

Northwest Pennsylvania
Economic and Workforce Development
Blueprint Project

*Building a New Paradigm **Together.***

FINAL REPORT

May 2015

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Clarion University Small Business Development Center
Corry Area Industrial Development Council
DCED Regional Office
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Economic Development Corporation of Erie County
Economic Progress Alliance of Crawford County
Erie County Redevelopment Authority
Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership
Forest County Community & Economic Development
Franklin Area Industrial Development Authority
Gannon University Small Business Development Center
Girard Area Industrial Development Corporation
Governor's Action Team

Greenville Area Economic Development Corporation
Greenville Reynolds Development Council
Lawrence County Economic Development Corporation
Northwest Commission
Northwest Industrial Resource Center
Northwest PA CareerLink ®
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Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry and Tourism
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Steel Valley Authority/Strategic Early Warning Network
Technology Council of Northwest Pennsylvania
Titusville Community Development Agencies
Warren County Chamber of Business and Industry
West Central Job Partnership

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Mr. James Decker – Warren County Chamber of Business and Industry
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A Note from the Author

As with any project, there are undoubtedly questions about what more could we have done or would it be different if we had done one thing or another; indeed, in life we as individuals are our own harshest critics. However, the reality is that while a project has ended and a report has been written, the work is never done. This report and its companion piece (a regional skills gap analysis prepared by our colleagues at Thomas P. Miller and Associates) are part of a beginning. And with any beginning, a strong foundation is essential. It is my hope, and the hope of everyone who contributed to this project, that this “blueprint” report will be one part of a larger paradigm shift in economic and workforce development collaboration that benefits not only northwest Pennsylvania, but also serves as an example of best practices across Pennsylvania in the future.

David Zellers, Jr.

May 2015

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Introduction

The need for every community, region, state, and country to have the best possible trained workforce as a means of a diverse and vibrant economy is paramount in an increasingly competitive world. America's "Great Recession" at the start of the 21st century was a difficult experience for the public and private sector, but most of all for countless individuals whose careers and skill development were stymied or lost in a sea of changes. This crisis and its global ramifications have presented opportunities for renewed investment in regional economies and workforces as small business survivors reinvigorate operations and corporations look to "re-shore" manufacturing jobs that were once thought of as lost forever to globalization.

As technology continues to shrink the world in which we live, increased specializations of worker skills are at a premium. The need for stronger linkages between economic and workforce development professionals is paramount in order to not only attract strong employers to a region, but also to build, retain, and attract a highly and diversely skilled workforce. The post-industrial shift away from traditionally strong manufacturing sectors in many parts of the United States has created a crisis of dislocated workers, while at the same time spurred the invigoration of advanced manufacturing techniques and entrepreneurship. There is a positive momentum building again in the national economy that can and is making a real impact in northwest Pennsylvania and beyond.

The responsibility of each economic and workforce development professional is to help and create the best possible environment for the citizens, businesses, and communities to flourish. At its core, the relationship between economic development and workforce development is this: without successful workforce development the ability to attract and retain successful employers is lost for economic development, and without successful economic development the workforce professional will be unable to train individuals for skilled and high paying jobs in their jurisdiction. The natural linkages between the economic development and workforce development professions with respect to the citizens served and the resources expended are increasingly vital as the demands of a 21st century economy place a high premium on specialized worker skills in order for local and regional economies to sustain and thrive. It is not merely enough for a region to offer low costs for land or abundant financial capital; rather, the economic development and workforce development professionals serving a community must be aware of the amalgamation of their area workforce's skills, credentials, and expertise as well as that workforce's aptitude to learn and develop for attraction, retention, and growth of businesses large and small.

The primary goal of this project and this report is to provide the leaders and board members of northwest Pennsylvania's regional economic development and workforce development organizations with a blueprint to begin to build a collaborative and sustainable model for success. No one agency can do everything alone; rather, through cooperation, trust, respect, and shared leadership goals the region as a whole can put forth a vision for achievement in economic and workforce development. These efforts to collaborate cannot be done in a pell-mell or disjointed way. The further development

and strengthening of ties between workforce and economic development can be accomplished through rigorous analysis of the citizenry and businesses collectively served as well as demonstrating jointly that through partnership more can be offered. Collaboration will signify to the public that a holistic and combined approach with an eye towards alacrity of service delivery is being constituted.

The competition between states for the best workforce is very real and very immediate. In order for Pennsylvania to develop a true 21st century economy it, will need to continuously push its economic development and workforce development professionals to share information, strengthen private sector relationships, and to collaborate in increasingly creative, innovative, and effective ways. The relentless drive to develop any region's economic prosperity is tied to the resources it offers businesses; human capital is paramount in the minds of the economic development, workforce development, and business community. In time, using the findings of this project combined with other economic development and workforce development collaborations, the region can set the bar for public sector service delivery, cooperation, and ingenuity.

The success of these efforts can serve as the beginning of a larger paradigm shift in the economic development – workforce development dynamic. By utilizing the concepts discussed in this report and building a sustainable collaborative model in economic and workforce development, northwest Pennsylvania will be uniquely positioned coming through a period of change to now step to the vanguard of effective and efficient delivery of workforce development services to its citizens, communities, and businesses. Through working together to create new opportunities for collaboration, the region and the Commonwealth's economic development and workforce development stakeholders stand to learn, grow, and succeed in the years to come.

Project Background & Methodology

For the purpose of compiling the information contained herein, the Northwest Pennsylvania Economic and Workforce Development Blueprint Project was broken into several parts that were completed simultaneously beginning in spring 2014 and continuing for approximately one year. The impetus for this project was an audit conducted by the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry (L&I) that called for a restructuring of the workforce development system's oversight and operations in northwest Pennsylvania. Recognizing the critical need for an effective and efficient workforce development system, members of the Northwest Pennsylvania Partnerships for Regional Economic Performance (NW PREP) began design of this project in late summer 2013 and first proposed the idea to the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) in September 2013. Subsequently, the regional partnership submitted a proposal and application under DCED's *Discovered in PA, Developed in PA* (D2PA) program in spring 2014 and the project began shortly thereafter.

The project research is in three parts: region based, county by county focus groups; best practices research focusing on other Workforce Investment Areas; and an academic literature review highlighting some of the program and policy areas that fall under workforce and economic development collaboration. Within the northwest region, in order to collect direct feedback from a universe of private and public sector stakeholders in the six counties (Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Venango, and Warren Counties) that make up the Northwest Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board's (NW WIB) jurisdiction, a focus group was convened by an economic development organization representing each respective county. Each meeting was conducted by a professional facilitator and lasted approximately one and a half to three hours. The goal of a meeting was to generate ideas and catalogue the expectations of the attendees as to how economic development and workforce development organizations in northwest Pennsylvania could work better together to maximize impacts and service delivery. At the end of each session, the participants were asked to rank the ideas generated to form a consensus county-by-county of what the top ideas and/or expectations were.

Beyond the northwest region, the project participants visited several workforce investment areas to learn directly about not only the best practices being utilized, but also the experiences and challenges being faced when it comes to economic and workforce development collaboration. Regions were chosen by the project team with a preference being on those regions with similar socio-economic, infrastructure, and/or demographic traits; once selected arrangements were made to meet with the leadership of these other workforce investment areas and the project participants were asked to volunteer and participate in each visit. To ensure the accuracy of the information received, each workforce area interviewed reviewed, edited, and approved the notes taken before they were added to this final report.

Also included in this report is a literature review which summarizes academic research conducted on a variety of topics related to the northwest region's economic and workforce development situation. The literature review is focused primarily on research from the last five years and ties together a variety of workforce topics, from the aging workforce to the potential of regional collaboration. The articles reviewed as part of this report only begin to scratch the surface of the total amount of research information available. The goal of the literature review is to be a first step in a process of continual analysis and measurement by qualitative and quantitative means to contrast and compare the progress and actions of northwest Pennsylvania's workforce and economic development activity within a larger global context.

Additionally, beginning in the fall of 2014 the project team facilitated region-wide meetings to bring leaders together to learn more about the research as well as unique collaborative and educational initiatives that can inform the future plans of northwest Pennsylvania. The first of these meetings was held on November 17th, 2014 at Grove City College. Presentations were made by the Northwest Commission, the Oh-Penn Interstate Region, and the Fort LeBoeuf School District from Erie County, Pennsylvania. The Northwest Commission discussed the NW WIB area county focus group meetings. The Oh-Penn Interstate Region made a presentation on their history and development and provided insight into how economic and workforce development can better collaborate. Lastly, the Fort LeBoeuf School District made a presentation on its Center for Post-Secondary and Career Discovery, a unique education opportunity for high school students incorporating parents and guardians as well as community partners.

The next region-wide meeting was held on February 24th, 2015 at Grove City College. Presentations were made by the Northwest Commission and Thomas P. Miller and Associates. The Northwest Commission provided information to attendees on the literature review that was completed for the final report as well as an overall status update on two regional economic and workforce development collaboration projects. Thomas P. Miller and Associates, represented by two members of its project team for northwest Pennsylvania, briefed attendees on its research activities related to regional skills gap issues and training providers. They also asked for feedback as to what additional research stakeholders were interested in as the regional skills gap analysis project was moving towards its completion in June 2015.

This report was finalized and sent to the printer for publication in May 2015. All of the information contained herein is considered to be accurate as of publication date.

NW WIB County Focus Groups

Beginning in August 2014, a focus group was convened by one or more economic development agencies in each of the NW WIB's counties. The attendees of these meetings came from the private sector, education sector, and county/local government as well as representation from non-profits and other non-governmental entities. At the start of each meeting, participants filled out a short survey that asked them to indicate with which sector they most closely identified with as well as to provide some basic information on their most immediate thoughts about northwest Pennsylvania as a whole, the economic development situation in northwest Pennsylvania, and then the workforce development situation in northwest Pennsylvania (the survey instrument can be found in Appendix B). Attendees were then given a short explanation of the project and some background on the NW PREP partnership of economic development and workforce development agencies. Each meeting was facilitated by Ms. Kathryn Lima of Faro Enterprises using a modified version of what is known as the "six-hats" method (meeting agenda/structure document can be found in Appendix A).

At the conclusion of each meeting, the attendees were asked to rank the ideas generated with a green, blue, yellow, and red sticker. The colors corresponded to the following key:

- – Highest priority idea of all generated.
- – Second highest priority idea of all generated.
- – Third highest priority idea of all generated.
- – Lowest priority idea of all generated.

A total of sixty-nine (69) individuals participated in the meetings region-wide. The largest group of attendees was those who identified as being from the private sector and the second largest was public education professionals. A breakdown of the attendees for the project as a whole and county-by-county can be found in Figure 1 and Figure 2:

Figure 1 – Regional Focus Group Meeting Attendees – Project Total

Project Totals		
Meeting Participant Sector/Role	Number of Participants	Percentage of Total Participants
1) Private Sector - Executive/Owner	9	13.0%
2) Private Sector - Human Resources	12	17.4%
3) Private Sector - Management/Fiscal	6	8.7%
4) Private Sector - Other	1	1.4%
Subtotal Private Sector (1,2,3,4)	28	40.6%
5) County/Local Government	14	20.3%
6) Public Education Professional	15	21.7%
7) Other	12	17.4%
8) Declined to Respond	0	0.0%
<u>TOTAL</u>	69	100.0%

Figure 2 - Regional Focus Group Meeting Attendees - County by County Breakdown

Meeting Participant Sector/Role	Clarion - Number of Participants	Clarion - Percentage of Total Project Participants	Crawford - Number of Participants	Crawford - Percentage of Total Project Participants	Erie - Number of Participants	Erie - Percentage of Total Project Participants	Forest - Number of Participants	Forest - Percentage of Total Project Participants	Venango - Number of Project Participants	Venango - Percentage of Total Project Participants	Warren - Number of Project Participants	Warren - Percentage of Total Project Participants	TOTAL - Number of Project Participants	TOTAL - Percentage of Total Project Participants
1) Private Sector - Executive/Owner	4	44.4%	2	22.2%	2	22.2%	0	0.0%	1	11.1%	0	0.0%	9	13.0%
2) Private Sector - Human Resources	0	0.0%	3	25.0%	2	16.7%	0	0.0%	5	41.7%	2	16.7%	12	17.4%
3) Private Sector - Management/Fiscal	3	50.0%	0	0.0%	2	33.3%	1	16.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	6	8.7%
4) Private Sector - Other	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	100.0%	1	1.4%
Subtotal Private Sector (1,2,3,4)	7	25.0%	5	17.9%	6	21.4%	1	3.6%	6	21.4%	3	10.7%	28	40.6%
5) County/Local Government	3	21.4%	1	7.1%	2	14.3%	3	21.4%	3	21.4%	2	14.3%	14	20.3%
6) Public Education Professional	3	20.0%	1	6.7%	4	26.7%	2	13.3%	2	13.3%	3	20.0%	15	21.7%
7) Other	2	16.7%	3	25.0%	4	33.3%	0	0.0%	1	8.3%	2	16.7%	12	17.4%
8) Declined to Respond	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	15	21.7%	10	14.5%	16	23.2%	6	8.7%	12	17.4%	10	14.5%	69	100.0%

Warren County Meeting – August 20th, 2014

A total of ten (10) attendees came for a meeting organized by the Warren County Chamber of Business and Industry (WCCBI). The following items were expressed during the discussion as ideas, concepts, and/or expectations for the future of collaborative efforts between economic and workforce development agencies in northwest Pennsylvania. At the conclusion of the meeting, the attendees were asked to rank from amongst all of the items their top three priorities as well as the one item each felt was not a top priority or was not best addressed in the immediate future by the collaborative efforts of workforce and economic development. The items listed below are in the order that they were presented in the meeting:

- 1) A greater or more agile response from the economic and workforce development agencies. ●●●
- 2) Emphasize specialized and soft skills development in training and education. ●●
- 3) Better communication with the private sector. ●●●●●●●●
- 4) Improved collaboration with state education officials. ●●●●
- 5) Address need for training in STEM, IT, and technology based fields (or at least the concepts in those fields). ●●●
- 6) Enhance the size and “depth” of the labor pool. ●●●●●●●●
- 7) Better marketing to attract workforce and to retain youth in the labor pool. ●●●●●●●●
- 8) Develop training programs to keep youth in the local labor pool. ●●
- 9) Develop infrastructure and lifestyle/cultural opportunities to enhance labor pool. ●●●●●●●●
- 10) Engender trust amongst responsible stakeholders and private sector. ●●
- 11) Envision labor market and private sector needs 3-5 years in advance. ●●●●
- 12) Forecast for needs based on economic and regulatory trends/expectations. ●●
- 13) Hold quarterly meetings to discuss upcoming needs amongst key stakeholders to discuss training needs, business needs, opportunities, etc. ●●●●●●●●●●

14) Collaborate with local industry to enhance training resources (equipment, opportunities, etc.).



It should be noted from the results that some attendees over-voted when it came time to rank priorities (this instructional error was corrected in all future meetings); however, the overall pattern that can be extrapolated from the results is only further reinforced by the over-vote. That is to say that ideas 3, 13, and 14, which all received some of the highest vote totals for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd priority respectively, deal with enhancing communication and collaboration with the private sector. Furthermore, 13 and 14 directly speak to the need not only to enhance communication with the private sector, but also to go a step further to offer insight on the type of discussions needed and the possibility of better utilizing private sector insights and resources to facilitate enhanced service delivery to citizens, while achieving higher coordination between economic and workforce development agencies.

Enhancing communication and collaboration is only part of the story; the question was raised as to how agile can the workforce system be? If one extends that thinking, then it is prudent to further consider how agile a collaborative arrangement can be as well. When considering agility, resources and the efficient use thereof is one factor to consider. For an idea like 14, agility would require being able to quickly and effectively reallocate resources be they training facilities, equipment, or fiscal support. Participants recognized that political stakeholder support was key to such an undertaking, but also expressed during the conversation of ideas 2 and 3 the importance of school district and PA CareerLink ® involvement.

Some of the discussion touched on apathy and motivation. Participants expressed concern that workforce resources should be focused first on individuals who were motivated to work and learn new skills. This was not to say that soft skills development should be ignored (it was the third idea brought up in the meeting), but as the idea rankings show it was not an overall high priority. The discussion of soft skills and worker motivation would occur in all following meetings, but in Warren County it did not dominate the conversation in the same way and was addressed as much as an issue of motivation and apathy as it was a central workforce training issue.

Another trend that emerges from the items discussed is the need to improve the retention of youth in the local labor pool and to develop the means to enhance the skills and ability of that labor pool both amongst the current citizenry as well as through the attraction of new workers to the area. As noted in idea 6, the size of the labor pool is one issue (and that is a pool that continues to shrink), but also of concern is the “depth” of said pool. “Skilled labor” is a term that is often bandied about, but defining it in an increasingly technologically advanced world is more difficult. Additionally, the discussion spent some time talking about experienced workers getting ready to retire and the effects this will have on businesses. It is reasonable to consider the decades of skilled experience that countless workers have brought to the labor pool. As such, not only is the pool getting smaller as

people move away and retire, but also the “depth” of the workforce is also shrinking at a similar (or perhaps greater) rate as a consequence.

Building on the concerns of an aging workforce, there was additional discussion about how this singular challenge will very soon affect two critical sectors: the building trades and agriculture. Whereas in agriculture increased mechanization means that fewer individuals would be needed to fill the positions of retirees, the same cannot be said for the building trades. Attracting the younger workforce to these sectors is important for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that they are both essential economic activities. Furthermore, both agricultural and building trades can offer younger workers the opportunity to be their own bosses through entrepreneurship. Finding farms and service businesses (plumbers, HVAC, mechanics, etc.) that are “turnkey” operations is very possible and can be very lucrative. Participants also noted the important role of agriculture as a region (and statewide) economic driver. Pennsylvania is still dominated by the agriculture industry and this trend can be expected to continue for the foreseeable future as one participant expressed.

Erie County Meeting – August 21st, 2014

A total of sixteen (16) attendees participated in a meeting organized by the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership (ERCGP). The following items were expressed during the discussion as ideas, concepts, and/or expectations for the future of collaborative efforts between economic and workforce development agencies in northwest Pennsylvania. At the conclusion of the meeting, the attendees were asked to rank from amongst all of the items their top three priorities as well as the one item each felt was not a top priority or was not best addressed in the immediate future by the collaborative efforts of workforce and economic development. The items listed below are in the order that they were presented in the meeting:

- 1) Create measures/metrics for school districts to tie together achievement and support systems for workforce.
- 2) Support proven strategies for workforce development.
- 3) Better connect employers to PA CareerLink® and job seekers. ●●●●●●●●
- 4) Better demonstrate career options to youth through business engagement. ●
- 5) Develop a “project management” based system to weave together various economic and workforce development stakeholders and integrate organizations. ●●●●●●●●●●
- 6) Link unemployed workforce to jobs and get them skills needed to fill jobs. ●
- 7) Address cultural and curriculum concerns to get youth workforce ready. ●
- 8) Direct training resources to ensure manufacturing is included in youth programs. ●
- 9) Greater agility & responsiveness to meeting emerging and/or short-term needs. ●
- 10) Development of adult education programs that utilize available resources. ●●
- 11) Better outreach to parents regarding career and education options that do not require a four-year degree. ●●●●●
- 12) Conduct outreach through a targeted local campaign that espouses the idea that work is an “honorable” pursuit. ●●●

- 13) Increase competitive level of regional economic and workforce development agencies against those in other regions (i.e. make our region a stronger competitor against other places through collaboration). ●●
- 14) Address cultural concerns regarding the use of public resources as it relates to encouraging workers to engage in career development.
- 15) Create a regional academy that trains workers to a national standard in manufacturing. ●●●●●●●●
- 16) Development of a “common-core” type of training program in the trades, technology, and STEM fields. ●●●●●●●●
- 17) Create an adopt-a-class program from the elementary schools onward through high school to nurture youth and encourage engagement in education and career development. ●●●

Better communication and better connections both within the economic-workforce development agency matrix and with stakeholders beyond it are key points to come from the Erie County meeting. Overwhelmingly, idea number 5 received the most votes for highest priority. This general concept was discussed in other counties; what makes it unique in Erie County is that it was suggested that it be based on a project management model. Essentially, this would mean that leadership in the collaborative effort would be based upon organizational expertise and success at leading previous cooperative efforts. Furthermore, a project management based approach would allow for detailed study of results and a continuous cycle of planning, doing, and analysis across multiple projects. Additionally, it can keep stakeholders engaged with multiple entities without allowing for a single entity to be liable for everything all at once and for a more agile response by the collaborative network of partners.

The idea that work is an “honorable” pursuit spurred a tremendous amount of conversation. Indeed, this very basic idea was related back to several other ideas mentioned during the meeting both prior to and after it, such as idea 17. A common concern expressed was that changing societal norms are affecting the ability to attract individuals who are determined to work and can bring the character needed to show up on time, be open to continued learning, and interact with co-workers and clients in a positive way. Soft skills development has been a core component to the concerns expressed regionally; in Erie County the conversation gravitated towards the motivational factors of why someone would want to (or not want to) develop the basic skills of professional conduct. When the conversation focused more on younger workers, participants expressed concern that youth do not have a solid understanding of the true value of a paycheck and what things actually cost, let alone an ability to manage household expenses. As such, without that basic understanding it was seen as impacting youth motivation to enter the workplace and to desire career advancement opportunities.

Concern about training opportunities was another overarching theme from the ideas generated in Erie County. Eight of the ideas put forth (1,2,6,7,8,10,15, and 16) all speak to training concerns. Furthermore, ideas 15 and 16 received some of the highest aggregate vote totals, but the priorities go in opposite directions. Creating a regional “academy” to train workers to national standards was considered a top three priority by ten of the participants, but seven participants voted that development of a “common-core” style standard for training programs for the trades, technology, and STEM fields was the lowest priority of all ideas generated. While this can be perceived as contradictory, it is also worth exploring the idea that curriculum development is not enough; rather, if a region was to create an institution or academy that undertaking would undoubtedly require strong curriculum development along with a plethora of resources to raise it to a national standard.

As with other counties, time was spent discussing the need to introduce parents, educators, and students to the opportunities that careers in manufacturing can offer. One issue raised as a concern in Erie County was how accomplish this in a society where safety and security are paramount; in other words, how can manufacturing facilities open their doors to families without compromising safety and security, as well as the integrity and proprietary technologies involved in their manufacturing processes? While this is not an insurmountable concern, it does merit consideration as a paradox; modern and advanced manufacturing is cleaner, safer, and more skill intensive than ever, but getting people into the door to see it and be a part of it is still subject to the same concerns that have existed at heavy industrial facilities for generations. Even with concerns such as these, participants were overwhelmingly positive about exposing students and others to the potential careers manufacturing can offer.

The Erie County meeting was the only one to discuss the PA CareerLink ® system at length (in other counties, it was mentioned in passing mostly as part of the workforce system). This part of the conversation centered on idea 3 and participants suggested a number of things. First, the consensus was that for the PA CareerLink ® system to work, employers needed to be more engaged in the system and more aware of services. As a corollary, some participants stated that they wanted to see a system wherein there was as much done for the “hirer as for the hire” and an improvement in candidate screening in order to improve new hire retention and success. This quest for efficiency in the use of resources already available was also part of the discussion for ideas 5 and 6. Participants saw the benefits of utilizing pre-existing entities and organizations; the desire is to see maximization of service delivery and capacity.

Crawford County Meeting – September 11th, 2014

A total of eleven (11) attendees came for a meeting organized by the Economic Progress Alliance of Crawford County (EPACC) and the Titusville Community Development Agencies (TCDA). One attendee abstained from completing a survey and voting on priorities because while they oversee a Crawford County entity, they do not live in Crawford County. The following items were expressed during the discussion as ideas, concepts, and/or expectations for the future of collaborative efforts between economic and workforce development agencies in northwest Pennsylvania. At the conclusion of the meeting, the attendees were asked to rank from amongst all of the items their top three priorities as well as the one item each felt was not a top priority or was not best addressed in the immediate future by the collaborative efforts of workforce and economic development. The items listed below are in the order that they were presented in the meeting:

- 1) Create more funding sources for worker education. ●●●
- 2) More flexibility in the use of training funds. ●●
- 3) Drug use/abuse prevention strategies and programs. ●●●●
- 4) Improve access to appropriate mental health and drug treatment facilities.
- 5) Increase outreach to middle school and high schools students, their parents, and school staff (educators, counselors, principals) about manufacturing as a career path. ●●●
- 6) Develop a character education program for youth. ●●●●
- 7) Improve access to adult literacy and mathematical programs.
- 8) Improve soft skills along with life skills programs for adults. ●●●
- 9) Increase outreach to people who need awareness of and motivation to attend soft skills training. ●●
- 10) Improve basic math skills and blueprint reading skills for workers in construction and trade industry. ●●
- 11) Identify barriers that are preventing people from entering the workforce. ●●●
- 12) Identify the lead agency or agencies responsible for economic development and workforce development collaboration. ●●●●●

- 13) Generate higher level discussions amongst elected officials and other high-ranking economic and workforce development stakeholders. ●●
- 14) Find ways to expand access to community college-type education in the region. ●●●●●
- 15) Create a volunteer program for unemployment compensation (UC) recipients. ●●●
- 16) Create adult-to-adult mentoring programs to encourage workforce participation. ●●●

There was no single idea that garnered a significantly higher vote total for first priority in Crawford County. Rather, the results show that the primary and even secondary priorities identified are a mixture of training concerns, soft skills related issues, and the need for better collaboration amongst and communication from the responsible economic and workforce development agencies. The only immediate discernible pattern from the ideas generated is that the later in the meeting the idea came up, the more likely it was to be ranked as lowest priority.

One unique take away from the Crawford County meeting's idea generation phase was the time spent on the issue of mental health both in the county and regionally. This discussion was tied to substance abuse issues as well as the general strain on the health care system in the county to address the mental health needs on citizens. There was also a brief conversation on veterans, mental health, and the workforce. Military veterans are seen as some of the best, if not the very best, technically trained individuals for any workforce as well as exceptional leaders; however, there were concerns expressed regarding the need for this region (or any for that matter) to be able to provide adequate mental health services for veterans in light of the last decade plus of increased conflict and operational tempo.

An idea that stands out from the Crawford County meeting is idea 11. Here again, the concept of barriers to employment was part of other county meeting conversations, but in Crawford County (much like with the mental health concerns) it was articulated more directly. While it was one of the last ideas expressed during that phase of the meeting, barriers to employment can mean very different things to individuals. In the context of the meeting discussion, it dealt with child care. However, ideas that address drug abuse, soft skills, and motivation can all be interpreted as being part of the "barriers to employment" conversation.

Furthering the issue of potential barriers, the conversation addressed the mindset of many working-age individuals and as in other counties the concern regarding motivation in the workforce came up. Specifically, time was spent discussing the unemployment compensation (UC) system and the worry that many individuals who have been out of a job for a long time had lost motivation to reenter the workforce. While it cannot be equivocally stated when and if a person facing a long term unemployment situation has or would lose motivation, it is a concern for a number of reasons. Primarily, reaching that audience may be difficult and it is important to engage as much of the

working-age population as possible. Secondly, participants expressed concerns that the perception of a large, unmotivated working-age population could be a detriment to the region being able to sustain training programs for workers and overall economic development initiatives.

Additional study of the ideas generated in Crawford County reveals one other concern: basic skills development needs. Again, this holds with the other county meetings. But, because there is no discernible highest priority, the approach may be to focus on solutions that touch on multiple concerns, such as motivation and professionalism or ensuring workers have basic literacy and arithmetic skills. Furthermore, if the lack of basic skills is identified as a fundamental barrier to employment (and this is a logical assumption to make), then it is prudent to examine the problem as more than just a skills development issue. If the barriers are directly tied to the lack of basic skills, it presents an immediate opportunity for collaborative efforts (combined with industry input) to implement programs to remove skill barriers. Other societal factors such as motivation or substance abuse may not lend themselves as easily to such an immediate solution; but by engaging in solving one challenge, it may pave the way to address the other barriers under better circumstances.

Venango County Meeting – September 16th, 2014

A total of twelve (12) attendees came for a meeting organized by the Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry and Tourism (ORA). One attendee left the meeting prior to the ranking of priorities. The following items were expressed during the discussion as ideas, concepts, and/or expectations for the future of collaborative efforts between economic and workforce development agencies in northwest Pennsylvania. At the conclusion of the meeting, the attendees were asked to rank from amongst all of the items their top three priorities as well as the one item each felt was not a top priority or was not best addressed in the immediate future by the collaborative efforts of workforce and economic development. The items listed below are in the order that they were presented in the meeting:

- 1) Streamline workforce and economic development outreach and responsiveness.
- 2) Focus on technical skill development and resources. ●●●●●●
- 3) Increase focus on curriculum development for high priority positions. ●●
- 4) Breakdown silos between training and education providers.
- 5) Align training to workforce needs. ●●●●●●●●
- 6) More internships and co-ops for high school students in technical fields. ●●●●●●●●●●
- 7) Greater emphasis on soft skills development.
- 8) Promote programs that can improve soft skills development and credentials for students.
- 9) Enhance understanding of the need for appropriate social and hospitality skills. ●
- 10) Retain talent from within the region and attract new talent to the region. ●
- 11) Develop economy as a means of retention and attraction of workforce. ●●●
- 12) Diversify industry base in the region. ●●●●
- 13) Build a better “spirit” of community. ●●●
- 14) Development housing stock and have readily available information to assist people moving to the region. ●●●●
- 15) Change unemployment compensation system to align with industry needs.
- 16) Increase economic development and workforce responsiveness to match the speed of business.
- 17) Increase communication between workforce and economic development stakeholders. ●●

18) Educate students on opportunities in STEM careers regionally. ●

Training needs dominated the voting in Venango County. Overwhelmingly, ideas 2, 5, and 6 carried the most votes for first and second highest priority and all of those speak to the need for talent development. The ideas also demonstrate a concern for the need to keep the local workforce in the region and to develop talent internally. This is something that was expressed in other counties and in particular aligns with the concerns expressed in Warren County regarding the “depth” of the regional talent pool. Conversely, idea number 3, which discussed the development of tailoring curriculum for high priority positions, received two votes for lowest priority. Attendees recognized the need for the skill and talent development, but how best the attendees felt this could be achieved is open to further interpretation based on the voting results.

The Venango County meeting was the only meeting in which drug abuse or the inability of potential or current employees to pass a drug test was not explicitly mentioned. However, again the results show the need for the development of soft skills. Specifically, some time was spent discussing idea 9 and the lack of social skills demonstrated by younger workers in the retail and hospitality sectors. While the idea itself only received one vote (for third highest priority no less), the conversation focused on the lack of a friendly “hello” when customer entered a store for example. Such concerns about hospitality-based businesses and the need for a more pleasant demeanor of those employed are not unique in the cultural zeitgeist as concerns abound about the continued decline in the quality of customer service levels.

Furthering the soft skills conversation were ideas 7 and 8. One of the challenges recognized in the discussion of the need for better training in the most basic job skills (showing up on time, motivation, maintaining respectful dialogue with supervisors, etc.), was identifying where and when that kind of training needs to begin both in society and in the workforce development system. As in other meetings, questions were raised about what role schools have in providing this kind of training and when they should begin doing it versus the role of the family in providing this type of guidance. Participants expressed concern about the inability to keep younger workers motivated and engaged for long term employment.

Ideas 1 and 16, focusing on the collaboration aspect between workforce and economic development, are important to note. While similar ideas were expressed in other counties, in both cases the discussion that accompanied each idea was oriented towards a need for greater alacrity and enhanced flexibility in service delivery. In both Venango County and Warren County, the first idea generated focused on the need for enhancing collaboration; however, in Venango County the conversation did not also ask the question of just how agile or quick the system can be as was raised in Warren County. Additionally, in the Venango County meeting, the participants tied ideas 1 and 2 together directly during the discussion phase of the meeting and concluded that by focusing on the opportunity for increasing jobs, increasing the utility and efficiency of programs, and increasing

effectiveness were all possible by embracing both ideas. While idea 1 did not receive any votes, idea 2 was the far and away the favorite of the participants.

Forest County Meeting – September 18th, 2014

A total of six (6) attendees came for a meeting organized by the Forest County Office of Community and Economic Development. Several invitees from the private sector were unable to attend at the last moment; however, given the relative size of Forest County to the rest of the region the smaller representation is understandable. The following items were expressed during the discussion as ideas, concepts, and/or expectations for the future of collaborative efforts between economic and workforce development agencies in northwest Pennsylvania. At the conclusion of the meeting, the attendees were asked to rank from amongst all of the items their top three priorities as well as the one item each felt was not a top priority or was not best addressed in the immediate future by the collaborative efforts of workforce and economic development. The items listed below are in the order that they were presented in the meeting:

- 1) Bring businesses and workforce to the region that readily serves the region's growth needs.
- 2) Help business owners nearing retirement with succession planning. ●
- 3) Create a training program to motivate workers towards career development. ●●●●●●
- 4) Encourage small business owners to get additional training in human resources (HR) and other business development activities. ●●
- 5) Encourage entrepreneurship amongst younger workers and keep them in the region. ●●●●
- 6) Increase financing opportunities for rural start-ups.
- 7) Increase awareness of available economic and workforce development services.
- 8) Identify opportunities for younger workers to step into leadership roles. ●●
- 9) Address poverty and associated social issues that hinder educational attainment. ●●
- 10) Educate workers on career opportunities that do not require a four-year degree.
- 11) Develop a co-op and internship program for high school students.
- 12) Encourage business owners to participate in co-op and internship programs.
- 13) Increase communication amongst business owners and workforce and economic development stakeholders.

- 14) Educate parents and students on the opportunities offered at county vocational education (vo-tech) schools.
- 15) Increase programs to train workers in the building trades and support entrepreneurs in those fields. ●●●
- 16) Explore ways to overcome topographical and infrastructure challenges. ●●●●

Forest County is unique amongst not only just the counties of the northwest, but also all counties in Pennsylvania. It has a small permanent population, but a seasonal population tripling the number of people in the area who enjoy the recreational activities and tranquil setting. Those coming to Forest County are more often than not semi-permanent residents who own the ever harder to define and quantify “camps”. Additionally, Forest County has bountiful natural resources and natural beauty that can be leveraged for responsible economic and workforce development. The challenge is how best is the county served and how can it grow while embracing its unique characteristics and heritage? For example, the participants talked about the needs of the county as a whole, but recognized that for Forest County’s businesses and residents the region’s overall health was vital. This discussion covered the fact that while the county is home to a large state correctional institution, the perception (either based in fact or not) is that most of the workers there do not live in Forest County. Rather, they just pass through it on the way to and from their homes and workplace.

Training concerns as well as motivated workers were discussed in Forest County in a very similar manner to the other counties. What differed slightly was more conversation focused on not just building a motivated workforce, but finding younger individuals with a motivation geared towards business ownership. While idea number 3 was the overwhelming highest priority and addressed the need for training as a whole, half of the ideas overall addressed the need for business start-up assistance, transition planning, and/or enhancing opportunities for younger workers to become leaders and more experienced and educated as to how a business works. Participants agreed that the owners of many of the businesses that service the regular and temporary populations of Forest County are aging and that the loss of these businesses would have a cascade effect. Additionally, the group agreed that it was important for businesses and entrepreneurs to recognize that overall Forest County’s population is aging and that this fact could create an opportunity for businesses as well as a need to ensure workers are trained to both replace the aging workforce and to service the needs of the retired population.

Related to the highest priority of training and motivation, the participants also expressed concern regarding the availability of services in Forest County. Several ideas (notably 2, 4, 7, and 13) touched on the need for existing business owners and residents to have access to workforce training and economic development assistance. All participants were aware that economic development services and workforce development services are available from providers stationed outside the county, but there is no singular location for all of these services to be obtained within the county. As a corollary,

infrastructure and topography were discussed and the idea of overcoming them was discussed (idea 16), but it was also ranked as the lowest priority item by more than half of the participants.

Participants recognized that there are very real challenges to service delivery in Forest County. An important take away from this would be that the economic development and workforce development service providers that serve Forest County (such as PA CareerLink ®, the SBDC, the IRC, etc.) can work together to better coordinate scheduling of services and seek efficiencies in co-locating and staffing thus improving service in Forest County. Such a cooperative effort would be relatively simple and could be tackled as a positive first step in enhanced collaborative efforts while also giving Forest County enhanced service and addressing the uniqueness of the county's situation.

Clarion County Meeting – September 23rd, 2014

A total of fifteen (15) attendees came for a meeting organized by the Clarion County Economic Development Corporation (CCEDC) in conjunction with the Clarion University Small Business Development Center. The following items were expressed during the discussion as ideas, concepts, and/or expectations for the future of collaborative efforts between economic and workforce development agencies in northwest Pennsylvania. At the conclusion of the meeting, the attendees were asked to rank from amongst all of the items their top three priorities as well as the one item each felt was not a top priority or was not best addressed in the immediate future by the collaborative efforts of workforce and economic development. The items listed below are in the order that they were presented in the meeting:

- 1) Collaborate to better educate the region's workforce. ●●●●●
- 2) Conduct assessment of the region's workforce to determine needs. ●●●●●●
- 3) Conduct SWOT analysis of the region to determine direction(s) for improvement.
- 4) Determine the skills needed to attract new industry and to fill current job openings.
- 5) Recognize and maximize the opportunities in the tourism industry. ●●
- 6) Better promote the area for business attraction. ●●●●
- 7) Emphasize education of trade skills for industry. ●
- 8) Find ways to retain younger workforce in the region. ●●●●●●●
- 9) Change the perception of vo-tech schools to demonstrate career opportunities and academic possibilities. ●●●
- 10) Improve curriculum for workforce training in hospitality/tourism. ●●●
- 11) Educate students more in-depth in the fields of economics, business, and entrepreneurship. ●
- 12) Teach students and employees the value of customer service. ●●●●●
- 13) Work with educators to develop curriculum that is applicable to career opportunities and job openings. ●●

- 14) Create programs for soft skills development.
- 15) Create programs for mid-career workers to learn more about technology. ●●●
- 16) Address concerns regarding drug abuse, basic skills, and soft skills in younger workforce.
- 17) Reach into schools and homes to develop work ethic programs. ●●●●●●●●●●
- 18) Understand and educate how the role of government regulation affects workforce development, economic development, education, and business. ●●
- 19) Identify leadership and stakeholders and engage them in economic and workforce development challenges. ●●
- 20) Develop youth-to-youth mentoring and leadership programs to educate the younger workforce on soft skills, work ethic, and professionalism. ●●

While the highest vote totals for top priorities went to ideas that deal with understanding the region's workforce as a whole and creating better training and education opportunities, more than any other meeting, the Clarion County discussion was heavily focused on youth. This conversation on youth included the development of the younger workforce, the retention of the region's youth population, and the challenges of getting younger workers motivated and able to work at an acceptable level. Along these same lines though, attendees delved into the appropriateness of workforce or economic development agencies addressing the motivation factor and talked about the role of family and schools. This is best evidenced in the number of lowest priority votes received for ideas 12 and 17 in particular.

Anecdotally, one private sector attendee shared a story that their business had hired well over four hundred individuals in the course of a year, but that in the end only one-twelfth of those hired were still employed. The reason for why the others were not employed ran the gamut from poor work attendance to lack of basic work skills to the inability to pass a drug test. Several other employers and educators expressed concerns about failed drug test and the need to have the entirety of the working age population (and younger) understand the consequences of failed drug tests and poor attitude.

Engaging the younger workforce can be difficult. One concern raised regarding the need to train youth on proper professionalism (appearance, showing up on time, proper attitude, etc.) was: Where are the lines of responsibility delineated? How schools, businesses, and parents/guardians work together on this problem without blurring the lines of responsibility is a challenging societal issue. However, the positives of this focus on youth far outweighed the concerns raised. Outreach to parents and students were seen as vital in retaining the region's population (and therefore potential

workforce size). As in other meetings, the point was raised that parents, students, and educators need to understand that a four-year degree is but one path for career attainment. Additionally, it is very possible for high school age students to develop technical skills and academic skills; for younger workers who can arrive in their mid-20s with technical acumen and a post-secondary degree they will find themselves well suited to excel in an increasingly competitive and complex job market.

Another issue that was raised several times was a need to fundamentally understand the region's workforce now and what the region's workforce needs to be. This is best expressed in ideas 1, 2, 3, and 4. It began the meeting discussion and was returned to at later points; there was a recognition that tying an analysis of the region to the future was important rather than making changes or trying new things for the sake of change and being different. Ideas 10, 13, and 15 for example all lend themselves to this concern. Number 15 in particular stands out because unlike many of the other ideas covered it does not focus on youth. Rather, it recognizes the inherent need to provide additional skills development to mid-career workers. Many, if not most of the individuals who could be defined as such, would be individuals who have established their career track and are beyond the need for soft skills and basic professional skills development making them the most sought after workers.

Lastly, the Clarion County meeting also touched on the need to engage stakeholders in continued collaborative discussions to help identify priorities and responsibilities as well to ensure that someone (or some conglomeration of organizations) are keeping an eye on the "big picture." The Clarion County meeting was the only meeting in which a participant asked what exactly workforce development is and how it is effectuated in the region; in all other meetings workforce and economic development were discussed in somewhat nebulous terms. Put another way, people don't quite know what it (workforce and/or economic development) is, but they believe they know when they see it. What is telling from this predicament is that while public agencies cannot get too distracted by marketing efforts that may be seen as "patting themselves on the back," it is critical to get the message out as to what services are offered and how those services are making a real impact in communities throughout the region.

Facilitator's Insights – Ms. Kathryn Lima, Faro Enterprises

Ms. Kathryn Lima of Faro Enterprises acted as facilitator for the county meetings. As such, she was asked to prepare a brief essay detailing her insights. She submitted the essay below on Friday, November 14th, 2014:

Among the challenges of facilitating an idea-generating meeting with community leaders are:

- to keep the focus on generating ideas;
- to assure that every participant feels comfortable offering his/her ideas, and that no one individual monopolizes the discussion; and
- to make sure that the ideas are recorded in such a way as to accurately reflect the intentions of the contributors.

The structured facilitation process we used allowed us to meet those challenges. By clearly defining and adhering to the time lines established for each segment of the process, participants could be confident that their time would not be wasted.

The process also separated the idea-generation activity from the evaluation and discussion portion. By waiting until after all ideas had been listed before discussing the pros and cons of each idea, we were able to elicit a larger number of ideas from most of the participants without getting bogged down on one or two ideas. The discussions about the relative merits of each idea were held in separate segments. In fact, the participants generated so many ideas that they seemed to have a hard time prioritizing because of the sheer volume of choices. We consider that a positive.

At every session of this project the attendees seemed to be enthusiastic and exhibited a sincere desire to help. We experienced no negativity, no attempts to dominate the meeting, no pre-conceived agendas. Although each region had its own issues, the general tone at all the meetings and of all the discussions was positive.

At each session the group was composed of representatives from a variety of sectors – government, education, and private sector – with no one sector being overly dominant. The private-sector representatives were primarily from the manufacturing sector. I think that it would have been helpful if we had had a few more participants from such non-manufacturing sectors as finance and retail. Although these sectors are not usually the focus in workforce development initiatives, representatives from those sectors offer a different perspective from which we would have benefited.

Secondary, vocational and post-secondary education were represented at most sessions. It was interesting to see the differences in responses to the idea – voiced in every session – that the schools needed to do more to prepare the next generation workforce in the areas of both skill development, as well as in development of life, or soft skills.

In some sessions the school representatives seemed a bit defensive, citing as obstacles local, state, and Federal standards that drove the curriculum. In other sessions, however, the education representatives were not only supportive, but even offered ideas for programs they were already implementing or were interested in implementing. To me, a former public school teacher, it spoke volumes about the difference school leaders can make if they are willing to try to think creatively while still working within the structures established for them by various oversight and government agencies.

These sessions generated many ideas about things that could or should be done to improve the workforce. Some were new, and some were things we have always known we should do. However, the devil is always in the details and the information gleaned in this initiative offered no specifics about how to implement the ideas generated.

One never knows what to expect when community leaders are gathered together for idea generation, but these sessions were productive and helped lay an excellent framework for goal setting going forward.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathryn Lima

NW WIB County Focus Groups – Summary and Conclusion

After reviewing all of the feedback, ideas, and expectations expressed in the six meetings held, the summation of the information collected can be broken into three interrelated themes (or threads): the need for enhanced communication/collaboration between economic development agencies and workforce development agencies; the need for more outreach to business, educators, and citizens; and societal trends and concerns.

Theme 1 – Enhanced Communication/Collaboration between Economic Development and Workforce Development Agencies

A disconcerting trend that emerged from the meetings is that many, if not most, of the participants do not know what the defined role of any economic development or a workforce development agency is. Moreover, they are not aware of programs such as the Partnerships for Regional Economic Performance (PREP) initiative or even the basic services provided at a PA CareerLink[®] location. What they are aware of is the fact that they need services (be they economic or workforce development) and they expect to receive them. Participants expressed in a number of ways the need for different agencies to work together, regardless of their stated purpose or mission. The how and who of this collaborative effort must be sorted out; the when is immediately and the why is because the needs to be address are imperative and not going away anytime soon.

The need for greater responsiveness was frequently raised by meeting participants. As is often the case, participants expressed concern over the speed at which services are delivered as well as the often times complex process of qualifying to receive services. Concerns over policy were also raised by participants as was the apparent disconnect between federal, state, and local government stakeholders. Developing a collaborative model for the region's economic and workforce development stakeholders that can be responsive and results oriented is an expectation that can be the impetus for addressing the other themes found throughout the county meetings.

Therefore, based on this theme and the participant ideas and expectations, the following potential action items can be considered:

- 1 – Develop a sustainable model for economic and workforce development collaboration.
- 2 – Look for methods that increase the speed, efficiency, and effectiveness of service delivery.
- 3 – Create projects and seek out opportunities to strengthen collaborative ties and serve an increasingly diverse spectrum of businesses, communities, and citizens in the coming years.

Theme 2 – Outreach and Communication to Business, Educators, and Citizens

A universal idea expressed in all six counties was the need to educate high school and middle school students (as well as parents, guardians, mentors, and educators) on the opportunity for a career in manufacturing. The need to change the perception of manufacturing as dirty and dangerous was expressed and agreed upon universally by participants. However, in referring back to the first theme discussed, outreach and awareness is also needed to educate all stakeholders about what is being done and what can be done with a robust economic and workforce development system. This outreach and awareness effort is not a problem of marketing; the mandate from participants across all six counties is that the education along with economic and workforce development need to show results and that there must be a common and constant message being delivered to the citizens, businesses, and communities in the region and beyond.

Coupled with the first theme discussed, stakeholders can collectively spread the message about the career opportunities in manufacturing and in other high priority jobs and careers to the region's youth, dislocated workforce, and underemployed workforce, while also ensuring that citizens and businesses are aware of what economic and workforce development organizations can do to assist them in fulfilling career, personnel, training, and growth needs (in addition to the myriad of other services provided). The key is to deliver the common message, while showcasing results and further developing new programs and opportunities.

Therefore, based on this theme and the participant ideas and expectations, the following potential action items can be considered:

- 1 – Develop common and consistent messaging to deliver to the businesses and citizens of the region based on results and vision.
- 2 – Strengthen ties with school districts and post-secondary institutions and work collaboratively on program development.
- 3 – Engage the private sector to discover what resources are needed and find resources in order to support new outreach and training programs.

Theme 3 – Societal Trends and Concerns

Drug abuse, mental health issues, the motivation of those who are unemployed, access to unemployment compensation and training, and the state of curriculum in the education sector are all areas which, on the surface, are not in the traditionally defined roles of economic development or workforce development agencies. However, based on the feedback in the meetings, regardless of whether economic and workforce development agencies think these topics are theirs to fix, the focus group attendees see them as such. Therein is a fundamental truth about leadership and responsibility: just because you do not think something is your problem to fix, if other people see it differently, it is far better to engage in solutions than to pass the buck onto someone else.

This is a challenge of leadership. Economic and workforce development agencies, their boards, and their staffs must work closer with human services agencies, educational institutions, and community agencies that directly confront issues which are hampering the region's ability to develop a 21st century workforce. This effort cannot be one in which fingers are pointed and accusations are made about why more is not being done; rather, the need is to develop holistic approaches to common problems across a broad front of attack. Where resources can be efficiently shared, they should be. Through each agency's ties to other agencies, the respective board members, the region's elected officials, and the region's leaders and stakeholders, the necessary work of finding common ground to address complex societal issues can be found.

Therefore, based on this theme and the participant ideas and expectations, the following potential action items can be considered:

- 1 – Engage in positive, issue-based discussions with human service, community service, and other agencies that address the types of societal issues that do not traditionally fall into the scope of workforce and/or economic development.
- 2 – Find common areas of concern with human service, community service, and other agencies and seek to share resources in mutually beneficial ways.
- 3 – Seek to better understand the changing skills, attitudes, aptitudes, and goals of the 21st century workforce and help businesses as well as economic and workforce development agencies adapt to seize the opportunities ahead.

Conclusion

All three common threads are intertwined as they speak directly to issues not uncommon in anyplace; the opportunity for northwest Pennsylvania is to develop a new paradigm and look upon the opportunities ahead through actively engaging in addressing the ideas and expectations articulated. As noted previously, while much of what was expressed does not fall under the traditional bailiwick of economic development and/or workforce development, there are causal relationships that cannot be ignored. Businesses and education providers in particular are affected by social trends in a variety of ways and this in turn affects not only the operations of economic and workforce development agencies, but also their ability to achieve even the most basic goals. In that regard, the primary conclusion to be drawn from the feedback received is that it is imperative to build a true collaborative system that can be sustained without reliance on any singular funding mechanism or personnel and personalities. The development of a new paradigm is crucial.

In order to ride the tide of prosperity, economic and workforce development organizations must also invest in developing businesses and workers with transferable skills who can survive boom and busts cycles as well as adapt to an ever changing socio-economic and technological landscape. By developing an institutional understanding of the changing nature of employment and careers, the region can offer existing businesses and workers continuous opportunities for growth and change, while also attracting new workers and businesses to northwest Pennsylvania. The ultimate decision of what actions to pursue will require recognition of the common concerns, while also requiring some unique tailoring to fit individual locations in a region that has one of Pennsylvania's most populous cities on one side and one of the least populous counties on the other. Nonetheless, through proactive leadership, dedicated and engaged organizations, and continued persistence, northwest Pennsylvania can utilize the ideas generated by citizens across the region to build a stronger future for economic and workforce development collaboration.

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Economic and Workforce Development Outside Northwest Pennsylvania

In order to further strengthen the research collected and contribute to the possible means of addressing the ideas and expectations gathered from across the region, beginning in October 2014, individuals from NW PREP organizations began traveling to meet with workforce investment areas outside of the six counties of the NW WIB. The goal of these meetings was to collect firsthand information by asking a series of questions and having a conversation with the staff and leadership of workforce development organizations and Workforce Investment Boards. The metric for the project was to interview five different workforce investment entities total; this goal was met and surpassed. The only impediment to meeting with additional entities within the scope of the project was the time needed to do so and scheduling conflicts.

Workforce development leaders and stakeholders from the following areas were interviewed for this report and the notes for each meeting can be found in this section (in chronological order by meeting date):

- Westmoreland-Fayette Workforce Investment Area – Youngwood, Pennsylvania
- Southwest Corner Workforce Investment Area – Washington, Pennsylvania
- North Central Workforce Investment Area – Ridgway, Pennsylvania
- West Central Workforce Investment Area – Sharon, Pennsylvania
- Area 19 WIB – Chardon, Ohio
- Tri-County Workforce Investment Area – Butler, Pennsylvania
- Pocono Mountains Workforce Investment Area – Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania
- Lehigh Valley Workforce Investment Area – Allentown, Pennsylvania

Representatives of the NW WIB and its workforce development system were able to participate in all but two of the eight meetings. The meeting notes detail the responses to several questions as well as capture additional information collected; each set of notes was edited and approved for publication by the appropriate workforce development executive in each area. The meetings were part interview and part conversation. The notes will read as a mix of first and third person depending on the edits made and the direction each conversation took. Each question was clearly announced at some point in the meeting to ensure methodological integrity. There are common threads, such as each area

dealing with aging population concerns or resource losses in the past few years, and there are circumstances and approaches that are unique to each area. Rather than provide analysis of each interview/meeting, the notes are meant to provide an accurate and direct view of the responses provided by each area. From the notes, concepts can be developed by regional leadership in northwest Pennsylvania; as a path is chosen, the area or areas that have expertise or experience with similar concepts as described in the meeting notes can be sought out directly.

At the strategic level, by tying together the information collected within the northwest Pennsylvania region with the information collected outside the region, there are two recommendations that this report can make based on the summation of lessons learned in each meeting. First, the NW WIB, the NW PREP partners, and regional leadership should continuously be interacting with other workforce areas as much as possible. Furthermore, a commitment should be made by stakeholders to seek out professional development, programmatic, and resource sharing opportunities in concert with neighboring workforce areas as a starting point. As seen in the meeting notes, there is a vibrant community of workforce development professionals who are full of creativity, passion, and a true willingness to collaborate with their neighbors in order to build a stronger workforce development system for job seekers and businesses alike.

Second, engaging educational (pre-K, K-12, post-secondary, and career & technical) stakeholders is vital to any shared economic and workforce development goals being successful. In speaking with other regions, their greatest concerns and emphasis for the potential of future achievements focused overwhelmingly on the school system, youth programs, and the adaptability of public and private educational institutions in their region. Developing programs that address common goals across these three pillars (economic development, workforce development, and education) of economic and societal progress is crucial. There are many approaches that can be utilized to achieve cohesion as were learned from other regions; the constant amongst each approach was the leveraging of resources and an emphasis on not only service delivery, but also results as a return on continued investment.

Area: Westmoreland & Fayette Counties Workforce Investment Area

Date: October 27th, 2014

Participants:

- Deana Burge (Economic Progress Alliance of Crawford County)
- Jill Foys (Northwest Commission & NW WIB)
- Dr. Kevin Roth, Ph.D. (Clarion University Small Business Development Center)
- William J. Thompson (Westmoreland & Fayette Counties Workforce Investment Board)
- David Zellers, Jr. (Northwest Commission)

1) What is the top priority (or priorities) for your area when it comes to workforce development?

- Companies are concerned about skills gap issues and not being able to find potential employees that have the credentials/experience/abilities to fill open positions.
- The region's workforce is aging across multiple sectors and the number of workers who are going to retire will continue to increase.
- Potential workers may have issues with attitude, motivation, professionalism, or drugs & alcohol that are precluding them from being employed.
- The oil & gas activity in the region has been attracting the younger workforce with the allure of high pay for jobs that in many cases require very little long term training (i.e. only the need for a Commercial Driver's License).

2) How are you collaborating with economic development, community service, and educational institutions in your area?

- There has always been a relationship between economic and workforce development that is based upon mutual understanding and friendly personal relationships; the collaborative efforts have not always been codified or documented in a formal agreement.
- Long-term initiatives, such as connecting the K-12 system with employers, have been a continued collaborative effort amongst area stakeholders.
- Efforts to reform the Career and Technical Centers (CTCs) have been another collaborative effort amongst stakeholders led by the WIB; communities meetings have been held to spread the word that the CTCs offer excellent secondary and post-secondary learning opportunities.
- The WIB, in conjunction with the Westmoreland County Community College (WCCC) and the Regional Industrial Development Corporation (RIDC), worked together to create a multi-tenant facility with WCCC training resources on-site known as the Advanced Technology Center (<https://wccc.edu/pages/locations/advanced-technology-center/>).

3) What is your outreach process to the business community?

- Business service teams from the PA CareerLink ® are utilized and are an integrated unit of the various PA CareerLink ® stakeholders.
- Specific industry sectors are focused on as determined by the WIB.
- Less economic development involvement in collaborative outreach activities since the discontinuation of BREP.

4) What have been the primary challenges your area has faced in workforce and economic development in the past five (5) years? How have your workforce development organizations addressed those challenges?

- The increase in Marcellus Shale activities has been an opportunity and a challenge; it required a lot of training to meet large and diverse workforce needs. The shale gas industry asked for help and made the pledge to hire Pennsylvanians if they were properly trained.
- To meet the needs of the shale gas industry.
- Some businesses have been more reticent about paying for training; the expectation is that for new hires the education system or the workforce system will have provided the training needed.

5) What are your concerns for workforce development in your area for the next five (5) to ten (10) years?

- The region's aging population is a primary concern.
- Additionally, the lack of in-migration combined with the aging population has created the need for population growth.
- Without population growth, it will be challenging for companies to expand locally.

6) If resources were not an issue, what would be a new program or initiative that your organization would undertake?

- There is no one "silver bullet."
- The challenges and opportunities that come along vary day by day in some cases.
- Hard to design any one program or activity as policies and priorities can change quickly at the state and/or federal level.

7) How do you address the challenges of the regulatory and bureaucratic environment that is often associated with workforce development and the PA CareerLink ® system in Pennsylvania?

- The goal has been to make the PA CareerLink ® demand driven.
- Try not to buy into the idea that it is a solution for everyone because the resources are not there to address every single problem or circumstance; therefore, service delivery is in part based on strategic decisions and key sector needs and wants.
- If employers are happy, then the job seekers will be happy.
- Encourage the stakeholders that are part of the WIB and interested in workforce development to make investments in the training needs of the identified key sectors.

8) What do you see as the biggest threat to the workforce development system? What do you see as its greatest strength?

- Not meeting private sector needs consistently is a threat to the system.
- Being unable to bring the long-term unemployed back in to the workforce is a threat.
- The new federal legislation is a strength because it allows for everyone to turn the page and confirms the accomplishments of the past.
- The role of the WIB as a convener in Westmoreland and Fayette Counties is a strength; the WIB and stakeholders can focus on strategic decisions and develop a workforce development vision for the region.

9) What can your region and your organization teach others about developing successful workforce development strategies?

- Embrace the role as a regional convener and build a positive rapport and trust with stakeholders.
- Develop and add more staff capacity.

Additional Notes:

- Educators and the private sector have collaborated on the BotsIQ program (<http://www.botsiqpa.org/>), a unique educational and competitive opportunity for schools in southwest Pennsylvania that gives students hands on engineering and problem solving experience by designing fighting robots.
- Through the management of industry partnerships, it revealed the need to begin looking at the future workforce needs, not just the immediate concerns.
- A cultural challenge to entrepreneurship is the generational and traditional idea in many communities that you work for a company or that you work at the local “plant” because that is what has always been done.
- The labor force of Westmoreland and Fayette Counties is tied in one way or another to Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh; additionally, there is greater movement of workers to jobs in more urban areas outside of the counties, particularly Morgantown, West Virginia as infrastructure makes that commute more manageable.
- Regional foundations (such as the Mellon Foundation) have taken an interest in workforce development and its role in the region’s community and economic development needs.

Area: Southwest Corner Workforce Investment Area (Beaver, Greene, and Washington Counties)

Date: November 5th, 2014

Participants:

- Linda L. Bell (Southwest Corner Workforce Investment Board)
- Deb Eckelberger (Titusville Community Development Agencies)
- Jill Foy (Northwest Commission & NW WIB)
- Jeffrey Nobili (Washington Greene County Job Training Agency)
- David Zellers, Jr. (Northwest Commission)

1) What is the top priority (or priorities) for your area when it comes to workforce development?

- Helping employers understand their needs.
- Meeting those employer's workforce needs.
- Building a skilled workforce.
- Bridging the gap between the employer's needs and the training programs.

2) How are you collaborating with economic development, community service, and educational institutions in your area?

- At the WIB level, we work to develop policy through strategic long range planning, developing our local plan and through regional efforts that bring together economic development, community service and education.
- At the PA CareerLink ®/Provider level, our Business Service Teams partner with economic development and community service organizations to share resources and expand services.
- At both levels, we work with education to develop training to meet employer needs.

3) What is your outreach process to the business community?

- Industry partnerships are a good tool for connecting to the business community.
- The WIB asks that fifty percent of the business outreach activities be targeted at the high priority industries.
- Representatives of the workforce system also facilitate outreach to new businesses and make presentations to public & community groups.
- PA CareerLink ® locations use Job Gateway, job fairs and 1:1 visits with business as ways to conduct outreach.

4) What have been the primary challenges your area has faced in workforce and economic development in the past five (5) years? How have your workforce development organizations addressed those challenges?

- Growing and new industry sectors have different needs than the prior industry strongholds.
- Even with growth in the oil & gas sector, other sectors have seen major layoffs and skills have not always been transferrable to the growth sector(s).
- Uncertainty in the workforce development system as resources have dwindled and legislative changes were on the horizon. WIOA should bring stability once it is implemented.

5) What are your concerns for workforce development in your area for the next five (5) to ten (10) years?

- Aging workforce.
- Skills gap and the knowledge divide.
- Ability to afford training for job seekers while also addressing how best to organize training resources/funding.
- Drugs, crime, and social trends creating consequences on employability in the workforce.
- Retaining local residents, while also attracting new additions to the workforce, requires the development of infrastructure and housing.
- Addressing the re-entry of ex-offenders into the workforce.

6) If resources were not an issue, what would be a new program or initiative that your organization would undertake?

- Expand tech-related and STEM-related programs for youth and the workforce at large to target the high growth job segments related to STEM education.
- Develop programs that embrace and espouse the critical thinking and technology capacity of youth.
- Expanded business assessment/job seeker assessment that leads to better job matching.

7) How do you address the challenges of the regulatory and bureaucratic environment that is often associated with workforce development and the PA CareerLink ® system in Pennsylvania?

- It is a necessary component and everyone must navigate it.
- Encourage the sharing of best practices between PA CareerLink ® locations in a given workforce area, while also ensuring each PA CareerLink ® is providing services that best address the local needs and wants.

8) What do you see as the biggest threat to the workforce development system? What do you see as its greatest strength?

- Lack of awareness about what the workforce development system does is a threat.
- The difficulty in defining the workforce development system is a threat.
- The shifting of priorities requiring rapid change is a threat.
- The opportunity to connect to new opportunities is a strength.
- The ability to develop greater agility and flexibility is a strength.

9) What can your region and your organization teach others about developing successful workforce development strategies?

- Have a flexible approach and remain persistent.
- Approach objectives one day at a time.
- Rely on partners for assistance.
- Focus on the importance of human capital needs in service delivery.

Additional Notes:

- Employers are often looking to hire for one thing, but the employee (incumbent or new) will often end up doing multiple tasks as the traditional “middle management” positions are eliminated.
- Traditional training programs do not emphasize leadership and management skills.
- In order to address the rising tide of retiring workers, employers could grant their older workers more flexibility in their schedules and duties to allow for the older worker to transition into full retirement, while also allowing for the training and imparting of institutional knowledge to their replacement(s).
- It is important for the workforce development system to effectively communicate to employers, job seekers, and the public at large how training dollars are in “different pots of money” and the contingencies that each unique “pot” is designed to address.
- Employers are requesting an increased amount of labor market data.

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Area: North Central Workforce Investment Area (Cameron, Clearfield, Elk, Jefferson, McKean, and Potter Counties)

Date: Monday, March 2nd, 2015

Participants:

- Eric Bridges (North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission)
- Blythe Brunner (North Central Workforce Investment Board)
- Sharon Engle (North Central Workforce Investment Board)
- Dr. Ray Feroz, Ph.D. (NW WIB)
- Jill Foys (Northwest Commission & NW WIB)
- Larry Horning (North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission)
- Dr. Joyce Miller, Ph.D. (NW WIB)
- Dr. Kevin Roth, Ph.D. (Clarion University Small Business Development Center)
- Susie Snelick (North Central Workforce Investment Board)
- Pamela Streich (North Central Workforce Investment Board)
- David Zellers, Jr. (Northwest Commission)

1) What is the top priority (or priorities) for your area when it comes to workforce development?

- Implementation of WIOA.
- Industry partnerships (advanced manufacturing and healthcare).
- Incumbent worker training.
- Industry engagement.
- Regional *Jobs 1st* project; a multi-faceted approach to surveying employers to understand comprehensive training needs and anticipated future needs.
- Business and Education Connect continuation and expansion. This initiative is an opportunity for the WIB to serve as a liaison between business and education to better engage our students with the world of work. Two Career Counselors have been hired to provide career counseling services in Clearfield and Jefferson Counties. Our CEC's in our other counties are providing similar services under the initiative.

2) How are you collaborating with economic development, community service, and educational institutions in your area?

- Working with education providers to design training programs that address employer needs.
- Participating on the Board of the North Central Regional Planning and Development Commission (as well as physically sharing the same office location).
- Collaborating on the region's *Jobs 1st* project.
- The "Business to Education Connect" program (http://www.ncentral.com/wib/?page_id=430).
- Workforce development conversations were part of the region's strategic discussions prior to and during the formation of North Central PREP.

3) What is your outreach process to the business community?

- North Central WIB – Industry Partnerships (IPs) and the "Business and Education Connect" program.
- PA CareerLink ® – Business service representatives go to companies and talk about the services and training opportunities available through the workforce development system and how said services can benefit a company.
- PA CareerLink ® – Employer consortiums convened in each county through the business service representatives discuss universal training needs and opportunities for training efficiencies; these consortiums began as a business service representative conducted effort, but slowly are transforming into being directed by the employers themselves.
- PA CareerLink ® – The employer consortium effort is separate from the Industry Partnerships so as to allow a local focus. However, the IPs are in the process of being transferred to the local Business Service Teams. This is in response to employers comments through the Job's 1st focus groups when they said they are being called on too many times by different individuals.

4) What have been the primary challenges your area has faced in workforce and economic development in the past five (5) years? How have your workforce development organizations addressed those challenges?

- Loss of funding; currently at about one-third of what was previously available.
- Less staff; dealt with this by implementing a video conferencing system that allowed one individual to provide a training presence at multiple locations.
- Due to the decrease in funding they aren't able to offer as many Individual Training Accounts (ITAs). However, the WIB does continue to ensure that at least 40% of our funds are "on the street" going directly toward customer services. There has been quite a bit of On-the-Job Training activity due to the continued funding from the state through National Emergency Grant funds.

5) What are your concerns for workforce development in your area for the next five (5) to ten (10) years?

- Lack of technical training opportunities available; need to get Career and Technical Centers (CTCs) to broaden training curriculum and programs to serve a wider audience.
- Defining and addressing what the region's "skills gap" challenges really are.
- Understanding the "opportunity gap" and bridging the divide between what employers see as opportunity and what the younger workforce and students see as opportunity and the potential to develop a meaningful career-oriented discussion.
- The abundance (over-abundance) of entry level positions available in the region without a clear understanding in the workforce as to what the career paths are.
- Potential changes in the definition and ratio of administrative versus program dollars as part of WIOA.
- Balancing resource constraints against the need to develop organizational capacity to manage expectations and deliver services in an impact and effective manner.

6) If resources were not an issue, what would be a new program or initiative that your organization would undertake?

- Put the Work Experience and Summer Youth programs "on steroids".
- Enhancing Work Experience would allow for many job seekers with barriers to have a genuine opportunity to overcome such barriers with little to no risk incurred by employers.
- Summer Youth program employment opportunities have been greatly reduced; by increasing the program's reach more young people can get the valuable experience of a first job.

7) How do you address the challenges of the regulatory and bureaucratic environment that is often associated with workforce development and the PA CareerLink ® system in Pennsylvania?

- By recognizing there are bureaucracies and personalities involved.
- Continuous and copious training of PA CareerLink ® staff.
- Keep the system challenges in-house; do not let internal challenges or bureaucracies affect the service delivery to businesses and job seekers, they should never see the red tape.
- Encourage partners to work collaboratively and keep the lines of communication open.

8) What do you see as the biggest threat to the workforce development system? What do you see as its greatest strength?

- The mandated bureaucracy and the challenge of full integration is a threat to the system.
- The staff taking initiative to serve businesses and job seekers is a strength.
- The relationships between stakeholders in the region is a strength.

9) What can your region and your organization teach others about developing successful workforce development strategies?

- Continuing to work to overcome challenges and collaboratively “figure things out.”
- Emphasize finding the right people to staff each part of the system to ensure WIB goals are achieved.
- Keep dialogue open.
- Develop a nimble organizational structure and capacity that can respond to priority changes.
- Emphasize the importance of making an impact on job seekers and businesses.
- “Don’t give up.”

Additional Notes:

- The North Central region has seen an approximately five to ten percent response rate for the surveys sent out as part of the *Jobs 1st* project; the outreach effort as part of the survey disbursement was intended to go beyond the companies that are typically engaged in regional economic and workforce development issues.
- Balancing the needs and wants of those businesses that are highly engaged in economic and workforce development versus the needs and wants of the businesses that are not as vocal and/or engaged is an important regional consideration.
- Employers have noted that they feel overwhelmed at times by the different types and number of economic and workforce development organizations that are conducting outreach.
- When bringing new Board members on, it is important to clearly define their duties and the expectations placed upon them to maximize each individual's contribution to the Board and the Board's contribution to the region.
- Business service representatives from the PA CareerLink ® are the conduit to the North Central PREP partners and vice versa.
- Employer evaluation of the services they receive from PA CareerLink ® is largely dependent on the amount of services they get from PA CareerLink ®; an additional consideration is that news about a negative service experience will always be better known than positive outcomes.
- An example of poor service was when employers are getting resumes from job seekers who are uninterested or unqualified for the types of jobs being advertised or reviewed through the PA CareerLink ®.
- The ability to use special projects and grants (such as *Jobs 1st*) to address concerns that WIA dollars could not be traditionally used for is invaluable.
- The website Workforce³ One (<https://www.workforce3one.org/>) was recommended as a great resource for webinars, toolkits, and other workforce development information.
- The book Hollowing Out the Middle: The Rural Brain Drain and What it Means for America by Patrick Carr and Maria Kefalas was also recommended as a potential resource for future planning and discussion of regional priorities.
- The region is beginning to have more involved conversations about early childhood education as a workforce development issue.

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Area: West Central Workforce Investment Area (Lawrence and Mercer Counties)

Date: March 13th, 2015

Participants:

- Gregg Dogan (West Central Workforce Investment Area)
- Deb Eckelberger (Titusville Community Development Agencies)
- Sam Giannetti (West Central Job Partnership)
- Maggie Horne (Gannon University Small Business Development Center)
- Jake Rouch (Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership & NW WIB)
- David Zellers, Jr. (Northwest Commission)

1) What is the top priority (or priorities) for your area when it comes to workforce development?

- Enacting WIOA implementation while maintaining continuity of service as things are changing.
- Working with new administration during WIOA implementation to allow for a “grandfather” period.
- Meeting the demands of major employer clusters and sectors (manufacturing & healthcare).
- Addressing the rising needs of the energy sector and the logistics/transportation sector.
- Also seeing an increase in the construction trades; working with labor & unions to address needs.

2) How are you collaborating with economic development, community service, and educational institutions in your area?

- The Oh-Penn Interstate Region (<http://ohpenn.org/>), the first federally designated interstate region in the country, is the primary vehicle for collaboration.
- WIB membership is also important as is maintaining positive relationships with economic development, community development, and education stakeholders.
- Integrating the Youth Program with county school districts and regularly meeting with school superintendents.
- As part of the outreach effort in the schools, collaborative work is being done to put the workforce system “on-the-map” for K-12 students.
- Participating in economic development action teams in Lawrence County and Mercer County.

3) What is your outreach process to the business community?

- Focus on manufacturing sector, while also keeping abreast of changes and developments in other key sectors such as healthcare.
- Supporting the Business Services Teams in Lawrence County and Mercer County.
- Utilizes a “response team” model across the region to surround companies with the support and services they need.
- Outreach process is integrated into the region’s WIF grant project.

4) What have been the primary challenges your area has faced in workforce and economic development in the past five (5) years? How have your workforce development organizations addressed those challenges?

- The economic downturn created multiple challenges for the workforce development system.
- A surge in unemployment brought a lot of people into the system, including many who had skills and education levels that differed from the traditional workforce development clients.
- The workforce system needed to sort out the serious job seekers from those who were only fulfilling requirements to continue to receive other forms of assistance.
- Funding cuts as a result of sequestration further taxed the system’s ability to respond in difficult times.
- Administration of programs and policies from the state need more field input to maintain a realistic and cohesive service delivery structure conducive to serving businesses and job seekers.

5) What are your concerns for workforce development in your area for the next five (5) to ten (10) years?

- Keeping skilled talent in the region is paramount as well as making the region a destination for new talent.
- Making services available and ready for immigrant populations (specifically those who do not speak English at all or as a first language).
- Preparing for organizational changes as long-tenured employees begin to retire, developing talent within the organization, and creating an internal plan of succession.

6) If resources were not an issue, what would be a new program or initiative that your organization would undertake?

- Improve Career and Technology Centers (CTCs) by getting them the best equipment and funding training programs in welding, machinery, and manufacturing for adults.
- An emphasis would be placed on manufacturing training needs for adults to address the changing nature of manufacturing equipment and the different skills sets that are needed in a modern manufacturing environment.

7) How do you address the challenges of the regulatory and bureaucratic environment that is often associated with workforce development and the PA CareerLink ® system in Pennsylvania?

- Site administrators have been in place for some time, leading to positive leadership continuity.
- Stress to any new talent recruited from outside the public-private nature of the system.
- It is important to understand that the environment is personality driven.
- Know the rules better than everyone else and develop strategies that overcome bureaucratic blocks.
- Staff hired for one-stop often have a private sector administration or human resources background.

8) What do you see as the biggest threat to the workforce development system? What do you see as its greatest strength?

- The ability to be flexible and to retool as things change is a strength of the system.
- The breadth of activity with the loss of financial resources is a threat to the system.

9) What can your region and your organization teach others about developing successful workforce development strategies?

- Most important thing to recognize is that no organization or region is an island unto itself.
- Reach outside your boundaries and ask the question, "What can partners do together to benefit everyone?"
- Come together to do projects and focus on shared priorities with partner organizations.
- Collaborate to go after resources and competitive grant opportunities.

Additional Notes:

- Don't just hire people for projects; develop talent from within.
- Utilize intake services to scout for the most talented job seekers; use that process to quickly and more effectively fill job openings for client businesses.
- Develop criteria for Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) that ensure recipients completed requisite steps before getting the full value of the ITA.
- WIOA requirements appear to be moving the one-stop centers towards an assessment center model that will get individuals on the right career path and determine who is serious.
- Take an entrepreneurial approach to bringing resources to the region.
- When developing resources, take a modular approach by gathering the necessary data and resources to be used as things are changing and evolving.
- Has provided training assistance as part of business attraction efforts put forth by economic development agencies.
- Keep as many functions possible as allowable under the federal act to reduce overall costs and to raise accountability.
- Tell the story of successes better than those who only tell the stories of difficulties.
- Use a "60 Minutes" approach to conducting business; make sure everything is run professionally so that there are no weak links or exposures to scandal.

Area: Area 19 WIB (Ashtabula, Geauga, and Portage Counties, Ohio)

Date: March 17th, 2015

Participants:

- Denise Gehring (Area 19 WIB)
- Rick Novotny (Erie County Redevelopment Authority & CRDA-CIBA-CAIDC)
- Craig Sernik, J.D. (Area 19 WIB)
- Brenda Vogley, M.Ed. (Area 19 WIB)
- David Zellers, Jr. (Northwest Commission)

1) What is the top priority (or priorities) for your area when it comes to workforce development?

- Having robust and professionally staffed one-stop centers (known as “Ohio Means Jobs” centers) that provide core services.
- Providing exceptional business services that connect economic and workforce development professionals to those businesses that could benefit from the same to expand or to prevent business and employment retraction.

2) How are you collaborating with economic development, community service, and educational institutions in your area?

- The Business Resource Network (<http://thebrn.net/>) brings together economic development, workforce development, training provider, and employer stakeholders to conduct business services and outreach.
- Holistic approach that goes beyond promoting the Ohio Means Jobs centers.
- Business Resource Network (BRN) born from a \$6 million grant project designed to set up and create collaboration, covers a sixteen county area.
- WIOA will only further serve the ongoing collaboration efforts.
- By incorporating existing agencies in to the business outreach process, duplication of services is avoided and trust is engendered with employers.

3) What is your outreach process to the business community?

- In two of three counties, the lead economic development organization serves as the “county account executive” for the BRN. We are hopeful that in July of this year all three lead economic development organizations can serve.
- BRN staff that meet with companies are instructed to leave each company visit with everything they need (such as job orders) in hand so that the company is getting assistance immediately without having to wait.
- A client management system is utilized to keep track of employer needs, engagement, and service completion.
- The BRN mindset is to enhance the value of the one-stop system for employers.
- BRN keeps a constant flow of information coming to and from the business community for a relatively small investment.
- BRN partners meet monthly in furtherance of keeping information flowing and staying on top of employer needs.

4) What have been the primary challenges your area has faced in workforce and economic development in the past five (5) years? How have your workforce development organizations addressed those challenges?

- Loss of funding; from 1998-2013 workforce dollars under WIA shrunk by approximately 60% when adjusting for inflation.
- Loss of funding meant that the workforce system had to accept it could not be all things to all people.
- Less resources mean prioritizing programs, focusing on placements, and staffing one-stop centers with the best staff available.
- High unemployment while funds were shrinking motivated us to switch to a more demand facing model, where we focus less on funding scholastic training for unemployed, and instead focus on On-the-Job Training and placements with employers.

5) What are your concerns for workforce development in your area for the next five (5) to ten (10) years?

- Finding more resources and dollars; WIOA will increase funding, but the amount of dollars is still falling behind previous funding levels when adjusted for inflation.
- Concentrating on the quality of staff and services offered at each Ohio Means Jobs center.
- Using money for job and sector driven strategies by targeting OJTs and ITAs at those who are guaranteed employment as much as possible.

6) If resources were not an issue, what would be a new program or initiative that your organization would undertake?

- Continue to scale up the BRN by enhancing service delivery efforts.
- More specifically, integrate BRN outreach to companies with the one-stop interactions with job seekers by identifying job candidates that are almost skilled enough for a job, but not quite there yet; target those individuals with concentrated training to create stronger job candidates for similar openings in key sectors.
- Find more approaches to attack business needs and job seeker needs simultaneously.

7) How do you address the challenges of the regulatory and bureaucratic environment that is often associated with workforce development and the one-stop system in Ohio?

- State driven innovations are going to alter service delivery; for example, changes in Youth Program requirements and resources.
- A greater emphasis on intensive case management through the one-stops requires not only more staff, but staff that are highly trained and exceptionally professional.
- Ohio Workforce Directors have formed a new association with a focus on education and advocacy about workforce issues to Ohio stakeholders.

8) What do you see as the biggest threat to the workforce development system? What do you see as its greatest strength?

- The need for the education system to catch up to workforce development needs is a threat to the system.
- Stagnant wages and the regional loss of working age population is a threat to the system.
- Lack of continuity in workforce development program and initiatives is a threat to the system.
- Lack of employer engagement and employer commitment to training youth is a threat to the system.
- The opportunity for innovation and to create programs that benefit both the job seeker and employers is a strength of the system.

9) What can your region and your organization teach others about developing successful workforce development strategies?

- Engage with organizations that are active in the communities you serve and bring them into the workforce development conversation.
- Embrace a demand-side model for workforce development.
- Link economic and workforce development activities together and share goals.

Additional Notes:

- Embrace the concept of a united economic and workforce development model.
- State of Ohio is looking to make more of the traditional one-stop center activities virtual. State received a twelve million dollar WIF grant to do the same.
- The job search market is more fractured than ever before; it is no longer enough for a job seeker to look in the "Help Wanted" section of a newspaper.
- It is important to strengthen the relationships between economic development entities and the one-stop centers.
- Workforce development services cannot be seen as solely meant to supplement education and other training activities.
- Like many areas, workforce development system is concerned about the aging workforce and also the aging population of business owner; succession planning is vital to ensure good employers stay in the area.

Area: Tri-County Workforce Investment Area (Armstrong, Butler, and Indiana Counties)

Date: April 9th, 2015

Participants:

- Scott Campbell (Butler County Community College/Tri-County Workforce Investment Board)
- Art Cordwell (Redevelopment Authority of the City of Butler/Tri-County Workforce Investment Board)
- Fred Fornataro (Tri-County Workforce Investment Board)
- Larry Garvin (CareerTRACK/Butler County PA CareerLink ®)
- Jamie Lefever (Clarion County Economic Development Corporation)
- Steve Paffrath (Tri-County Workforce Investment Board)
- David Zellers, Jr. (Northwest Commission)

1) What is the top priority (or priorities) for your area when it comes to workforce development?

- Transition to WIOA; determining how things will flow from WIA to WIOA and making changes to Board composition.
- Transitioning Board structure to a committee based structure that will allow for greater strategic focus at WIB meetings.
- Getting as much money to clients as possible to enhance training opportunities, especially for youth.
- Prepare job seekers to get back to work through Job Clubs, networking, soft skills development, and through short and long term training.
- Help employers reach out to possible employees effectively through Job Gateway.

2) How are you collaborating with economic development, community service, and educational institutions in your area?

- Working with economic development to identify businesses moving to the area and providing hiring support.
- Co-sponsoring job fairs with chambers of commerce and employers.
- Sharing space with community development organization.
- Butler County Community College is represented on the WIB and the Youth Council.
- Butler County Community College has a workforce training and non-credit course section that designs training based on industry cluster needs.
- Redevelopment Authority for the City of Butler and other public sector entities have coordinated with workforce development to utilize the youth and senior aide programs.

3) What is your outreach process to the business community?

- Staff are assigned to support industry clusters.
- Annual event to recognize employers.
- Employers are educated on workforce development services in the same way other stakeholders are.
- Employers are surveyed after receiving assistance to gauge their satisfaction with services rendered.
- Use job/training seekers to spread the word to employers about training programs available.
- Joint calls to companies in conjunction with economic development are utilized.
- Identify what and when businesses are in need and be ready to provide services.

4) What have been the primary challenges your area has faced in workforce and economic development in the past five (5) years? How have your workforce development organizations addressed those challenges?

- Loss of funding led to downsizing of staff and PA CareerLink ® locations.
- Despite challenges presented by loss of funding, Board and seasoned WIB staff were able to keep programs operating and maintain organizational integrity.
- Changing programs that accompanied funding cuts led to the development of new methods of service delivery that kept the training being offered “relevant” during difficult times.
- To address funding cuts, the staff worked to keep the PA CareerLink ® locations “right-sized” for the region while also keeping all stakeholders apprised of events and on the same page.

5) What are your concerns for workforce development in your area for the next five (5) to ten (10) years?

- WIOA changes may drastically reshape the needs and requirements of each PA CareerLink ® location.
- Reformatting the Board composition and moving towards a committee based structure within the bounds of WIOA.
- Maintaining strong personal network and ties in the region between all stakeholders.
- Potential changes in the short term following 2014 gubernatorial election in Pennsylvania coupled with the potential for changes at the federal level following 2016 election season.
- WIB staff changes are on the horizon with a number of retirements in the offing; loss of significant institutional knowledge must be addressed with internal capacity building.
- Need to address the changing demographics and aging population of the region while also working in a climate in which fewer younger workers are getting traditional degrees.

6) If resources were not an issue, what would be a new program or initiative that your organization would undertake?

- Increase youth employment programs as a means of breaking the cycle of generational poverty.
- Develop centers and partner with youth-oriented organizations that can provide job training and skills to youth.
- Get younger workers to understand the value of service and employment.
- Include adult workers in programs that emphasize community service as a means of job training and skill development; this was done several years ago after regional flooding occurred and was a major success.
- Work with stakeholders to develop credential programs that help job seekers and employees skill-up.

7) How do you address the challenges of the regulatory and bureaucratic environment that is often associated with workforce development and the PA CareerLink ® system in Pennsylvania?

- The one-stop concept makes sense, but silos remain that complicate program execution.
- Coordinate one-stop partners by focusing first on how to help people and businesses.
- When state funding was reduced, Title I provider was able to step in and fill gaps for a time without service degradation.
- Processes are often seen by job seekers and businesses as lacking direction and very cumbersome; development methods to demonstrate the bigger picture to those seeking assistance.

8) What do you see as the biggest threat to the workforce development system? What do you see as its greatest strength?

- The public being unaware of the system's successes is a threat.
- Stereotypes about the lack of impact of government services is a threat.
- Funding losses and regulatory challenges are threats.
- Collaboration between stakeholders is a strength.
- The opportunity to continue to develop mutual goals for stakeholders is a strength.

9) What can your region and your organization teach others about developing successful workforce development strategies?

- Establish strong, ethical leadership while also being politically sensitive, but not ruled by politics.
- Make sure that everyone who interfaces with the workforce development system is treated fairly.
- Maintaining positive relationships amongst all Board members.
- Don't overextend or take on projects that are difficult to deliver on or will negatively impact core service delivery.
- Stick to mission and core goals first and foremost; don't lose sight of who is being served.

Additional Notes:

- Substance abuse issues in the workforce are not just a challenge for employers, but also for the system and training providers.
- The employer portion of the workforce development system can be overlooked, but it is very important because without it the job seeker services would be severely diminished.
- Committees are a great way for a WIB to get things done.
- Programs that have a community service element are a win for job seekers and those receiving training as well as for the communities served; the individual benefits from making a positive impact and providing a service while getting training while the community served sees the benefits of workforce development programs.
- The Job Club program was developed during a period of funding cuts as a means of staying relevant; the program has since become one of the most popular programs because job seekers find a support network that promotes the success of everyone involved.
- WIB staff took pay cuts while funding was lost as a means of leading by example during a difficult time.
- Engaging youth as early as possible is a powerful tool in facilitating anti-drug abuse programs.
- Use credential programs to develop career ladders and as a linkage to apprenticeships.

Area: Pocono Counties Workforce Investment Area (Carbon, Monroe, Pike, and Wayne Counties)

Date: April 27th, 2015

Participants:

- Janet Anderson (Partners for Performance)
- Keith Ramsay (Pocono Counties WIA)
- Joseph Sebelin (Pocono Counties WIA)
- David Zellers, Jr. (Northwest Commission)

1) What is the top priority (or priorities) for your area when it comes to workforce development?

- Providing services to those who need help across the region.
- Being able to provide services through personal interactions to a predominately rural population.

2) How are you collaborating with economic development, community service, and educational institutions in your area?

- Working closely with the Career and Technical Centers (CTCs) and Community Colleges to design training that industry needs and get individuals subsidized training.
- Workforce development serves on the Board of the Local Development District and vice versa; economic development organizations are also represented on the WIB.
- Working with education system to identify students that can fill employer needs with additional training and then getting those students into appropriate training programs.
- Partners worked together several years ago to develop videos that were intended to promote the CTCs and the educational opportunities available to both parents and students.
- Regionally, there is access to a number of higher education institutions that can be utilized as part of the larger regional workforce system.

3) What is your outreach process to the business community?

- Workforce system is engaged with economic development community as part of business attraction process and to ensure training needs are met.
- Business Service Teams (BSTs) through the region's PA CareerLink ® locations are also part of the business outreach process and provide support to meet industry needs.

4) What have been the primary challenges your area has faced in workforce and economic development in the past five (5) years? How have your workforce development organizations addressed those challenges?

- Addressing the funding paradox; when funding is available demand for services has been low, but when funding is scarce the demand for services has been elevated.
- There has been (and continues to be) a shortage in the number of training providers regionally that can provide technical training for jobs on the high-priority list.
- Availability of ninety-nine week unemployment compensation made it difficult to get people to fully engage in training programs.

5) What are your concerns for workforce development in your area for the next five (5) to ten (10) years?

- Finding the best way to address how the workforce is changing regional; regional economy is largely based on hospitality and tourism and many of those jobs, such as in the gaming industry, are becoming increasingly automated.
- Keeping younger workers in the region and attracting individuals to the region along with family-sustaining jobs.
- Keeping employers in the region and helping them meet their workforce development needs.

6) If resources were not an issue, what would be a new program or initiative that your organization would undertake?

- Dedicating resources to the school districts to develop programs that give students greater career guidance.
- Educate youth on basic “real-world” skills that will be needed no matter their chosen occupation, such as personal accounting and budgeting.
- Increasing collaboration with workforce development systems in New Jersey and New York State.

7) How do you address the challenges of the regulatory and bureaucratic environment that is often associated with workforce development and the PA CareerLink ® system in Pennsylvania?

- Work through frustrations.
- Recognize that different administrations in state government will approach the situation in their own way; the best thing to do is offer the administration assistance and expertise as they are making decisions.
- Understand that a “one size fits all” approach is not applicable in the workforce development system.
- Use the strengths of different team members to the advantage of everyone involved.
- Managing the Resource Sharing Agreements (RSAs) can be a challenge as things will often need adjustment depending on the individual partners own needs and wants.

8) What do you see as the biggest threat to the workforce development system? What do you see as its greatest strength?

- The uncertainty of what the workforce system will look like under new federal legislation in Pennsylvania is a threat.
- The fact that the workforce system represents the last, best effort to try and help individuals who are in need and have want of training without the options and means to get it alone is a strength.

9) What can your region and your organization teach others about developing successful workforce development strategies?

- Always be learning from others and look at what is new and innovative.
- Work with neighboring regions and partners; find ways to standardize processes across multiple workforce areas in a region to make service delivery more cohesive and better for citizens and businesses.
- One solution for all is not a solution at all.

Additional Notes:

- The workforce system in the area must be responsive to several labor markets that are highly urbanized while also serving a core rural constituency.
- Pocono Mountain has collaborated with three neighboring workforce areas to develop regional industry partnerships as well as share responsibility and leadership on different cooperative projects.
- The larger region used a *Jobs 1st* grant as a means of allowing for training opportunities for individuals who might not have otherwise fit traditional service criteria.
- The PA CareerLink ® assessment and intake process is seen as the first line of service for job seekers.
- Given the rural nature of the region, across the four counties there are two comprehensive PA CareerLink ® locations and two satellite locations.
- Generational poverty is a concern for the workforce and economic development providers because of the need for more workers in the region as well as a need for workers to have access to opportunities to continue skill development.
- Approximately forty percent of the areas youth program have an Individualized Education Program (IEP); the switch in the youth in school/out of school ratio under the new federal legislation will be a challenge.
- There is no public transportation system or linkage between multiple public transit systems that allow for an individual to travel the length of the region without access to an automobile creating a substantial barrier to employment for many in the most rural areas.
- Without the WIB and a functional workforce development system in such a rural area, it is likely that there would be very little in the way of alternative training opportunities for citizens.
- Creating opportunities for the workforce to engage in life-long learning is critical.
- Wage stagnation is a challenge to retaining workforce in the region; many workers live in the four counties, but are commuting to work elsewhere for more competitive wages.

Area: Lehigh Valley Workforce Investment Area (Lehigh and Northampton Counties)

Date: April 28th, 2015

Participants:

- Janet Anderson (Partnership for Performance)
- Nancy Dischinat (Lehigh Valley WIB)
- Dawn Ferrante (Lehigh Valley Economic Development)
- Gina Kormanik (Lehigh Valley WIB)
- Michelle Griffin Young (Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce)
- David Zellers, Jr. (Northwest Commission)

1) What is the top priority (or priorities) for your area when it comes to workforce development?

- Integrating workforce and economic development strategies and initiatives.
- Utilizing employer driven sector strategies to drive workforce development and training options within the community.

2) How are you collaborating with economic development, community service, and educational institutions in your area?

- Developed a Skills Gap and Workforce and Economic Development Strategic Plan.
- Sharing space in the PA CareerLink ® location with workforce stakeholder groups.
- Holding bi-weekly meetings with community organizations to discuss job openings and trends.
- Initiated a Workforce and Economic Development Talent Development Committee.
- Utilizing regional *Jobs 1st* grant to develop a regional economic and workforce development strategy, a career pathways initiative, school to work initiatives, and small business development workshops.
- Regional chamber of commerce plays a major role in the Industry Partnerships through the development and convening of new and current chamber councils.
- Joint studies through workforce and economic development agencies are used to benefit the community at large; an additional benefit of such endeavors is the ability to use labor market information and forecasts to make strategic and programmatic decisions based on data.

3) What is your outreach process to the business community?

- Businesses are the primary component to the outreach process and we utilize the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce and the Society for Human Resource Management extensively. Word of mouth based on successful services provided by the workforce development system to businesses is the most effective outreach for return employer customers.
- Workforce and economic development market the services.
- Industry Partnerships are utilized for targeted outreach activities.
- Economic development partners in the region are designing a database from the business outreach process that will help catalogue and predict regional trends.
- The use of labor market information.

4) What have been the primary challenges your area has faced in workforce and economic development in the past five (5) years? How have your workforce development organizations addressed those challenges?

- The most imperative challenge continues to be the economic recovery from the recession.
- The statistical unemployment rate is not able to fully capture the out of work population.
- Finding ways to get organizations to share resources and physical locations as a means of reducing administrative overhead and improving service delivery and effective use of funding.

5) What are your concerns for workforce development in your area for the next five (5) to ten (10) years?

- Finding the best strategies that bring together the right economic climate, business services, financial capital, and workforce to help the region grow.
- Keeping the collaboration efforts ongoing and moving in a positive direction.
- Blending the strategic plans and goals of partner organizations together to achieve common goals for the betterment of the community.

6) If resources were not an issue, what would be a new program or initiative that your organization would undertake?

- Change the focus of education to talent development and career pathways that creates a pipeline of talent based on employer driven workforce requirements.
- Create a marketing and outreach plan that will get students interested in attending the Career and Technical Centers (CTCs) and begin that outreach to students in middle school.
- Require work experience and co-ops as part of the education of all students regardless of their intended career and higher education plans to develop and understand the basic skills needed for working and life-long learning.
- Invest in the CTCs based on employment projections and data focusing on high priority occupations and equip CTC's with first class equipment and from the trades to engineers, not what looks "cool" on television.
- Create a K-14 educational system, not K-12 then 2 years of Community College at additional costs.
- Invest in having dedicated workforce coordinator positions in the school districts backed by the workforce development system to provide career counseling, professional development for school districts, and strategically embed employability skills into the entire curriculum.

7) How do you address the challenges of the regulatory and bureaucratic environment that is often associated with workforce development and the PA CareerLink ® system in Pennsylvania?

- Continue to combat the perception of the PA CareerLink ® as only a "welfare office."
- Utilize functional teams of all workers to engage in shared tasks.
- Find ways to engage staff and assign duties that maximize the individuals return on investment as part of their commitment to their work.
- Make all partners in the system look good through achievements large and small.
- Recognize employee accomplishments and also have employees understand the how and why of duties and responsibilities.

8) What do you see as the biggest threat to the workforce development system? What do you see as its greatest strength?

- The status of the economy and fluctuations that threaten growth is always a threat.
- The fact that workforce development is a system and not just a program is a strength.
- The transparency of the system and where and how resources are allocated is a strength.
- The fact that the workforce system requires at least 51% private sector on the WIB is a strength.

9) What can your region and your organization teach others about developing successful workforce development strategies?

- It is absolutely necessary to align economic development, workforce development, education and community.
- We are all in the business of talent development.
- Utilizing forums for legislative staff is a valuable tool; demonstrating how the workforce system and its partnerships can make the lives of legislators and their staffs easier when it comes to constituent services is an important message to convey.
- Holistic approaches should be taken to community problems, whether it be early childhood education or aging issues, everyone has a role to play in contributing to the solution.
- Bring partners into the system and let them find ways to add value and see the value in other stakeholders.
- Share a vision and leverage resources to build a critical mass and engage partners in advocacy.
- Bring together the qualitative and the quantitative to craft a regional narrative and tell that story.
- Be a Best Practice Workforce System.

Additional Notes:

- Upon entering the Lehigh Valley PA CareerLink ®, the first thing that an individual sees is a mirror with the words, "Would you hire this person?" looking back at the individual.
- The workforce system in a given region should add value, have strong leadership, have a strong Board, and work to align the goals of economic development, workforce development, education, and community stakeholders.
- Many employers still do not understand the comprehensive services available to businesses through a PA CareerLink ® or the JobGateway website.
- Help employers to decipher what jobs skills and job descriptions mean across industry sectors and develop a common regional language to improve employment opportunities for job seekers and training programs.
- Generationally, there is a shift in work ethic and attitudes about working that are a challenge that must be addressed.
- Be transparent with information and keep all stakeholders and leaders equally informed about what is going on.

Literature Review

The discussion of any region's future economic and workforce development goals does not exist in a vacuum; rather, it is a discussion that can be viewed through a variety of lenses, such as understanding the workforce demographics, examining the dynamic between policy and funding, or exploring collaborative models and projects that can benefit many or targeted communities and populations. The context of the current state of affairs is defined by the economic downturn widely referred to as "the Great Recession" and the subsequent and ongoing period of economic recovery along with the need for increased transparency for government programs has created an imperative for publically funded workforce and economic development agencies to be more austere, accountable, and creative. Focusing on the last few years of academic research into economic development and workforce development practices and policies offer ideas on how leaders can understand what has been, what is, and what the future of economic and workforce development can be through collaboration, persistence, and thoughtful analysis.

Paramount to understanding the challenges ahead in economic and workforce development is gleaning what the workforce of the future will look like and where things stand today. Discussions about the skills gap and the lack of soft skills dominated the county by county research in northwest Pennsylvania. Nationally, the trends for the future point in part to a "career readiness gap;" for example, over half of business leaders polled in a 2011 study indicated they faced challenges in recruiting non-managerial employees and at the same time nearly two-thirds of those business leaders polled indicated they believed a four-year degree was important for an individual's workplace success.¹ However, the emphasis on potential employees having a four-year degree is only part of the equation. Business leaders also indicated that they expected post-secondary education to provide both career skills and academic knowledge; conversely, only one in four education leaders surveyed in the same study indicated that providing workforce knowledge and skills was their single or second most important priority.²

As the research in the six counties of the NW WIB showed, there was discussion about the divide between education and industry, thus mirroring national trends. The emphasis on the four year degree is one borne out of traditional social mores; of the new jobs expected to be created by 2018, the percentage of those requiring a bachelor's degree or better as compared to those requiring only an associate's degree or some post-secondary education is thirty-three percent to thirty percent.³ The challenge in addressing this need for post-secondary training in northwest Pennsylvania (and indeed almost all of the northern counties of the Commonwealth) is the current lack of a community college. While that issue is being addressed currently, how it ultimately attracts and facilitates education for students will be important. Approximately forty percent of high school students nationally are dropping out and are out of work, constituting a crisis exacerbated by the economic

¹ Bridgeland, John, Jessica Milano, and Elyse Rosenblum. "Across the Great Divide: Perspectives of CEOs and College Presidents on America's Higher Education and Skills Gap." *Civic Enterprises* (2011): p.3-4.

² Bridgeland, Milano, and Rosenblum: p.4.

³ Bridgeland, Milano, and Rosenblum: p. 11.

downturn of the early 2010s.⁴ However, there is also an increase in the number of students enrolling in college, but failing to complete the traditional four year degree program; in four decades while the number of high school graduates enrolling in college has continued to grow, the percentage of students leaving with a four year degree has remained level.⁵ This education dichotomy presents significant economic and workforce development challenges. As companies look to expand, they need workers with the right credentials and as they look to replace retiring workers companies need a younger workforce who is educated and motivated from the start.

The nature of northwest Pennsylvania's aging workforce is a serious concern that was expressed throughout the project. Nationally, in critical sectors such as utilities and aerospace, the problem is most acute with fifty to sixty percent of those workforces being eligible to retire by 2020.⁶ Even with the increasingly specter of accelerated retirement losses, there are job openings across the nation that go unfilled; for example, in the eight counties of northwest Pennsylvania on May 14th, 2015 Pennsylvania's JobGateway site listed approximately 6,038 job postings. Skills gap concerns between what a position requires and what the labor pool has to offer regionally were cited anecdotally as being a major concern for filling positions. As position openings increase due to retirement, the number of job postings would also be expected to increase along with (temporary) productivity losses; this in turn can exacerbate a skills gap problem in the labor pool as a whole as well as in specific sectors.

The skills gap does not exist in any one strata of the labor market. For example, so-called middle skills jobs – occupations in computer technology, nursing, manufacturing – and other occupations that require postsecondary technical and/or college level credentials, represent almost half the national labor force.⁷ Analyzing this middle skills portion of the labor market to other skills groups/strata, there are several conclusions that can be drawn. As compared to lower skilled jobs, the concerns expressed in the region were focused on the soft skills challenges as much as an overall skills gap for the lower skilled strata. When comparing middle skills positions (healthcare, technology-related, and advanced manufacturing being three sectors of key importance to the future of northwest Pennsylvania), the comparison focuses more on things like overall years of experience, competitive wages, and the ability to attract talent. Middle skills jobs (sometimes referred to as gold-collar jobs) require additional training and experience. The challenge for the region in addressing a middle skills gap is two-fold: provide opportunities for training the current workforce in the region and also entice already trained workers to come and work in northwest Pennsylvania by providing opportunity and competitive wages.

In the past, advancement in many key sectors revolved around a pre-determined career track; unions (for example) negotiated career ladders that were tied to skills and seniority and employers joined

⁴ Bridgeland, Milano, and Rosenblum: p. 12.

⁵ Bridgeland, Milano, and Rosenblum: p.13.

⁶ Kochan, Thomas, David Finegold, and Paul Osterman. "Who Can Fix the "Middle-Skills" Gap?" *Harvard Business Review* 90 (2012): p. 83.

⁷ Kochan, Finegold, and Osterman: p. 83.

with them to encourage apprenticeships and create a pipeline for new workers.⁸ The nature of careers has changed greatly and the notion of starting with one employer and working up the ladder (whether in a union position or not) is evolving. Educational achievement was also seen as a path to enhanced employment opportunities, but while the demand for liberal arts graduates has declined, only fifteen percent of college graduates are majoring in science, math, engineering, or a technology related field; these are all sectors where career opportunities have increased in the past two decades while educational achievement remains flat.⁹ Reconciling educational achievement (and ambition) along with employment and training opportunities that can encompass a person's entire career is a significant challenge that goes beyond traditional economic and workforce development.

However, there are regional strategies that have been tested to address the middle skills gap and career development challenges for those looking to move upward. The key to such strategies is developing strong collaborative ties between government, education, and private sector stakeholders. SkillsWorks (www.skill-works.org), founded in 2001 in Boston began by focusing on training displaced workers before assisting incumbent workers in the health care, hospitality, property services, automotive, and green industries upgrade their skills.¹⁰ In Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership is a union, industry, and educational institution partnership designed to provide technical and general skills training for manufacturing, construction, and health care.¹¹ These are two examples of regional initiatives that have been in place for over a decade and pivoted from their original purpose to grow and provide greater impacts; such models can be further studied and implemented to address skills gap concerns in northwest Pennsylvania.

In developing regional strategies for success, there are several ideals that can be utilized to begin to develop a common understanding of processes and outputs. In order to best tie together the future needs of businesses with the capacity and plans of training providers (colleges, universities, career and technical centers, and community colleges specifically) there needs to be greater collaboration. To enhance and focus such collaboration, credential programs can be a starting point. Smaller companies benefit from credential programs because they are reliable indicators of career knowledge and skills; workers benefit from such programs because they are usually short-term degrees and can serve as valuable academic and career building blocks.¹² Furthermore, educational institutions can form strong bonds with both companies and students, thus allowing them to better serve communities and regions. There is an opportunity to re-imagine how education and business interface by changing perceptions as well. The concept of college has long centered on the four-year degree and the campus lifestyle; the reality is that an increasing number of students are working more than twenty hours a week and many more are supporting families than in previous generations.¹³ Access to education from an economic and workforce development perspective must

⁸ Kochan, Finegold, and Osterman: p. 84.

⁹ Kochan, Finegold, and Osterman: p. 85.

¹⁰ Kochan, Finegold, and Osterman: p. 86.

¹¹ Kochan, Finegold, and Osterman: p. 87.

¹² Bridgeland, Milano, and Rosenblum: p. 24.

¹³ Bridgeland, Milano, and Rosenblum: p. 25.

account for the difference between reality and perception. Fostering stronger ties between businesses and educational institutions to ensure a comprehensive understanding of what the labor market needs are and how the training needs of a region can best fit with the academic mission of an educational institution will be mutually beneficial.

As northwest Pennsylvania is moving closer to having a regionally based community college, the context of the community college in the economic-workforce development dynamic requires consideration. The nature of the community college has evolved significantly in the past three decades. Beginning with the Job Training Partnership Act of 1982 (JTPA), community colleges took on their more modern role of participating in the workforce development system and having a seat on workforce investment boards.¹⁴ Furthermore, community colleges have been mentioned in all but one State of the Union Address since 1996; a 2012 survey conducted by The University of Alabama found that forty-five of forty-nine state community college directors agreed or strongly agreed that business leaders see community colleges as the primary workforce training providers in their states.¹⁵ The standing of the community college in society is evident as being an increasingly important part of a locality's ability to develop, train, and sustain a viable labor pool. Because northwest Pennsylvania is in the midst of developing a community college, it can benefit from the start by orienting such an institution to meet the challenges laid out through thirty years of workforce development programs and legislation.

Developing a workforce has both short and long term dimensions.¹⁶ The recession of the past several years costs millions in lost wages and career progress. For workforce development, the job losses in the recession from high paying jobs meant placing individuals into positions that were "underemployment" as an alternative to unemployment.¹⁷ Conversely, the long term aspects of recovery and renewal require a different approach; in order to improve the wage curve and have workers entering into career paths with higher earnings potential, it means filling positions that require more than a secondary education.¹⁸ The role of a community college in the past several years has been to plug the short term gaps to assist workers in developing transferrable skills. Now, emerging from a recession, the workforce needs to have an eye towards that longer term development of talent, wages, and opportunity. However, the flexibility of the community college system has been shown to be strong in addressing the short and long term concerns. Community colleges present unique workforce opportunities for a locality or region because ultimately, they are "place based" institutions that are guided by local citizen, business, government, and educator concerns.¹⁹

¹⁴ Katsinas, S. G., M. M. D'Amico, and J. N. Friedel. "Workforce Training in a Recovering Economy." *Workforce Training*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, Education Policy Center (2012): p. 5.

¹⁵ Katsinas, D'Amico, and Friedel: p. 5-6.

¹⁶ Katsinas, D'Amico, and Friedel: p. 2.

¹⁷ Katsinas, D'Amico, and Friedel: p. 2.

¹⁸ Katsinas, D'Amico, and Friedel: p. 2.

¹⁹ Katsinas, D'Amico, and Friedel: p. 11.

The evolution of policy in the next decade will dictate not only the role of community colleges, but also the full spectrum of programs and tools in economic and workforce development with changes in federal workforce guidelines forthcoming and shifting funding priorities in both economic and workforce development. The past success and failure of programs is often a bellwether for gauging future success. In general, individual education and training participants are rarely the sole beneficiaries of workforce development investments; rather workforce development programs also have the potential to benefit employers, taxpayers, and society at large.²⁰ Understanding the larger impacts beyond the individual is difficult to quantify from a workforce development perspective alone. Ergo, the quantification of the economic and social impacts of workforce development programs requires collaborative and cooperative relationships with economic development, community development, and human services agencies. Investment differences between adult and youth programs can sometimes miss this larger point; while it is easy to argue that spending on younger children has a longer time to produce benefits than spending on adults, the typical analysis of workforce development programs is a short window of time that cannot fully capture the value of the investment.²¹

Policy development is an offspring of the governmental and political processes of a democracy. The windows for evaluation of programs and spending are often tied to budget and election cycles. As investment is then tied to short term markers and the evaluation is also pegged to said markers, long term planning and development (in any policy area) can be stifled. Critiques of the workforce system have at times been very harsh; however, this may in fact be because standard performance measures have been a part of job training programs since the 1970s and beginning with JTPA the analysis and transparency of workforce development programs was systematically entrenched.²² For example, during the recent recession it was found that the returns on sector-specific training were above expectations, while at the same time the debate over how to allocate limited training resources was very negative in its appraisal of the role and effectiveness of workforce development programs.²³ In redesigning a regional program of activities, an important consideration is how to value metrics, evaluate investment of resources, and how to best quantify outputs in order to ensure that the system as a whole is understood.

The substantive differences between economic and workforce development policies can be overcome through intermediary organizations; said organizations can also identify the common goals and work towards achievement together in formal and informal arrangements.²⁴ In northwest Pennsylvania, formal and informal structures are already working towards common goals in many ways. Policy and program development are areas for enhanced collaboration as evidenced by the research collected in

²⁰ King, Christopher T., and Carolyn Heinrich. "How effective are workforce development programs? Implications for US workforce policies." *University of Texas at Austin* (2011): p. 11.

²¹ King and Heinrich: p. 11.

²² King and Heinrich: p. 6.

²³ King and Heinrich: p. 8.

²⁴ King, Christopher T. "Integrating Job Opportunities for People with Disabilities into State and Regional Economic and Workforce Development Strategies." (2011): p. 8.

the NW WIB footprint. Differentiations in policy between economic development and workforce development are often generalized in a number of ways. For example, state and regional economic development efforts usually focus on attraction efforts that take workforce into account only after incentives have been doled out.²⁵ Workforce development policy, while intended to be looking at future workforce needs, is often focused on meeting current needs or catching up on past needs because employers and elected leaders focus is on the immediate.²⁶ The tension that this disconnect creates plays out in two ways. First, the lack of workforce consideration in business attraction efforts leads to a loss of efficiency in the impact of an economic development project. Second, the immediate needs of both economic and workforce development almost always trump any opportunity for future planning and goal setting. The challenge of providing services and planning for the future all while addressing immediate needs can be best summed up in the words of Abraham Lincoln: "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate for the stormy present."

Reforms to policy, programs, and legislation are all taking place constantly to address the stormy present. Holistically, a region's human capital development is a driver for workforce and economic development success. Human capital development that embraces a life-long approach to learning is critical to economic success both nationally and globally.²⁷ The concept of life-long learning is nothing new, but how it can be utilized as a means of driving workforce development policy is intriguing. The traditional path of getting a formal education and then entering a singular career has fundamentally changed; this societal change necessitates aptitude and agility in workers and employers.²⁸ Additionally, what constitutes an education has changed. The classroom is only the start of education in a life-long process that incorporates on-the-job training, apprenticeships, and hands-on experiences.²⁹

Building a system of workforce and economic development based on life-long learning requires different forms of stakeholder engagement. Traditionally, the education component of policy development as it relates to workforce has focused on primary and secondary schools along with community colleges.³⁰ Strategically, human capital development policies require buy-in from colleges and other higher education providers in addition to an emphasis on adult education and creating opportunities for continued skill development and growth.³¹

From a historical perspective, the divide between workforce and economic development policy can be traced back almost seventy years. Beginning with The Employment Act of 1946, the delineation between labor market policy and macro-economic stability was removed from statute as a reflection of the dominant economic thought of the day (Keynesianism) as well as the business community's

²⁵ King: p. 2.

²⁶ King: p. 2.

²⁷ Jacobs, Elisabeth. "Principles for Reforming Workforce Development and Human Capital Policies in the United States." *Report, The Brookings Institution*, December 4 (2013): p. 1.

²⁸ Jacobs: p. 2.

²⁹ Jacobs: p. 3.

³⁰ Jacobs: p. 3.

³¹ Jacobs: p. 3.

desire to see the government role in the free market limited.³² Gradually, the conservative socio-economic policies of the post-World War II era evolved into a more liberal approach to government's role in the free market and society in the 1960s. However, the War on Poverty of the 1960s targeted federal employment and training policies at population groups that were historically disadvantaged as opposed to creating universal access.³³ Additionally, the fragmentation of workforce development funding and programs is a consequence of the War on Poverty.³⁴ Taking this history into consideration, the policies of the late 1940s in small part, coupled with the policies and social changes of the 1960s, still have a profound impact on how workforce development and economic development policy is contemporarily viewed politically, rhetorically, and legislatively.

Funding as means of achieving policy and program goals is another challenge. The Job Training Partnership Act of 1982 (JTPA) only reached five percent of those eligible for services because of budgetary constraints.³⁵ The underfunding situation creates several immediate consequences. A lack of full funding undercuts the potential success of a program and can lead to an inability to make good on the promise of policy.³⁶ Additionally, underfunding leads to under-service of a program's intended constituency; the under-service in turn creates a scenario in which targeted constituencies can never fully achieve creating both organizational and individual impacts.³⁷ In other words, the underperformance of a program can create a scenario in which both the providers of the program and the intended recipients of services are put in a negative light when the source of the underperformance is caused by budgetary constraints beyond their control. Addressing such constraints in an era of increased accountability and austerity in public sector service delivery is critical, but presents its own political challenges. Primary amongst the challenges of accessing underperformance due to budgetary constraints is being able to answer the question of whether or not more funding overcomes challenges and if so, then from where then does the additional funding come?

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) had been the reigning workforce development legislation at the federal level for over fifteen years. Moving on from WIA into the new age of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) allows for the opportunity to begin evaluating what the post-WIA world looks like. WIA focused on the short-term goal of getting individuals into jobs; this meant that the emphasis was on employment rather than employability and it led to employers getting individuals who were not the best-trained or best-matched for the job.³⁸ This short-term approach is echoed in the feedback collected during the meetings held in the NW WIB footprint and also speaks to larger concerns about the skills gap problem in the workforce. Career-counseling services that were part of WIA did not equate to job training and while program success

³² Jacobs: p.4.

³³ Jacobs: p. 4.

³⁴ Jacobs: p. 6.

³⁵ Jacobs: p. 5.

³⁶ Jacobs: p. 5.

³⁷ Jacobs: p. 5.

³⁸ Jacobs: p. 9-10.

was measured at moving service recipients back into the labor market, the long term impact of a short term strategy is a decline in wages and employability.³⁹

The one-stop system created under WIA (known as PA CareerLink ® in Pennsylvania) is not without policy challenges. The concept to provide streamlined, universal access to services was complicated by the differing philosophies of the primary federal funding mechanisms as well as the sometimes conflicting outcome measures and performance standards of different funding sources.⁴⁰ The dominant philosophy in the WIA era was a work-first approach, which prioritized the requirement of having individuals get into employment through the workforce development system; this dominant philosophy was driven by the expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in 1993, the policy evaluations of JTPA done in the early 1990s that interpreted the impact of JTPA as modest for adults and women, and the economic prosperity during the Clinton administration.⁴¹ These three primary factors created a very different policy environment than the workforce legislation the 1940s, 1960s, and early 1980s were developed from. WIA was designed to change unemployment into reemployment and this idea garnered strong bi-partisan support in what was a time of economic growth and employment opportunity in the United States.⁴²

In an evaluation of WIA, several conclusions can be reached with corresponding recommendations. For example, the universal access offered through the one-stop system created under WIA allows for the potential of creating human capital development services that can serve long-tenured, higher-skilled workers who could face long term unemployment as global economic conditions affect regional economies.⁴³ The universal access concept of WIA also created a policy environment where multiple stakeholders have an investment in the public workforce development system.⁴⁴ The continued enhancement of stakeholder collaboration can be leveraged through a universal access system that allows for flexibility in service delivery and program design. At the federal level, the government can serve the regional and local workforce investment boards in a number of ways based on the WIA experience. Federal funds can be tied to incentivizing best practices that recognize the spread of a labor market over state boundaries as well as those which create strong employer engagement and sectoral strategies in the workforce development system.⁴⁵ The reach of the federal government can also create an environment of enhanced data sharing and analysis. There is no universal system to track workforce development spending, investment, and outcomes as each state collects different data to varying levels of detail.⁴⁶ If universal state-by-state data sets existed and a standard was upheld, then understanding the impacts of multi-state labor forces and workforce development investment could be achieved to the benefit of economic and workforce development policy makers.

³⁹ Jacobs: p. 10.

⁴⁰ Jacobs: P. 11.

⁴¹ Jacobs: p. 7-8.

⁴² Jacobs: p. 8-9.

⁴³ Jacobs: p. 17.

⁴⁴ Jacobs: p. 17.

⁴⁵ Jacobs: p. 21.

⁴⁶ Jacobs: p. 18.

The true impacts of WIA are far from being understood; federal policy and legislation are trees in a forest when it comes to shaping a regional workforce development strategy. Connecting strategies between workforce development and economic development is, for northwest Pennsylvania, perhaps the most important part of that forest to understand and cultivate. Timing of need is one area in which program differences exist between economic and workforce development. Regional economic development projects, such as efforts to develop clean energy businesses, require planning, educating businesses, and developing facilities; meanwhile, workforce development funds are expended to train workers for the forthcoming opportunities in clean energy businesses, but once the training is complete in many cases the jobs are not available in the region and the labor force moves elsewhere.⁴⁷ This difference in program execution between economic and workforce development creates a labor supply and demand imbalance regionally, which leads to either too many or too few skilled workers being available as jobs are created.⁴⁸

Labor market imbalances are just one collaborative challenge. At a more basic level, workforce development and economic development programs are often judged on very different criteria when evaluating success and generally interact with very different constituencies.⁴⁹ For example, workforce development programs are typically judged on whether or not participants find jobs and earn higher wages, whereas economic development programs are measured in part by the amount of investment into a community and region as well as the overall amount of jobs created.⁵⁰ While not completely dissimilar in intent, the difference is important to note because of the policy implications. Furthermore, the differences between workforce development goals and economic development goals on the whole create a similar situation across funding streams that exists within workforce development itself as stated previously. Different funding streams create tensions in goal setting and integrating activities. Merging economic and workforce development administratively can be challenging when it is based on top-down directives; rather, unifying efforts often require an investment in time and resources to develop joint-mission goals and the building of staff relationships.⁵¹

Joint-mission development, over a period of time and with judicious planning and evaluation, offers possibilities for greater regional collaboration. As the most recent period of recession showed, the investment of public dollars into economic development and workforce development must be maximized in order to allow for companies to meet their innovation goals and compete in the global marketplace, while ensuring that workers locally and regionally are skilled in the best way possible for their own advancement.⁵² There are many ways to achieve the loftiest of goals in workforce and economic development collaboration. When sector-based strategies are utilized, economic and workforce development professionals can work in tandem to develop an expertise not only about a

⁴⁷ Conway, Maureen. "Where labor supply meets labor demand: connecting workforce development to economic development in local labor markets." (2011): p. 3.

⁴⁸ Conway: p. 3.

⁴⁹ Conway: p. 3.

⁵⁰ Conway: p. 3.

⁵¹ Conway: p. 4.

⁵² Conway: p. 1.

sector's current needs, but also understanding how that sector will look in a year, five years, ten years, and so on.⁵³ Developing the capacity to conduct regional labor market research along with a very detailed understanding of the local labor pool is also important to coordinating strategies; the deeper the understanding of the labor pool by the workforce development system, the more impactful economic development investments can be.⁵⁴ The capacity to conduct direct analysis of the local or regional labor environment also presents the opportunity for more on-time analysis as well as the long term possibility of generating data that is useful across a wider spectrum of policy than any one discipline. Achieving commonality in data, whether at the federal or regional level, is recognized as an important step towards enhanced collaboration efforts.

The role of the employer in the training landscape is also an important consideration in designing collaborative programs that address regional needs. Private sector employers in the United States are responsible for the majority of workforce development activity and associated spending.⁵⁵ How private sector entities provide their training can affect the labor market and career development of employees. In general, firm-specific training is seen as more likely to increase productivity and reduce turnover, but firm specific training also reduces the utility of providing public sector resources because it takes away universal opportunities for the employee.⁵⁶ Furthermore, because of budgetary considerations, the amount of training dollars in both the public and private sector is expected to be constrained and therefore the need exists to target training resources where they can be most effective.⁵⁷ The need for targeting training dollars, as a consequence of both budgetary constraints and execution on policy goals, ties directly into the importance of employer engagement in the workforce development system. Without active employer engagement, the investment in training resources between the public and private sector could be less effective and efficient than what is possible and the potential exists for the investments by the respective sectors to run counter to one another.

Comparatively, the European model of employer engagement offers some unique differences than what is currently facilitated in the United States. A study by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training found that investment of public resources into the workforce system was a consequence of private market failures.⁵⁸ The failures, however, are not the fault of the private sector alone. Employers were found to lack adequate information on training returns and like their American counterparts, the fear was that employees who received more skill training would be poached.⁵⁹ Also, similar to the United States, sector strategies have been employed with an emphasis on public-private partnerships. In the United Kingdom, an agency was created to monitor a

⁵³ Conway: p. 9.

⁵⁴ Conway: p. 10.

⁵⁵ Heinrich, Carolyn J. "Targeting Workforce Development Programs: Who Should Receive What Services? And How Much?" *Workforce Development Needs in the Global Economy: US and Cross-National Perspectives*, School of Public Policy, University of Maryland, College Park, MD (2013): p. 6.

⁵⁶ Heinrich: p. 6.

⁵⁷ Heinrich: p. 9.

⁵⁸ Heinrich: p. 18.

⁵⁹ Heinrich: p. 18.

network of sector skills committees and through the initiative training access and opportunity for eighty-five percent of the workforce was covered.⁶⁰

Tying together everything in the realm of policy, program development, and the engagement of employers and other stakeholders is the local workforce investment board. The decentralized structure of the workforce development system provides the flexibility for local workforce investment boards to form partnerships and be the catalyst for collaboration.⁶¹ As each local workforce investment area develops a local plan, state governments may request waivers on certain rules in an effort to enhance or improve job seeker and employer activities.⁶² The opportunities for innovation are then primarily the responsibility of the local area to develop. Critical to the development of new programs and policies at the local level is not only the support of economic development and other stakeholders, but also the relationship between state government stakeholders. Without adequate support at the state level, a local area would find it very difficult to push waivers and other workforce development needs.

Nationally, many workforce investment boards are increasingly relying on partnership development through a variety of formal and informal structures; in some case the workforce investment board acts as leader, in some cases a convener, and in others as the junior partner.⁶³ In California, an eleven county workforce investment board (covering twenty percent of the state's land area, but only two percent of the population) found that there were not enough organizations to support economic development activity and arranged to bring all workforce and economic development activities under a sole oversight authority.⁶⁴ The state government in California had policies and practices in place that supported combined workforce, education, and economic development entities in partnership activities.⁶⁵ In Michigan, a different approach to collaboration was undertaken. To facilitate evidence-based decision making, the Workforce Intelligence Network was created in southeast Michigan in order to deliver real-time information on skills gaps, labor market, and actionable workforce development intelligence information.⁶⁶ As noted in other research cited, data collection is an important component of facilitating workforce and economic development collaboration. Sustainable efforts to provide data can lead to a decision making process, which is built on empirical and objective approaches to resource allocation.

The manner in which collaboration happens can vary greatly. The California example cited above required bringing together multiple stakeholders and having them agree to combine formally and legally under a single entity. In Michigan, a collaborative initiative centered around the Detroit metropolitan area was structured through a series of memoranda of understanding that established

⁶⁰ Heinrich: p. 18.

⁶¹ Eberts, Randall W. "How Local Workforce Investment Boards Can Help Support Job Creation." *Employment Research Newsletter* 20.4 (2013): p. 1.

⁶² Eberts: p. 2.

⁶³ Eberts: p. 2.

⁶⁴ Eberts: p. 2.

⁶⁵ Eberts: p. 3.

⁶⁶ Eberts: p. 3.

joint processes.⁶⁷ Organizational agreements are important to workforce investment board initiatives, but so is the private sector support that drives local and regional economies. In central Michigan, the private sector and educators came together with a local college to develop on-demand training that was not tied to a semester schedule.⁶⁸ Four community colleges in the region were brought in to support the training efforts; the evolution of the program allowed for a modular course design that made credentials stackable and resource support allowed for the courses to be available almost twenty-four hours a day.⁶⁹ Comprehensive collaborative efforts such as these are not born in a day, but through planning and coordination, evidence demonstrates that such goals are achievable in areas with diverse populations, large footprints, and resource constraints. The role of a local workforce investment board in developing the ideas and governance structures to move big ideas forward can vary greatly. Finding the right role as part of a larger collaborative matrix is an important first step as a region is accessing its future goals.

An additional factor to consider from the policy and historical perspective is an understanding of where the national economy has just been. During the recent Great Recession, more lost their jobs than in any prior economic downturn in the post-World War II era.⁷⁰ The record high job losses created a scenario in which more job seekers participated in federal workforce programs than at any other time (whether through the unemployment compensation system, the Wagner-Peyser Act, or the Workforce Investment Act); the significant increase in new participants exceeded the funded capacity that existed in the system pre-Great Recession.⁷¹ For example, one immediate consequence (albeit temporary) of the strain the economic downturn placed on the system was unemployment insurance (UI). Benefits under UI were extended to ninety-nine weeks by Congress in 2008 and an additional step was taken to relieve state UI trust accounts of financial responsibility.⁷² State government UI trusts are typically built up during periods of economic prosperity in order to cushion a loss of UI tax collections; the accelerated pace of layoffs in 2007 and 2008 made it impossible for states to sustain the increase outflow of UI benefits.⁷³

The strain on UI services that led to federal intervention was one part of the strategy to address workforce needs during the Great Recession. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 was the primary federal legislative vehicle for arresting the economic downturn. For workforce development, WIA programs were the recipient of over three and a half billion dollars of ARRA funding per the Congressional Research Service.⁷⁴ The WIA Adult program saw its most significant differentiation between entrants and exiters between the third quarter of 2008 and the third quarter of 2009.⁷⁵ The increase in ARRA funding helped to accommodate the increase in

⁶⁷ Eberts: p. 2.

⁶⁸ Eberts: p. 3.

⁶⁹ Eberts: p. 3.

⁷⁰ Wandner, Stephen A., and Randall W. Eberts. "Public workforce programs during the Great Recession." (2014): p. 1.

⁷¹ Wander and Eberts: p. 1-2.

⁷² Wander and Eberts: p. 5.

⁷³ Wander and Eberts: p. 5.

⁷⁴ Wander and Eberts: p. 3.

⁷⁵ Wander and Eberts: p. 10.

participation, but it could not keep pace with the increase in participants.⁷⁶ The WIA Dislocated Worker program also experienced increases in participants. In the one year period between the second quarter of 2008 through the second quarter of 2009, the WIA Dislocated Worker program had an increase of 110,000 entrants per quarter as unemployment overall increased by six million.⁷⁷ Ultimately, the lessons of the Great Recession cannot be lost moving forward. It is a time period for workforce and economic development planning and policy development moving forward that must be well understood in order to prepare for future periods of downturn and uncertainty. The considerable increase in activity and the strains placed on the workforce development system demonstrated the flexibility of the system under duress. The lessons learned from such difficult periods are applicable in times of opportunity and economic growth as well.

Beyond the great depths and considerations of history and the policy arena as a whole, there are a number of specific areas for opportunity, which are highlighted in research. As with the many regions in the Marcellus and Utica Shale plays, there are unique workforce and economic development challenges that northwest Pennsylvania must address. When the industry began to see renewed activity in Pennsylvania and New York State, it first relied on skilled “out-of-town” workers before engaging more with the local labor pool to fill positions.⁷⁸ As the industry evolved in Pennsylvania from 2010 through 2014, activity seemed to increase exponentially and the demand for natural gas was insatiable. However, as commodity prices dropped in late 2014 and early 2015, the activity also seemed to level off. Nonetheless, the workforce development challenge presented by natural gas exploration and extraction is still present. The industry, in part, requires a highly trained workforce who is mobile both within the region and able to move beyond it.⁷⁹ Natural gas exploration and extraction has many phases of activity that must be understood in order to structure a regional economy around it; the two main phases are the drilling phase and the production phase.⁸⁰

The drilling phase is the phase in which most of the jobs generated by the industry are available; it is also the phase most associated with the “Boom and Bust” cycle of economic development that is often discussed with natural resource exploration and extraction.⁸¹ Considering the history of not just northwest Pennsylvania, but the Commonwealth as a whole, the state has seen more than its share of natural resource boom and the eventual bust, beginning with iron ore extraction at the time of the American Revolution through lumber and coal production during the Industrial Revolution. The natural gas “Boom and Bust” differs in part from the past because of technology changes, but also because the drilling phase workforce is destined to be mobile because of the fluctuation of commodity prices and the strategies of the energy companies.⁸²

⁷⁶ Wander and Eberts: p. 12.

⁷⁷ Wander and Eberts: p. 13.

⁷⁸ Jacquet, Jeffrey. "A Comprehensive Economic Impact Analysis of Natural Gas Extraction in the Marcellus Shale: Workforce Development Challenges in the Natural Gas Industry." *Cornell University* (2011): p. 1.

⁷⁹ Jacquet: p. 2.

⁸⁰ Jacquet: p. 4.

⁸¹ Jacquet: p. 5.

⁸² Jacquet: p. 5.

While only five percent of the total workforce jobs from natural gas come from the production phase, the expectation is that these jobs are more stable and more likely to be filled (in time) by local employees.⁸³ The types of jobs that are part of the production phase represent a cross-section of technical skills and labor intensity. However, on the whole, jobs in the production phase tend to be less labor intensive, more location specific, less hazardous, and highly specialized all while continuing to exist even in the event all manner of exploration ceases.⁸⁴ What this ultimately means as a workforce and economic development challenge is how does a region forecast the level of production phase jobs over a five, ten, and twenty year period? Considering the stability of the production phase jobs, the investment in training and education resources geared towards those activities is prudent. Part of undertaking a forecasting effort is understanding the industry as a whole. The energy industry is dependent on an extensive array of subcontractors who specialize in specific tasks in the drilling and production phases.⁸⁵ There are also opportunities away from the extraction sites to consider when looking at the industry workforce as a whole. A support network of administrative, accounting, public relations, and other business services are also needed to keep the industry running; the greater Pittsburgh region has become a de facto hub for these support activities.⁸⁶

The preeminence of Pittsburgh as the lead city for the natural gas industry in Pennsylvania is an asset for all of western Pennsylvania; this does not preclude attracting specialized support activities directly to northwest Pennsylvania. Because of the highly specialized and fractured nature of the industry structure, training needs are not clearly defined. Many companies are willing to provide on-the-job training, but that training is often company, not task, specific.⁸⁷ Part of the challenge identified during a central Pennsylvania based program's beginnings was matching the traditional job seekers coming through the workforce development system with industry needs.⁸⁸ Continuing to plan and better develop the region's workforce for the shale gas industry and the energy industry as a whole will mean a continued emphasis on talent development, while working with industry to ensure training is transferrable from company to company.

Providing assistance to overcoming barriers to employment is an important part of workforce development service delivery. The number and types of barriers that exist can seem staggering at times and run the gamut from affordable child care to substance abuse issues to lack of basic literacy. How barriers are confronted has changed with technology and social progress. For example, individuals with disabilities are an increasing percentage of the workforce. To continue to address this trend, policy makers and employers must consider how new ways of doing business can open new workplace opportunities to those who otherwise would have not been able to work.⁸⁹ Economic and workforce development, in tandem with employers, working to find avenues of overcoming barriers to employment is critical to address future workforce needs. A report by the Aspen Institute

⁸³ Jacquet: p. 5.

⁸⁴ Jacquet: p. 5.

⁸⁵ Jacquet: p. 10.

⁸⁶ Jacquet: p. 6.

⁸⁷ Jacquet: p. 11.

⁸⁸ Jacquet: p. 15.

⁸⁹ King: p. 1.

identified that, while in recent decades the United States added large numbers of well-educated and skills workers to the workforce along with higher wages, this trend is leveling off.⁹⁰ Combating this trend will rely not only on increased productivity and technology, but also in finding as many ways as possible to bring as many people into the workforce as possible.

Through a joint United States Department of Labor and Social Security Administration program, New York State and Connecticut partnered on a regional project in the greater New York City area designed to emphasize the individual worker skills of those with disabilities and to address how those skills meet employer needs.⁹¹ To facilitate the work needed on a regional level to address disability and barriers to employment, the “Connecticut/New York Talent for Growth” plan was created. The process included an assessment of regional demographics of individuals with disabilities, mapping out the talent pipeline for people with disabilities and whether the talent development was aimed at high-growth sectors, as well as soliciting feedback from regional employers on their role in hiring individuals with disabilities.⁹²

While the collaborative regional effort between New York State and Connecticut is one of many such programs, its accomplishments are noteworthy. The success of the effort led to process changes by the Connecticut Department of Labor and a review of state policies designed to eliminate barriers to hiring people with disabilities.⁹³ Achieving success in an area such as overcoming barriers to employment can be done as part of a region’s comprehensive strategy and not as a subset of it. Engaging employers routinely on the skills they need and incorporating the skills of all job seekers, whether they have a barrier to employment or not, into those discussions is crucial.⁹⁴ Educating employers about how individuals can overcome employment barriers alone or in concert with said employers is critical; also imperative is engaging intermediaries that understand employment barriers in program development as well as incorporating subsets of programmatic delivery into the overall scope of service and achievement.⁹⁵ Barriers to employment, whether they fall into traditionally understood program areas such as individuals with disability or not, can be addressed through collaborative work on a regional level and beyond through sustained attention and evaluation of both the barriers themselves and the opportunities for workforce and economic development in providing all possible means to individuals in overcoming workforce entry challenges.

The changing of regional and national demographics is often understood in what the workforce will lose in the next several years, but it is also important to understand who the next generation of workers and leaders will be. In five years, the millennial generation will constitute one of three adults in America and in ten years they will make up as much as seventy-five percent of the workforce.⁹⁶ In

⁹⁰ King: p. 1.

⁹¹ King: p. 3-4.

⁹² King: p. 5.

⁹³ King: p. 6.

⁹⁴ King: p. 8.

⁹⁵ King: p. 8.

⁹⁶ Winograd, Morley, & Michael Hais. “How Millennials Could Upend Wall Street and Corporate America.” *Governance Studies at Brookings* (2014): p. 2.

the next decade, this means that not only will the abundance of entry level workers be from the youngest working age generation, but an increasing number of managers and executives are from the age group currently defined at those approximately ages eighteen to thirty-four. The prototypical “Millennial” is seen as being more concerned with advancing the cause of the group, more in tune with technology and analytical tools, and more likely to be socially aware and concerned about issues such as the environment.⁹⁷

Policies and programs that are developed now will emphasize the immediate need of replacing Baby Boomers in the workforce and will be implemented by Generation X leaders and executives; however, given population trends these new programs and policies will ultimately be judged by their effectiveness on the millennial generation. The influx of millennials into the workplace and the consumer space is creating a need for companies to pay attention to corporate responsibility.⁹⁸ The business bottom line of companies will rely on cultivating loyalty not only to a product, but also to what the brand represents.⁹⁹ For these same companies, it is as important to maintain the loyalty and engagement of its millennial workforce by upholding integrity and espousing an image of social and community responsibility.¹⁰⁰ The linkage between social good (for lack of a better term) and different sectors or business and industry varies greatly, but companies will be judged as employers on some level for their civic engagement. Companies in manufacturing and distribution, for example, will need to find ways to inject meaning into their enterprise’s activities to retain millennial worker loyalty; company programs that serve the community and engage stakeholders may serve just such a purpose.¹⁰¹

For workforce and economic development, meeting the challenge of a new generation of workers means beginning to develop programs, policies, and outreach efforts that engage both the potential employee and the employer. Some employers have begun to make changes to the culture. For example, PricewaterhouseCooper has done away with annual reviews and replaced them with more immediate feedback in a task driven environment.¹⁰² Cultural changes at firms both large and small will not come about easily, nor will the necessary program and policy changes that the future requires. However, in the larger context of economic and workforce development collaboration, the need to understand the mindset and motivation of the future workforce is paramount in order to ensure that wise counsel can be given and prosperity secured in the years to come.

There are many ways to frame the challenge and many ways to seize opportunities through collaboration. As the region identifies the programs and policies it wants to pursue, evaluation of research being conducted and models being employed in other parts of the state and nation will be of continued benefit. The socio-economic components of the national labor force are changing and will

⁹⁷ Winograd and Hais: p. 2.

⁹⁸ Winograd and Hais: p. 6.

⁹⁹ Winograd and Hais: p. 7.

¹⁰⁰ Winograd and Hais: p. 7.

¹⁰¹ Winograd and Hais: p. 10.

¹⁰² Winograd and Hais: p. 10.

change even more dramatically as one generation retires in the coming years to be replaced by a younger workforce with very different experiences and goals. Talent development and retention will be watchwords to live by for economic and workforce development to be successful at all levels of government. What the research demonstrates is that as much will change, much will also be similar. The same challenges of how to disperse funding, to tie together economic and workforce development goals, and to further strengthen regional economies will be constants. Utilizing research will provide decision makers with greater perspective and depth of understanding that can better inform decision making and allow for more impactful program design and long-term goal setting. This in turn will achieve a more effective and efficient investment of both public and private sector dollars in the development of the next generation of workforce participants.

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Report Summary & Recommendations

Time does not stand still; as this report was compiled events were already shaping the future of workforce and economic development including a gubernatorial election in Pennsylvania, the passage and signing of new federal workforce development legislation, and the transformation of the new legislation into guidelines for states to build upon. As time moves on, so does the work of countless economic and workforce development professionals throughout northwest Pennsylvania. The tools at their disposal are always changing. Funding sources and mission statements are altered by political and societal change, all while the needs of citizens and businesses evolve at an increasingly rapid pace. The goal of this report as stated was to provide direct information for the Northwest Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board (NW WIB) to assist them in building a better future for the region, a true “blueprint” concept. With the insights collected through direct interaction with the region's citizens and businesses, with the ideas gleaned from meeting with workforce development leaders in other regions, and through review of the academic and policy research that exists, the application of this report can be applied not only in northwest Pennsylvania, but also across the Commonwealth as the challenges and opportunities ahead do not recognize divisions of boundary, personalities, or politics.

As a review, based upon the information collected to assemble this report, the following recommendations are made to the NW WIB, its leadership, and the entirety of the economic and workforce development stakeholders in northwest Pennsylvania:

- Develop a sustainable model for economic and workforce development collaboration.
- Look for methods that increase the speed, efficiency, and effectiveness of service delivery.
- Create projects and seek out opportunities to strengthen collaborative ties and serve an increasingly diverse spectrum of businesses, communities, and citizens in the coming years.
- Develop common and consistent messaging to deliver to the businesses and citizens of the region based on results and vision.
- Strengthen ties with school districts and post-secondary institutions and work collaboratively on program development.
- Engage the private sector to discover what resources are needed and find resources in order to support new outreach and training programs.
- Engage in positive, issue-based discussions with human service, community service, and other agencies that address the types of societal issues that do not traditionally fall into the scope of workforce and/or economic development.

- Find common areas of concern with human service, community service, and other agencies and seek to share resources in mutually beneficial ways.
- Seek to better understand the changing skills, attitudes, aptitudes, and goals of the 21st century workforce and help businesses as well as economic and workforce development agencies adapt to seize the opportunities ahead.
- Develop programs, projects, and shared strategic goals amongst the economic development, workforce development, and educational institutions in the region to maximize resources and meet the needs of employers and job seekers.
- The NW WIB and its leadership should continuously be interacting with other workforce areas with a commitment to seek out professional development, programmatic, and resource sharing opportunities in concert with neighboring Workforce Investment Boards as a starting point.

As noted prior, the recommendations have been developed from the county focus groups and the meetings with the other workforce areas. The literature review is intended to provide additional insight and future discussion points. The recommendations are not prioritized or ranked; rather, they are meant to encourage and guide further discussion by the region's economic and workforce development stakeholders as new collaborative plans are developed. Ultimately, the recommendations can be further refined or combined as the region looks to the future.

The movement towards more cohesive economic and workforce development is a constant process. As events have transpired and with information now collected and ready for presentation to the leaders of workforce and economic development in northwest Pennsylvania from multiple reports prepared in 2014 and 2015, it is the earnest hope of all stakeholders that this is the start of a new, engaging, and positive direction for the future of workforce and economic development collaboration in the region. The excellence that has been achieved can, must, and will be exceeded in the future through a new spirit of cooperation and by utilizing the information and lessons contained herein.

Appendices

Appendix A – County Meeting Agenda/Meeting Structure

Appendix B – Example of County Meeting Questionnaire Form

Appendix C – Word Cloud for Answers to County Meeting Questionnaire Form Question #2

Appendix D – Word Cloud for Answers to County Meeting Questionnaire Form Question #3

Appendix E – Word Cloud for Answers to County Meeting Questionnaire Form Question #4

Appendix F – Works Cited

Appendix A – County Meeting Agenda/Meeting Structure

Agenda

10 Minutes	Introductions/Questionnaire
5 Minutes	GOAL OF TODAY'S MEETING: Generate new ideas about how Workforce & Economic Development orgs can work together and determine expectations of communities from each type of organization. Questions about goal? How system works.
25 Minutes	Background information (current situation) Missions & programs offered by Workforce & Economic Dev. Orgs. Vision of each.
5 Minutes	Break
15 Minutes	Generate ideas
5 Minutes	Establish ground rules for evaluation of ideas: e.g., ideas must be applicable, doable, etc.
15 Minutes	List positives of each idea
15 Minutes	List weaknesses of each idea
5 Minutes	Generate ideas to overcome weaknesses
15 Minutes	Summarize evaluated ideas
2 Minutes	Prioritize ideas (Place a green sticker next to individuals' first choice, a blue for second choice, yellow for third choice, and red as a "no go.")
5 Minutes	Explain next steps Q & A Meeting adjourned

Blue: Focus & manage (agenda, timing, meeting management)

Yellow: Benefits & feasibility

White: Information: background, need, missing items

Black: Risks, difficulties, problems

Red: Feelings, intuition, gut instincts

Green: New ideas, possibilities

Appendix B – Example of County Meeting Questionnaire Form

Northwest Pennsylvania Economic and Workforce Development Blueprint Project Regional Research Questionnaire

XXXXXXX County Meeting – XXXXXXXX, XXXXXXXX XX, 2014

1. How would you best describe your sector of employment and role (check one):

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Private Sector – Executive/Owner | <input type="checkbox"/> Private Sector – Human Resources |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Private Sector – Management/Financial | <input type="checkbox"/> Private Sector – Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> County/Local Government Official | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Education Professional |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Decline to Respond |

2. What are the three words you must often associate with Northwest Pennsylvania in general?

- a.
 - b.
 - c.
- ☐ Decline to Respond

3. What are the three words you most often associate with economic development in Northwest Pennsylvania?

- a.
 - b.
 - c.
- ☐ Decline to Respond

4. What are the three words you most often associate with workforce development in Northwest Pennsylvania?

- a.
 - b.
 - c.
- ☐ Decline to Respond

Please note this questionnaire is intended to be confidential – do not place your name or organization's name anywhere on this document

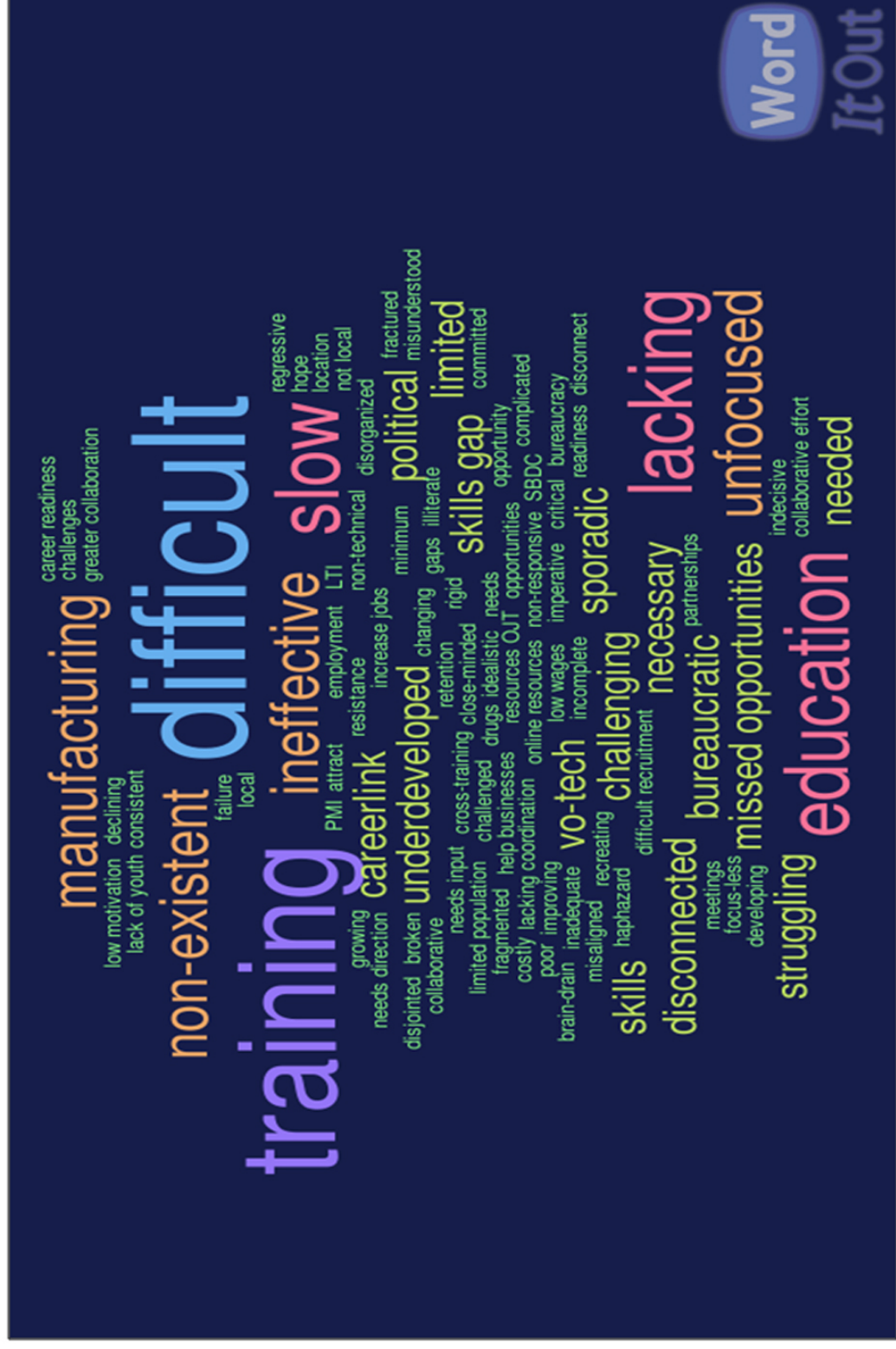
Appendix C – Word Cloud for Answers to County Meeting Questionnaire Form Question #2:
What are the three words you most often associate with Northwest Pennsylvania in general?



What are the three words you most often associate with economic development in Northwest Pennsylvania?



Appendix E – Word Cloud for Answers to County Meeting Questionnaire Form Question #4:
What are the three words you most often associate with workforce development in Northwest Pennsylvania?



Appendix F – Works Cited

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Northwest Pennsylvania Economic and Workforce Development Blueprint Project

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