referred to services offered by partner agencies, community-based organizations, or other appropriate entities in the local area.

**Comprehensive Assessment:** The job seeker's barriers to employment goals, as well as their current educational and skill levels, are assessed to determine the customer's service needs. Under WIOA Title I, the comprehensive assessment is used to develop the Individual Employment Plan.

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**Individual Employment Plan:** In conjunction with the customer, and in alignment with the customer's choice, the career counselor identifies appropriate employment goals for the customer. The IEP outlines the services to be provided to achieve the planned goals, and the steps and timeline for the customer to reach those goals.

**Labor Exchange Services:** Career counselors and NYSDOL partner staff provide job referrals, placement services, labor market information on local demand occupations, information on nontraditional employment opportunities, development of a work search plan, placement in workshops, and advisement on maintaining work search records. Programs may require customers to maintain and submit logs of their work search activities. Labor exchange services also include customized screening and referral of qualified customers in training services to local businesses, and customized screening and referral of qualified associates.

**Unemployment Insurance (UI) Information and Assistance:** Career Center and UI staff provide information and assistance to individuals needing to file a claim for unemployment compensation.

**Labor Market Information:** Staff provides workforce and labor market employment statistics to job seekers to assist in the development of employment goals. Labor market information is provided to business customers to aid in the development and implementation of business plans, sector partnerships, and career pathways.

**Referrals to Programs:** All partner agency staff provide referrals and coordinate activities with other appropriate programs and services to address customer needs and promote future employability. Referrals may be made to partner agencies, community-based organizations, or other entities available locally to meet the customer's needs.

**Referrals to Supportive Services:** Partner agency staff provide customers with referrals to supportive services that assist the customer with their training and employment needs. The LWDB has a Supportive Services Policy outlining the services available for WIOA Adults and Dislocated Workers. Supportive services may include transportation, child care, dependent care, housing, interpreter services, legal aid services, and financial assistance with uniforms, books, fees, and school supplies.

**Career Planning and Counseling:** Career Center and partner staff offer one-on-one remote and in-person career planning and counseling sessions for Adults and Dislocated Workers.

**Short-term Pre-Vocational Skills Services:** Partner staff offer pre-vocational skills training to encourage the development of the skills necessary for customers to live independently and enter the workforce fully prepared to engage in employment.

**Classroom Training:** The local area offers eligible Adults and Dislocated Workers access to WIOA funding for in-demand occupations within the local area, in accordance with LWDB policies.

**Financial Aid Assistance:** Assistance is offered to establish eligibility, access, and apply for financial aid for training and educational programs. Because WIOA is the funding of last

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resort, Adults and Dislocated Workers entering Pell/TAP eligible training programs need to access these grants before accessing WIOA funds.

**On-the-Job Training:** The local area offers WIOA OJT reimbursements to local employers who hire eligible Adults and Dislocated Workers who will need to be trained by their new employer, in accordance with LWDB policies.

**Financial Literacy Services:** Partner staff and community-based organizations such as SUNY ATTAIN Lab and Consumer Credit Counseling Services provide workshops and one-on-one meetings to provide job seekers with the knowledge and skills needed to make informed financial decisions. Offerings include creating a budget, using a checking and savings account, and managing credit and debt.

**Workforce Preparation:** Activities are offered to assist job seekers in acquiring the basic academic skills, critical thinking skills, digital literacy skills, and self-management skills needed to be successful in the workforce. For adult education, these skills and activities are incorporated into literacy instruction. Orleans-Niagara BOCES, a partner agency, is the designated Literacy Zone training provider for the local area if basic skills training is also indicated. NCCC, another partner agency, also offers basic skills remediation training in the local area. Other community-based organizations such as SUNY ATTAIN Lab offer work readiness training and periodically host workshops for Adults and Dislocated Workers in the Career Centers.

**Out-of-Area Job Search:** Career Center staff provide information on labor exchange activities in other local areas, regions, and states. Career Center staff can connect job seekers to the American Job Center Finder to locate the nearest Career Center in a particular geographic area of the nation. For eligible Trade Act customers, financial assistance with relocation is offered.

**English Language and Integrated Education:** Training provider staff provide an integrated program of services that incorporate English literacy and civics education concurrently with workforce preparation and training for a specific demand occupation.

**Performance for the Local Workforce System:** Performance and program cost information for eligible providers of education, training, and workforce services is provided by training providers, including eligibility for additional financial aid sources. Assessment of services and outcomes will be completed through analysis of performance data provided by NYSDOL. Performance outcomes are discussed at quarterly One-Stop Partner meetings.

- e. Describe how workforce activities will be coordinated with the provision of transportation, including public transportation, and appropriate supportive services in the local area.

The LWDB's policies ensure that job seekers have access to transportation assistance in the form of bus passes, ride-sharing gift cards, or a daily transportation allowance for (1) regular customers of the Career Center needing transportation to/from interviews or to/from new employment, (2) customers accessing WIOA training services, or (3) enrolled

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WIOA Youth, when needed to travel to/from work experiences, training, TASC/GED courses, or unsubsidized employment.

- f. Describe the replicated cooperative agreements in place to enhance the quality and availability of services to people with disabilities, such as cross training to staff, technical assistance, or methods of sharing information.

The Local Service Provision and Infrastructure MOU details the cooperative agreement among the NYS Commission for the Blind, the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), and ACCES-VR. The LWDB and the One-Stop System Operator arranged for cross-training presented by NYS OTDA and NYS Commission for the Blind in April 2021 to ensure all Career Center staff were familiar with all assistive technology programs and hardware available in the Career Center. ACCES-VR has provided in-person workshops for staff on best practices when serving individuals with disabilities. The local Disability Resource Coordinator (DRC) is on site in the Niagara Falls Career Center and meets regularly with individuals with disabilities to provide career guidance and the work supports needed for successful employment outcomes. The DRC received a NYATEP award for creating a vehicle visor card to assist individuals with hearing difficulties as they interact with police. Assistive technology in the Career Centers was upgraded during the past year to incorporate newer, more accessible software and hardware. A WIOA Youth Counselor has been cross-trained in DRC duties and has completed the educational components required of DRCs. WIOA Youth programs and TANF Summer Youth programs have strengthened the referral process for younger individuals with disabilities and continue to refer individuals to the agency which will best meet their needs.

- g. Describe the direction given to the One-Stop System Operator to ensure priority for adult career and training services is given to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient.

The LWDB Veterans Priority and Priority of Service Policy ensures that priority is given to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, individuals who are basic skills deficient, and Military Veterans and their eligible family members. The One-Stop System Operator has been provided with a copy of this policy. Career Center staff are familiar with the priority of service and ensure these customers are given priority when accessing Center services. Career Center staff also ensure that those who are most in need are given first access to training funding when funding is limited.

- h. Describe how One-Stop System Operators and One-Stop partners will comply with the nondiscrimination requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (section 188), and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.) regarding:

- i. The physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs, and services;

The Career Centers are both easily accessible to individuals with disabilities and are in compliance with the ADA of 1990. In 2020, accessibility to the Niagara Falls Career Center was enhanced with the addition of a wheelchair lift. Instead of entering through a side door, now all customers enter through the same door, creating a more welcoming and

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inclusive environment. The Career Centers include software and hardware to accommodate individuals with hearing, vision, and mobility issues. The DRC provides periodic "On the Spot" trainings for Career Center staff to refresh their learning and understanding of best practices.

ii. Technology and materials for individuals with disabilities; and

Career Centers offer an external wheelchair ramp, and internal wheelchair lift, accessible restroom facilities, and the following software and hardware to assist individuals with disabilities:

**Zoom Text Fusion Professional:** Fusion is a tool for individuals with any level of vision impairment. Fusion provides the best of both worlds – ZoomText, with its screen magnification and visual enhancements for screen viewing ease, coupled with the power and speed of JAWS for screen reading functionality.

**Zoom Text:** ZoomText Magnifier is an advanced screen magnification program that enlarges and enhances everything on the computer screen, making the computer easier to see and use.

**JAWS:** Job Access With Speech, is the world's most popular screen reader, developed for computer users whose vision loss prevents them from seeing screen content or navigating with a mouse.

**ONYX Deskset HD:** Portable video magnifier that adapts to multiple environments and tasks for productivity. The 3-in-1 flexible camera provides document reading, distance viewing, and self-viewing modes with versatile controls.

**Read and Write:** Literacy Software that reads electronic text such as websites, email and documents created in word-processing programs. Read & Write helps writers with predictive spelling, word choice, dictionary and thesaurus features. The program includes voice dictation that also reads aloud what individuals write and helps them identify errors.

**Epson Perfection V600 Photo Scanner:** Quality scans from photos, slides and everyday documents. Scanned documents can then be read by Read and Write software or JAWS, or enlarged using Zoom text.

**Large Print Keyboard Black letters in yellow keys:** For visually impaired individuals, low and dim lighted areas, or seniors with poor vision. Color contrast makes it easier to see.

**Headphone with Microphone:** Full-featured and optimized for Unified Communications; Improved noise-canceling microphone ensures software application hears precisely what is said, free of extraneous, error-causing information.

**Kensington Trackball mouse:** Require much less wrist movement than a traditional mouse.

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Ergonomic Keyboard & Gel Wrist Rest for Keyboard: Keyboard with split and angled design makes it comfortable to use. Natural wrist alignment; Intuitive Zoom Slider; 1-touch functionality; improved number pad.

Ambidextrous Mouse & Gel Mouse Pad with Wrist Rest: Corded, ambidextrous comfort; responsive, smooth cursor control and precise tracking and easy text selection.

HP Computer & Privacy Screen for 23" monitor: Desktop computer and large monitor with privacy screen.

UbiDuo: Communication device for face-to-face, simultaneous communication for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

C\*Pen Reader Pen: Reads text aloud and uses dictionary to look up and explain words.

iii. Providing staff training and support for addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities.

Training on assistive technology and related software/hardware has been provided by the NYS OTDA, NYS Commission for the Blind, and the DRC. The LWDB, One-Stop System Operator, and Career Center staff seek out opportunities to improve our understanding and ability to serve individuals with disabilities.

iv. Describe the roles and resource contributions of the One-Stop partners related to the nondiscrimination requirements of WIOA (section 188), and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.).

The Local Service Provision and Infrastructure MOU outlines the resource contributions and roles of the One-Stop Partners related to WIOA section 188 and the ADA of 1990.

## Business Engagement

a. What strategies and programs, including training programs, will be used to facilitate engagement of businesses, including small businesses and businesses in in-demand sectors and occupations?

In-demand sectors and occupations for Niagara include hospitality and tourism, retail, health and life sciences, advanced manufacturing, information technology, and transportation. The LWDB is collaborating with WNY regional WDBs to create career paths in in-demand occupations. Through participation in the online Slack group for WNY Startups, the WNY REDC, the Buffalo Niagara Manufacturing Alliance, and the Niagara Open Coffee Chats, the LWDB continues to encourage the growth of information technology, transportation, and start-up businesses in the local area. The LWDB conducts many one-on-one Zoom meetings to aid new businesses and connect them to local resources. The Career Center Business Services Team and our Partner agencies engage with businesses to offer recruitment services, pre-hiring testing and skills assessments, interview space, work readiness and soft skills workshops, and direct access to WIOA programs such as Customized Training, On-the-Job Training, and Incumbent Worker Training. Local businesses have volunteered to conduct soft skills workshops and have presented at the Professional Opportunity Developers Group (POD) meetings. POD is a

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specialized networking group consisting of job seekers with management experience who are conducting a professional level job search. The One-Stop System Operator conducts Strategic Planning events with local businesses to survey upcoming needs for the local workforce. Staff and partners are provided with information to assist in business outreach and are informed about WIOA and TANF grant programs, regional partnerships and grants, CFA grants, and other business grants available through partner agencies or other entities. The LWDB has met with local apprenticeship program leaders to assess the pre-entry needs for their programs. Local apprenticeships have indicated that since COVID-19 began, the number of applicants has decreased significantly. They report that some applicants do not have a basic understanding of the apprenticeship training and are in need of interviewing skills. The local area will continue to strengthen the relationship between the mock interviews and soft skills workshops offered through the Career Center and our apprenticeship partners. The Career Center's Business Services team is creating and uploading YouTube videos to address work readiness, soft skills, and interviewing skills to allow job seekers remote access to career readiness guidance.

- i. If applicable, describe the local area's use of business intermediaries.

n/a

- b. What strategies or services are used to support a local workforce development system that meets the needs of businesses in the local area?

As detailed in Item a. above, the LWDB, its partner agencies, and the One-Stop System Operator are in daily contact with local businesses. This interaction allows for immediate feedback on the services we provide, the anticipated future needs for businesses, and ways to streamline the processes for service provision. During COVID-19, the LWDB and its partner agencies have pivoted to allow remote service provision for both businesses and job seekers. Electronic signatures, fillable forms and applications, and Zoom meetings have allowed us to continue to serve our businesses at a time of great need. The Career Center has begun offering remote Meet the Employer events, remote interviewing of candidates, and remote mock interviews for job seekers. To ensure we are meeting the needs of businesses, satisfaction surveys are provided to businesses upon completion of On-the-Job Training or Customized Training. Surveys are also provided to employers attending job fairs to ensure we are meeting the needs of local businesses.

- c. Describe how the local area's workforce development programs and strategies will be coordinated with economic development activities.

The LWDB and its partner agencies work very closely with the Niagara County Center for Economic Development (NCCED) and the Niagara County Industrial Development Agency (IDA). Monthly Workforce Development Group meetings ensure the LWDB, partner agencies, and NCCED are well informed about upcoming events, grant opportunities, and economic development strategies. NCCED collaborates with the LWDB and partner agencies where appropriate for local business retention or expansion efforts, or to attract new businesses to the local area.

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The LWDB confers regularly with the NCCED, NC IDA, Niagara USA Chamber, Invest Buffalo Niagara, City of Niagara Falls Economic Development, and Workforce Development Institute to ensure the needs of small businesses, start-ups, and established businesses are being addressed. The One-Stop System Operator confers regularly with the Greater Lockport Development Agency, Town of Lockport IDA, Lumber City Development, and Chamber of Commerce of the Tonawandas, and regularly participates in the Small Business Workshops offered through NCCED to address the concerns of local businesses.

- i. Describe how these programs will promote entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services.

The LWDB and its partner agencies encourage and promote entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services by meeting one-on-one with local start-up enterprises to ensure they have information on local tax incentives, energy incentives, assistance with site location and rental/purchase, and connections to the local workforce through the Career Centers. The LWDB has referred microenterprises to [www.score.org](http://www.score.org) for business mentorship and has provided connections to local IDAs or Economic Development agencies, such as the City of Niagara Falls or City of Lockport. Additionally, the LWDB is actively participating in the WNY REDC Remote Talent Attraction Work Group, which seeks to encourage ex-pats and local college graduates to return to the local area if they have work-from-anywhere jobs or are seeking to relocate due to the lower cost of living in the local area. Referrals are made to the NCCC Small Business Administration where appropriate.

- d. Describe how the LWDB will coordinate its workforce investment activities with statewide rapid response activities.

The LWDB regularly receives notification of Rapid Response activities from NYSDOL. The LWDB will continue to work with the statewide rapid response team to coordinate presentations to affected workers; workshops; retraining or reskilling activities such as TAA, classroom training, or On-the-Job Training; and access to any potential grant opportunities. Career counselors routinely attend Rapid Response meetings for affected Niagara County businesses and outline the many services available for affected workers.

## Program Coordination

- a. How do the local area's programs and strategies strengthen the linkages between the One-Stop delivery system and unemployment insurance programs?

Local NYSDOL and WIOA services staff provide coordinated re-employment services for UI customers. UI program information is used to target and serve a greater number of Dislocated Workers within the One-Stop system. NYSDOL, One-Stop, and WIOA services staff coordinate services under the Rapid Response program to better serve the needs of affected workers. The One-Stop Business Services Team coordinates efforts with NYSDOL staff to ensure local businesses receive assistance with job postings, shared work

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programs, HR assistance such as employee manual development, labor market information, recruitment events, Customized Training, Incumbent Worker, and On-the-Job Training opportunities. NYSDOL staff regularly assists with in-person Career Fairs and recruitment events hosted by WIOA staff and/or One-Stop Partner agencies.

- b. Describe how education and workforce investment activities will be coordinated in the local area. This must include:

- i. Coordination of relevant secondary and postsecondary education programs;

The LWDB's Youth Council includes members from each high school guidance office for the three major cities in the local area. The LWDB and WIOA services staff regularly meet with local high school guidance counselors and/or principals to encourage greater participation in WIOA Youth programs and Career Center offerings such as career fairs, resume preparation, interviewing skills workshops, and mock interviews. The LWDB has assisted in coordinating services with a local training provider interested in offering a Pre-apprenticeship program at a local city school district, and a new business interested in offering an after-school program in 3-D printing for high school students. WIOA Youth providers routinely meet with high school students on the school premises to connect them to appropriate WIOA and partner services. The LWDB maintains long-standing relationships with high schools, post-secondary educational institutions, and the local business community with the goal of leading tomorrow's workforce to access career opportunities.

- ii. Activities with education and workforce investment activities to coordinate strategies and enhance services; and

The LWDB has encouraged the development of pre-apprenticeship programs, such as one which is to be offered at a local high school. The LWDB has worked with Niagara County Community College to ensure the new Microcredential classroom training programs (which combine a Microcredential, an Internship, and a Work Experience) meet the qualifications for WIOA funding. To date, microcredential programs which are both stackable and portable have been added to the ETPL for: Disability Awareness Microcredential Plus Internship and Work Experience, and Early Childhood Studies Microcredential Plus Internship and Work Experience. The LWDB has revised the classroom training policy to allow for 100% online courses, hybrid (online and in-person) courses, and traditional in-person training options. The LWDB uses labor market data obtained from NYSDOL, EMSI data from Invest Buffalo Niagara, and apprenticeship programs to enhance service provision and training offerings within the local area.

- iii. A description of how the LWDB will avoid duplication of services.

Quarterly One-Stop Partner meetings and monthly Workforce Development Group meetings are held to ensure entities operating with the One-Stop system are aware of the services and service gaps in the local area. The One-Stop Partner Guide, a resource listing the services and contact information for the Partner agencies, is distributed to Partners and is readily available through the LWDB and Career Centers. Through these frequent interactions, non-duplication and maximization of resources is more closely achieved.

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- c. Describe plans, strategies, and assurances concerning the coordination of services provided by the State employment service under the Wagner-Peyser Act (29 U.S.C. 49 et seq.), to improve service delivery and avoid duplication of services.

Wagner-Peyser services are delivered to eligible participants in a timely manner. The LWDB and the local NYSDOL offices are co-located and are in regular contact to ensure a streamlined system of service provision and non-duplication of services. Shared business and job seeker event calendars prevent service duplication, and a coordinated reception area in the One-Stop Career Center ensures seamless service delivery to customers.

- d. Provide a list of executed cooperative agreements that define how all local service providers, including additional providers, will carry out the requirements for integration of and access to the entire set of services available in the local Career Center System. This includes agreements between the LWDB and entities that serve individuals eligible under the Rehabilitation Act. If no such agreements exist, provide an explanation why this is the case and/or progress towards executing such agreements.

The LWDB is awaiting approval of the Local Service Delivery and Infrastructure MOU by NYSDOL. The LWDB has MOUs in place with entities offering one or more of the 14 Program Elements for WIOA Youth programs, including: Consumer Credit Counseling Services, Close the Gaps, Health Association of Niagara County (HANCI), Iroquois Job Corps, Leadership Niagara, Niagara County Youth Bureau, Niagara County Employment & Training, Niagara Falls Boys & Girls Club, Niagara County Community College, Orleans-Niagara BOCES, and Will Motivates.

## Title II Program Coordination

- a. Provide a description of the LWDB's strategic vision and goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce, specifically addressing how to improve access to activities leading to a recognized post-secondary credential, as well as other strategies for serving out-of-school youth (OSY) and adults who have low literacy skills, are English Language Learners, or lack a high school diploma or the equivalent.

Through the LWDB's Young Adult and Youth Services RFP process, the LWDB specifically promotes programming and services that target out-of-school and at-risk youth, most of whom are low income and have at least one significant barrier to employment. Partners providing alternative secondary school services (or dropout recovery services) such as Niagara County Youth Bureau, Iroquois Job Corp, and Orleans-Niagara BOCES are involved in improving linkages and access through the career centers. Local school districts along with identified system partners play a key role by providing evidence-based dropout prevention and recovery strategies that lead to completion of the requirements for a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent.

The LWDB's Youth Council provides guidance and direction to local youth programs and the Board.

The Niagara County Literacy Zones provide a comprehensive network of community services to help system customers create pathways out of poverty. Adult literacy,

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remediation, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs are available through these partner programs. The Niagara Falls Housing Authority's SUNY ATTAIN Lab also provides TASC preparation, digital literacy, Microsoft Certifications, and career exploration opportunities. TASC attainment programs are offered through the local Literacy Zone and Title II Partners during both day and evening hours to accommodate the schedules of our local youth and adult populations. Title II Partner agencies are located throughout Niagara County to facilitate service delivery.

The LWDB encourages the expansion of connections among the Literacy Zones, SUNY ATTAIN Lab, community agencies, and service providers. The board will continue to work in conjunction with its Title II Partner agencies to enhance opportunities for vocational and post-secondary training that align with the needs of our local workforce and businesses.

- b. Provide a description of how the LWDB will expand access to employment, training, education, and supportive services provided through the NYS Career Center System for Title II participants with barriers to employment.

The LWDB has an Inclusion Committee to address the specific needs of “targeted Special Populations, serving targeted groups of customers such as veterans, individuals with disabilities, and other groups of individuals with a barrier to employment under WIOA”. This committee and the board continue to evaluate and expand the educational and workforce services as the need arises.

Niagara’s Disability Resource Coordinator (DRC) continues to be an expanding resource for center and system customers who self-identify as having a disability. Through an expanded Ticket-to-Work/NYESS partnership and the LWDB’s DRC, customers have access to benefits advisement, intensive case management, SSI/SSD work incentives and benefits, education, job readiness planning, training programs, career advisement, job referrals, and work supports.

- c. Identify how the LWDB will facilitate the development of a career pathways and co-enrollment in academic training programs.

Niagara has entered into a Regional Sector Partnership with the Buffalo and Erie County WIB (BECWIB), Chautauqua County, and Allegany and Cattaraugus Counties, with BECWIB as the lead agency, to pursue Career Pathways development opportunities. The local area has met with BECWIB to review findings on Career Pathways for the Hospitality and Tourism industries. This Regional Sector Partnership coordinates the development of career pathways in Advanced Manufacturing and in Hospitality and Tourism, and plans and convenes regional sector partnership meetings in Western New York.

The LWDB has met via Zoom with the Buffalo Niagara Manufacturing Alliance and Registered Apprenticeship programs in the local area to discuss the development of career pathways in the skilled trades and advanced manufacturing fields.

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The LWDB regularly attends the SUNY Apprenticeship bi-monthly meetings to increase local awareness of the SUNY career pathways offered by these apprenticeship opportunities.

The LWDB has worked with Niagara County Community College to ensure the new Microcredential classroom training programs (which combine a Microcredential, an Internship, and a Work Experience) meet the qualifications for WIOA funding. To date, microcredential programs which are both stackable and portable have been added to the ETPL for: Disability Awareness Microcredential Plus Internship and Work Experience, and Early Childhood Studies Microcredential Plus Internship and Work Experience.

- d. Provide a description of how the LWDB will support the strategy identified in the State Plan and work with the entities carrying out core programs and other workforce development programs, including those authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act to support service alignment.

The LWDB supports improved program accessibility and service connections for customers via technology such as through the center/system website, virtual services, closed captioning of virtual meetings, and individual partner sites as well as through improved physical center accessibility and increased direct access to partners and programs at the career centers. Once the State WDB reconvenes, the LWDB will support strategies that enhance local services and will implement recommendations for program improvement.

The LWDB also supports improved comprehensive system referrals, as well as increased alignment of activities, training, and resources that will lead to improved local employment outcomes. Local WDB support for the use of On-the-Job-Training (OJT), Customized Training, Incumbent Worker Training, Classroom Training, and WIOA Youth programs is demonstrated by the Board's policy improvements to streamline remote service provision during COVID-19. Changes were incorporated to allow for remote access to career counselors, career center services, partner linkages, and youth engagement activities during COVID-19. Local Business Services staff members work with local businesses to identify and develop effective custom training programs and to identify how training strategies such as OJT, Incumbent Worker Training, and Customized Training could be modified to increase business engagement.

The LWDB has worked collaboratively with the Niagara County Center for Economic Development, Niagara County IDA, and City of Niagara Falls Economic Development offices to encourage a new technical training provider, Craft Technical Institute, to open a training facility in the City of Niagara Falls. Work has involved site location and touring, planning for niche training offerings, and various incentives to make the site more affordable for this training provider. The LWDB continues to work with Niagara Falls High School, the Workforce Development Institute, and the aforementioned economic development agencies to establish a Pre-apprenticeship program in the Construction industries through Craft Technical Institute. Additionally, this training provider will offer courses that will qualify for WIOA funding once the NYS Education Department has approved their Niagara Falls training facility.

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The LWDB maintains strong relationships with local Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Centers and plans to continue including these Centers in local planning to address the needs of local employers. The LWDB is committed to identifying and supporting training programs that best align with the needs of businesses and bridge the skills gaps of job seekers and low skilled workers. The LWDB actively participates in the Regional Sector Partnership planning process which convenes key educational and business stakeholders to support targeted training development that meets local labor needs.

## Youth Activities

- a. Provide contact details of Youth Point(s) of Contact for your local area including: Name of organization, name(s) of Youth Point(s) of Contact, title, address, phone number, and email address. Youth Point(s) of Contact details are primarily used to refer young adults, parents, and partners about youth programs and posted on the [NYS DOL webpage](#).

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- b. Provide the number of planned enrollments in PY 2021 for new Out-of-School Youth (OSY), carry-over OSY, new In-School Youth (ISY), carry-over ISY, and work experience. \*

- i. New OSY

89

- ii. Carry-over OSY

10

- iii. New ISY

30

- iv. Carry-over ISY

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3

v. Work experiences

30

\*Please note that PY 2021 enrollments will provide the baseline estimate for the remaining three years of the Plan.

c. In Attachment F, Youth Services, located on the New York State Department of Labor (NYS DOL) [website](#) under the Local Planning section, identify the organization providing the Design Framework which includes: Intake & Eligibility, Objective Assessments, and Individual Services Strategies (ISS), and 14 Youth Program Elements and whether the provision of each element is contractual, with a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), or provided by the LWDB.

d. Explain how providers and LWDB staff ensure the WIOA elements:

i. Connect back to the WIOA Youth Program Design Framework, particularly the Objective Assessments and ISS; and

The LWDB has instituted a mandatory WIOA Youth Program Orientation session via Zoom, following contractual awards for each program year. The orientation session is intended to provide support to providers to ensure program success. The WIOA Youth case file forms for Objective Assessment, ISS, program eligibility determination, etc., have been standardized to ensure compliance with WIOA requirements; paper copies are provided to all WIOA Youth Program staff prior to the orientation session. Electronic copies of OSOS Guides, sample OSOS Comments, and applicable Technical Advisories and LWDB policies are provided to all WIOA Youth Program staff prior to the orientation session and are reviewed during the orientation session. Performance goals and OSOS entries for goals are reviewed, as well as the process for placing a WIOA Youth in work experience, how to complete and submit youth incentive payments, quarterly invoices and documentation, and completion of Quarterly Progress Reports. The LWDB has instituted mandatory Quarterly Progress Reports to be submitted by each WIOA Youth provider, including information on the number of WIOA Youth enrollments and expenditures for the current quarter and the next quarter of the program year. LWDB staff then compares this information to OSOS information to ensure entries are being recorded properly. The WIOA Youth Program Design Framework encompasses the 14 Youth Program Elements. The orientation session covers the necessity of providing at least 1 of the 14 elements to each WIOA Youth and the process for OSOS Services entry and OSOS Comments. The RFP for WIOA Youth Services includes the 14 Program Elements as a necessary component.

ii. Are made available to youth with disabilities by describing specific program practices, tools, and services that are tailored to serve youth with disabilities.

The Career Center's DRC, ACCES-VR, and the NYS Commission for the Blind refer youth ages 16-24 to the WIOA Youth and TANF Summer Youth Employment Programs. A WIOA Youth Counselor has completed DRC training as well and is well versed in the

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accommodations available for individuals with disabilities. Youth providers are trained to contact the DRC/ACCES-VR if a youth or their parent/guardian discloses a disability. The LWDB maintains a very strong relationship with ACCES-VR and the NYS Commission for the Blind. Both agencies use the Career Center for meetings with job seekers. Dennis Martinez of ACCES-VR is on the LWDB's Board, Executive Committee, and is Chair of the WDB's Inclusion Committee. Mr. Martinez also chairs the Workforce Development Group, a consortium of Partner and economic development entities which meets monthly.

- e. Describe successful models for youth services from your local area, including but not limited to virtual work experiences, OSY recruitment, and engagement strategies.

The LWDB instituted policy changes to allow WIOA Youth to complete Youth Engagement Activities virtually during COVID-19. The local area also reached out to local employers seeking remote work experiences during COVID-19. As a result, the local area was able to engage youth in work readiness and work experiences despite the closing of many local businesses that typically employ local youth. The LWDB has met individually with guidance counselors and/or local high school principals to encourage a stronger connection to WIOA Youth programs for their students and their graduating class. WIOA Youth staff regularly attend meetings for various social agency consortiums such as the Grigg Lewis Foundation, Community Services Group, Education Focus Group, Family Focus Group, Heart Love & Soul, Human Services Coalition, Lockport Association of Human Services, and Niagara County Mental Health Services Providers Group. In the pre-COVID era, WIOA Youth staff routinely maintained a presence in the guidance counselor offices of local high schools to meet with eligible youth and encourage them to avail themselves of WIOA Youth services. The WIOA Youth staff maintains a strong connection to the local DSS Office; DSS staff routinely distribute WIOA Youth flyers and program applications to potential program participants and encourage them to apply.

In 2020, the LWDB released RFPs and subsequently awarded contracts for Youth Outreach and Engagement Events and, separately, for Youth Outreach and Engagement Advertising. One target audience was gamers, or youth who may be disconnected from the workforce and disenchanted with their job search prospects. The WIOA Youth events were held virtually due to COVID-19. In 2021, the LWDB released an RFP and subsequently awarded a contract for Youth Outreach and Engagement Advertising. These steps are being taken to increase the awareness and engagement of youth ages 14-24 and their parents/guardians about the WIOA Youth programs offered locally, with the ultimate goal of increased WIOA Youth enrollments.

- f. Does your local area plan to serve ISY and/or OSY using the “Needs Additional Assistance” qualifying barrier for eligibility?

Yes (Attach a Needs Additional Assistance policy that defines reasonable, quantifiable, evidence-based, and specific characteristics of ISY and OSY as described in Technical Advisory (TA) #[19-2](#).)

No (Not required to attach a policy)

- g. Attach a Basic Skills Deficiency policy of youth program as described in the in TA #[19-2](#).

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## Administration

- a. Identify the entity responsible for the disbursement of grant funds as determined by the Chief Elected Official(s) (CEOs) or Governor.

Niagara County Workforce Development Board

- b. Describe the competitive process to be used to award subgrants and contracts for WIOA Title I activities in the local area.

The LWDB develops a Request for Proposals (RFP) in conjunction with guidance from NYSDOL FOTA and Program representatives to ensure compliance with WIOA regulations. RFPs are then reviewed by the County Attorney to ensure compliance with County regulations. The County Purchasing Department subsequently posts the RFP, ensures the RFP is distributed to entities on the bidder's list, and advertises the RFP. After the application deadline, proposals are forwarded to LWDB staff. RFP review process includes individual review and ranking by members of an ad hoc RFP Review Committee comprised of Board members, non-Board members and, where appropriate, a youth. Aggregate data from reviewers is compiled by the LWDB staff. The RFP Review Committee then convenes to discuss individual reviews and to determine a recommendation to the full Workforce Development Board. The full Board then votes on the RFP Review Committee's recommendations. Upon award, a contract is developed in conjunction with guidance from NYSDOL FOTA and Program representatives as well as the County Attorney. Once the contract has been fully executed, other bidders are notified that they were not selected for funding.

Records of the above transactions are retained according to the stricter requirement of either NYS or County records retention guidelines.

- c. Provide the local levels of performance negotiated with the Governor and CEO(s) to be used to measure the performance of the local area and to be used by the LWDB for measuring the performance of the local fiscal agent (when applicable), eligible providers, and the One-Stop delivery system, in the local area.

Niagara	FINAL Performance Goals for PY20 and PY21		
	Adult	Dislocated Worker	Youth
	2020	2020	2020
TARGET OUTCOME			
Employment Rate 2nd Qtr After Exit	69.00%	67.00%	69.50%
Employment Rate 4th Qtr After Exit	68.00%	67.00%	61.00%
Median Earnings 2nd Qtr After Exit	\$5,300	\$6,500	\$3,000
Credential Attainment 4th Qtr After Exit	42.80%	51.00%	55.70%

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Measurable Skill Gains	45.00%	45.00%	50.00%
	Adult	Dislocated Worker	Youth
	2021	2021	2021
TARGET OUTCOME			
Employment Rate 2nd Qtr After Exit	69.50%	67.50%	70.50%
Employment Rate 4th Qtr After Exit	68.50%	67.50%	63.50%
Median Earnings 2nd Qtr After Exit	\$5,400	\$6,600	\$3,100
Credential Attainment 4th Qtr After Exit	43.80%	51.50%	56.70%
Measurable Skill Gains	45.50%	45.50%	50.50%

- d. Describe the actions taken toward becoming or remaining a high-performing LWDB, consistent with factors developed by the State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB). The LWDB will be defined as high performing if it meets the following criteria:
- i. It is certified and in membership compliance;
  - ii. All necessary governance actions and items have been accomplished, including executing a local Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), selecting a One-Stop System Operator, and implementing all required local policies, etc.;
  - iii. All One-Stop Career Centers in the LWDA have achieved at least an 80% score in the Career Center Certification process; and
  - iv. The LWDA meets or exceeds all performance goals.

The LWDB is certified and meets membership compliance requirements. The LWDB has completed all necessary governance action, including submittal of a Local MOU which is awaiting NYS approval; selection of a One-Stop System Operator by competitive RFP process; and implementatino of all required local policies. All One-Stop Career Centers in the LWDA have achieved at least an 80% score in the Career Center Certification process. The LWDA anticipates meeting or exceeding all performance goals for PY20 once adjustments are made to the Measurable Skills Gain measures.

On 1/20/23, NYS Department of Labor issued TA #23-01, Serving Priority Populations and Priority of Service under WIOA Title I Adult Program. This TA introduced a new performance measure for Adult Priority Populations and necessitated revising the local area's Adult Priority of Service Policy. These changes required revisions to Career Center procedures and paperwork to ensure the local area will be able to meet the new performance measure in the future. WDB Policy for Adult Priority of Service was updated to reflect these changes; the policy was approved by the Board on 3/7/23.

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The LWDB has taken steps to improve the Board's understanding of its duties. A WDB member orientation session is held via Zoom when new Board members are appointed, and materials related to Board member duties are mailed to each new member. Pre-COVID, the LWDB Executive Director visited each Board member at their place of business for a one-on-one meeting to discuss ways to improve Board engagement. These meetings will be re-implemented once the COVID restrictions end.

The LWDB has also instituted a mandatory WIOA Youth Service Provider orientation session to ensure providers understand the OSOS data entry, program service provisions, and fiscal provisions of the program. LWDB staff is in weekly contact with WIOA Youth service providers, responding to questions as well as providing guidance for program success. Quarterly Progress Reports (QPRs) have been instituted for WIOA Youth programs to monitor progress toward programmatic, fiscal, and performance goals. QPRs are completed quarterly by each WIOA Youth service provider and include data on number of youth served, anticipated youth enrollments and spending for the coming quarter, and future planning for their program. This information is cross-referenced with OSOS data to ensure information is being captured correctly for performance goals. Meetings are held regularly to discuss progress toward performance goals for all WIOA programs.

Data regarding WIOA Youth service provider performance and a report by the One-Stop System Operator are shared at WDB meetings. During the past two years, the LWDB has worked diligently to improve its policies, procedures, program and fiscal monitoring as well as to ensure Board membership was brought into compliance.

## Training Services

- a. Describe how training services will be provided in the local area. This may include incumbent worker, on-the-job, and customized training programs.

In December 2020, the LWDB developed an Incumbent Worker Training policy to expand its offerings to the existing local workforce. Due to COVID-19, the LWDB developed policies for providing OJT during COVID-19 to allow electronic signatures and other remote service provisions. These policy changes have resulted in continuous service to local businesses during the pandemic. The WIOA services staff continues to provide these training services within the local area and has seen an increase in the interest in OJT from local employers. Wagner-Peyser and other Partner agencies continue to refer eligible job seekers, workers, and employers to these services.

Training services offered in the local area are based upon an assessment of labor market data, demand occupations, wage rates, local training programs and cost data, and the customer's need for training. Local funding allocations and priority of service are also taken into consideration where applicable. As part of the screening and development process for enrolling in an ITA, counselors work with each potential trainee to ensure that the resources needed to successfully complete the program are accessed, including Pell and TAP grants. Potential trainees are encouraged to access the maximum additional sources of tuition and school resources to allow WIOA resources to serve a greater

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number of trainees. Potential trainees receive an initial assessment, comprehensive assessment, and assessment for training appropriateness. The list of Eligible Training Providers and the list of locally approved training courses are available online and in the One-Stop Career Center. Upon approval for training, the trainee's school of choice and the local area will execute an ITA for the approved training.

Incumbent worker, OJT, and customized training contracts are developed by the WIOA services staff assigned to the Business Services Team. For all three training programs, the WIOA services staff vets the business (in conjunction with NYSDOL staff). A training outline is developed with the employer. The training candidate(s) are interviewed, documentation needed for program eligibility is obtained, and their current level of knowledge on the subject matter is determined. The WIOA services staff conducts the initial assessment, objective assessment, and makes a training determination. The WIOA services manager then approves the training determination. Forms for each step of this process were developed with guidance from NYSDOL program and fiscal monitors to ensure the documents meet WIOA requirements. The WIOA services staff and manager are responsible for data entry into OSOS for each trainee and employer. LWDB staff monitors the case file documentation and OSOS data entry to ensure WIOA requirements are met. The LWDB Fiscal Manager ensures documentation is appropriate for employer reimbursement, provides future funding analysis, and recommends the training budget for each program year for WDB Board approval.

- b. Describe how contracts will be coordinated with the use of Individual Training Accounts (ITAs).

The LWDB developed an ITA policy to allow 100% online, hybrid (online and in-person), and in-person training options; electronic signatures; and other remote service provisions during COVID-19 to ensure continued service for those in need of classroom training.

WIOA services staff coordinates signed contracts with eligible training providers on an annual basis. A potential trainee accesses the demand occupation list, list of approved training providers and courses, and WIOA classroom training application online at [www.worksource1.com](http://www.worksource1.com) or by contacting one of the two Career Centers. Applications are screened for appropriateness for potential WIOA funding. WIOA services staff then meets individually with the potential trainee for initial assessment, comprehensive assessment, individual employment plan, and documentation of WIOA eligibility. If appropriate, an ITA is developed by WIOA services staff. The training plan and funding are then approved by a WIOA services manager. The ITA is then signed and executed by both the WIOA services manager and the training provider. LWDB staff monitors ITAs to ensure both fiscal and programmatic compliance.

- c. Describe how the LWDB will ensure informed customer choice in the selection of training programs regardless of how training services are provided.

The Demand Occupation List, List of Approved Training Providers and Courses, and Classroom Training Application are available online for customers to explore their training options at [www.worksource1.com/training](http://www.worksource1.com/training). Paper copies are also available at the Career Centers. During comprehensive assessment and development of Individual Employment

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Plan, the customer's choice of training program and training provider are discussed to ensure the customer has selected training that will meet their employment goal.

## Public Comment

- a. Describe the process used by the LWDB 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 Western Region, WNY REDC, Invest Buffalo Niagara (which also provided EMSI data), Buffalo Niagara Manufacturing Alliance, labor organizations, SHRM Panel on Virtual Recruitment and Diversity, and local training providers were consulted where appropriate during Local Plan development. The Local Plan will be posted online at [www.worksource1.com](http://www.worksource1.com) for a period of no more than 30 days for public comment. Availability of the Local Plan and the public comment opportunity will be advertised in local newspapers. LWDB Board members, the local Workforce Development Group, and One-Stop Partners will also be notified via email of the availability of the Local Plan and public comment opportunity. After public comment opportunity has ended, the LWDB will review and respond to any comments.

## List of Attachments

Please complete all attachments listed below.

**Attachment A** – Units of Local Government

**Attachment B** – Fiscal Agent

**Attachment C** – Signature of Local Board Chair

**Attachment D** – Signature of Chief Elected Official(s)

**Attachment E** – Federal and State Certifications

**Attachment F** – Youth Services Chart

Original signature pages for Attachments C, D and E, must be delivered to NYSDOL in one of the following two ways:

- Electronic signature (if the LWDB has the capability for it) – Note that electronic signatures must follow the requirements and guidelines of the Electronic Signature and Records Act ([ESRA](#)). LWDBs choosing to submit signature pages via electronic signature may submit these pages via email with the Local Plan.
- Mail original versions – Hard copies of traditional signature pages may be sent to:

**Attn: Local Plan**  
**New York State Department of Labor**  
**Division of Employment and Workforce Solutions**  
**Building 12 – Room 440**

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**W. Averell Harriman Office Building Campus  
Albany, NY 12240**

All other attachments must be submitted via email with the LWDB Local Plan Template.

In addition to these attachments, LWDBs must provide copies of the agreements listed in the Program Coordination section of this template under [\(d\)](#). If possible, it is preferable to provide a list of hyperlinks to these agreements available on the LWDB website.

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