

Workforce Alliance WIOA Local Plan

Executive Summary - August 16, 2020

Background

Workforce Alliance. Together with businesses, local elected officials and community leaders, Workforce Alliance creates a comprehensive community-wide response to build a highly-skilled workforce in South Central Connecticut. Through the coordination and administration of a variety of employment and training initiatives, the Workforce Alliance has prepared thousands of individuals for jobs and assisted numerous employers with training and employee transition.

The COVID pandemic has upended both our regional economy and our services, creating uncertainties that make longer term planning difficult. While we have responded with great agility so far, including moving all services online, our plan going forward must remain a working document with the capacity for rapid adjustment as health and economic conditions evolve and change.

The national focus on racial equity in the wake of the killing of George Floyd and many other Americans of color has moved our Board to affirm a deep commitment to applying a racial equity lens in all that we do as a workforce board to move our region toward a more equitable future. Specific actions are defined across our plan to accomplish this result for which we will be accountable.

Fortunately, we are building on strengthened partnerships with both mandated partners like the CT Department of Labor, the Community Colleges, and the Adult Education system and with a range of local and community-based agencies.

Economic Landscape and Priority Sectors

As of June 2020, the unemployment rate in South Central Connecticut was 9.1% due to the pandemic, up from a recent low of 3.4% in March. The total number of unemployed in our region was 29,990 as of June 2020. While job growth began to recover in May, the state lost 17% of its jobs (291,300) to the pandemic between February and April. The hoped for V-shaped recovery does not appear to be

happening as the recovery looks like it will be more gradual. The Workforce Alliance has an opportunity to work with the State and its partners to help shape the response to this dislocation in a way that focuses on continued upskilling of the labor force and on job

quality. Table 1 shows the top growth sectors in the latest CT DOL employment projections which continue to show gains in sectors that require post-secondary training.

Table 1: Top 5 Growing Industry Sectors 2016-2026

Industry Title	Base Employment 2016	Projected Employment 2026	Numeric Change	Percent Change
Education and Health Services	124,366	132,058	7,692	6.2
Health Care and Social Assistance	68,860	75,938	7,078	10.3
Ambulatory Health Care Services	20,212	24,192	3,980	19.7
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	4,936	8,872	3,936	79.7
Professional and Business Services	39,266	43,173	3,907	9.9

Table 2 presents the 12 South Central Connecticut occupations groupings which are projected to have more than 2,000 annual total openings between 2016 and 2026, accounting for 93% of all openings.

Table 2: Top 12 Growing Industry Occupational Categories, 2016-2026

SOC Code	Occupation Title	Base Employment 2016	Projected Employment 2026	Annual Change	Annual Total Openings
43	Office and Administrative Support Occupations	58,411	58,508	10	6,495
35	Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	28,698	29,951	125	5,080
41	Sales and Related Occupations	34,980	35,574	59	4,887
39	Personal Care and Service Occupations	21,182	24,907	372	3,624
41-2	Retail Sales Workers	20,535	20,518	(2)	3,295
35-3	Food and Beverage Serving Workers	16,517	17,486	97	3,177
25	Education, Training, and Library Occupations	30,883	32,143	126	2,714
53	Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	19,974	21,930	196	2,699
39-9	Other Personal Care and Service Workers	15,270	17,361	209	2,588
51	Production Occupations	20,713	20,644	(7)	2,278
11	Management Occupations	23,259	25,458	220	2,082
37	Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occu	15,638	16,033	40	2,018
	Total	306,060	320,513	1,445	40,937

Workforce Challenges The Workforce Alliance will employ several strategies, detailed below, to address the following pressing challenges for our region:

- *Skills Gaps.* Closing skills gaps will be essential to a robust, highly-skilled workforce and we recognize that there are multiple skill areas that will need to be addressed. Healthcare, IT and manufacturing employers report shortages of workers with the specific occupational skills to fill their open positions, and we will need to simultaneously to address the major gaps in academic skills and professional skills of career seekers.
- *COVID19.* The global pandemic has required a rapid change in our service delivery models at the same time our region experiences severe increase in the number of unemployed. The Workforce Alliance will need to work closely with our region’s employers to respond to increased need in healthcare, IT and warehousing and logistics positions and offer job training supports to career seekers through a variety of virtual methods. The uncertainty of this time will require that we remain agile and innovative.
- *Transportation and Child Care.* Access to transportation and adequate child care remain major barriers to high quality employment for many in our region. 13% of individuals in our region experience transportation insecurities which are more common among Black and Latino residents (2019 DataHaven Community Well Being Survey). Regarding child care needs, New Haven alone is in need of 2,500 additional child care slots and the cost of available slots is a major issue (NHCHLD).
- *Customizing Services for Specific Populations.* Our service population represents a diverse array of lived experiences and effective training and supports require approaches that are customized per population. Providing effective services for youth, underemployed, those with disabilities and ex-offenders will require the Workforce Alliance to adopt a range of best practices and to be effective service providers for a variety of customers.
- *Digital Divide.* The shift to virtual services in the wake of the pandemic has highlighted the need to bridge the digital divide in our region. This divide not only includes physically components such as computers, but also access to the internet and a foundation of digital literacy for customers. We will seek funding to supply these items and all of our training

programs will now include a digital literacy component to cover virtual interview skills, and virtual workplace skills.

Vision, Goals, and Strategies for 2020-2023

Vision. To work with our partners to cultivate the highly-skilled, high-quality workers needed for regional employers to prosper and grow. Our vision includes a renewed focus on creating a more just system that produces equitable outcomes for Black and Brown residents.

Our vision embraces the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) emphasis on partnership, alignment and systems integration, as well as WIOA's dual focus on developing a supply of highly-qualified workers while meeting the hiring demands of employers.

Our vision aligns with Governor Lamont and the Governor's Workforce Council's vision for our state, which also serves as the vision in Connecticut's WIOA Unified State Plan: *Connecticut will create and sustain the global economy's best-educated, most-skilled, highest-productive workforce, capable of pursuing rewarding careers, such that every Connecticut business has access to a qualified, skilled, job-ready workforce.*

2020 Plan Goals

The Workforce Alliance has six overarching goals for 2020-2025 to address our region's unique priorities and that align with WIOA priorities and Connecticut's Unified State Plan.

- 1. Develop and implement an action plan to advance racial equity through workforce services.** Our board and staff will work together to build and apply knowledge of racial equity and to implement actions that move our region toward racial and economic equity. Racial equity focused measures will be incorporated across all our 5 year plan strategies to ensure sustained action to address systemic racial bias.
- 2. Continue to build an integrated workforce system with increased access, greater agility, and deeper partnerships to advance career pathways.** Responding to the COVID pandemic by moving to virtual service delivery required great agility. We will learn from this experience to continually adjust service strategies to ensure increased access through closer partnerships with all service providers, employers, chambers and industry associations and deepened connections to the community and community based organizations, and customer feedback.
- 3. Continue and expand efforts to engage youth, with a focus on out-of-school youth and young adults and minority youth.** Through strong, person-centered practices and the implementation of relevant and engaging youth programs, we will support youth as they enter career pathways. We will work with our partners in K-12 and Adult Education to meet the academic needs of youth and will work with employers to provide work experience and career exploration opportunities.
- 4. Strengthen employer-driven, next generation sector partnerships to enhance industry talent pipelines.** We will expand on our successful manufacturing industry partnership by engaging with other regional industry sectors such as health care, IT, and logistics to address employers' talent needs.
- 5. Continue progress toward person-centered service delivery within a two generation approach with particular focus on availability of support services to address barriers to participation and employment.** Access to adequate transportation and child care services remain barriers to employment for many in our region. By addressing the needs of an individual and their family, more appropriate plans and strategies can be put in place so that

career seekers can obtain and sustain employment while still working toward a long term career goals.

6. **Continue to strengthen AJC system services for career seekers with *disabilities*.** We will continue to refine our nationally recognized strategies to support individuals with disabilities as they navigate career pathways through use of Integrated Resource Teams involving partners, provision of assistive technology, and strong connections with employers.

2020 Plan Strategies

- Racial Equity -

Begin implementation of our racial equity action plan to do our part in ushering in a more just and equitable workforce system in our region. We recognize the persistent inequalities that continue to impact Black and Brown communities, leaving them with higher unemployment rates, lower graduation rates, less income, higher poverty rates, and less wealth. The recent pandemic has magnified this issue as we've seen Blacks and Latinos getting sick and dying at disproportionately high rates and being much more likely to be laid off during the economic shutdown. To address systemic racism, the Workforce Alliance has committed to:

- Assess our internal and external operations and commit to making changes and being accountable for them.
- To deepen our connections with Black and Latino communities, we will dedicate new outreach resources through our network of American Job Centers and increase our collaboration with our community partners to not only reach and serve more people of color with employment & training services, but also seek input from customers and partners so that what we do is meaningful and has impact.
- Review existing Business Services policies to ensure that minority-owned businesses and start-ups are not excluded from services to increase the participation of minority-owned businesses in our programs
- Disaggregate our program outcomes to reveal disparities by race and use those results to inform programmatic changes, including changes to internal policies.
- Advocate for state policies that address barriers in areas of transportation, child care, and access to services faced disproportionately in Black and Brown communities

-Integrated System-

Institute new avenues of engaging with mandated and other partners that are more inclusive and responsive to 2Gen approaches and incorporate successful virtual elements created for COVID in our American Job Centers. We will continue to deepen our engagement with all partners to move toward a more integrated, transparent, and equitable workforce system. Our virtual service delivery models in response to COVID provide insight into new opportunities to increase engagement with both partners and customers. Customers who previously were limited by lack of transportation or child care needs can now participate in activities like online training through the METRIX platform and virtual job clubs. We will expand on this new opportunity to offer more virtual services such as industry based work-shops, Q&A sessions with employers, and appointments with Job Seeker consultants.

In order to be successful with these endeavors, we must also address the digital divide facing Black and Brown communities in particular by providing technology supports such as computers, access to internet hot spots, and digital literacy services. We will need to work with our partners to advocate for the state level policies and the resources to bridge this divide.

We will enhance our regional partner network to focus on engagement and retention of participants from Black and Latino communities and address the specific barriers that have impacted their success in programs previously.

-Employer Engagement and Industry Pipelines-

Advance sectoral partnerships across growth areas. Our history of engagement with employers from diverse sectors, all with differing talent needs and target populations, has allowed the Workforce Alliance to greatly improve our training services and job opportunities for career seekers while addressing specific employer needs. We will continue to refine talent pipeline offerings in manufacturing, health, IT, and logistics, seeking new state and federal resources to support them and will expand our engagement with employers through sector advisory bodies, virtual and in-person hiring events, and opportunities to advise on program offerings. For sectors undergoing transition, such as hospitality, which was a growing industry before the pandemic, we will listen to industry adaptations and be responsive to new roles and occupational requirements in coming years.

We will also encourage employers currently utilizing Business Services to become mentors to minority-owned businesses and start-ups and will work with our employer partners to provide guidance and strategies with the goal of increasing diversity in recruitment and hiring practices.

-Support Services-

Continue refinement of AJC system practices to ensure a person-centered, strengths-based approach that meets participants where they are and continue move from focus on immediate placement to career pathways. We will adopt broad interpretation of supportive services to include any barrier to participation in training or work, which can be supported by fully utilizing funds allocated for support services. Understanding that barriers to employment impact minorities at greater rates than their white counterparts, often resulting in their taking part-time or lower wage work, we will incorporate best practices for equity and inclusion in our support services model as important to closing racial gaps in career success.

Transportation and child care continue to be major barriers to successful opportunities for our customers. Our study conducted with the NAACP and COG showed much lower rates of car ownership in our urban areas resulting in much higher unemployment for those individuals. We will develop transportation strategies for employment outside areas or times served by public transportation such as expanding on a pilot partnership with UBER for our customers. To address the longstanding issue of our customers' need for child care services, we will work with the CT Office of Early Childhood and regional early childhood councils and providers to expand resources for and improve access to services, including exploring how to support Child Care Navigation to build stronger connections to community providers.

-Youth-

Administer better supports and engagement with youth and young adults. To help our region's youth and young adults gain access to strong career pathways, we will implement better support services to address this population's unique needs. Our youth serving program, Project CEO, has been successful in engaging youth and introducing them to career pathways, and we now shift our focus to expanding on those successes. To do so, we commit to developing earlier interventions, creating engaging and relevant career exploration opportunities and expand utilization of subsidized employment and On the Job training to provide work experience opportunities.

-Persons with Disabilities-

Continue to advance work to serve persons with disabilities across the AJC system. To increase opportunities for career seekers with disabilities, we must continue to implement our best practices of engaging partners and providing adaptive services and strive for more opportunities and supports for this population. We will maintain and upgrade assistive technology and professional development in our three American Job Centers and accessible online presence, using a lending library approach where appropriate, and seek funding for interpretive services. Due to our increased utilization of virtual service delivery, adaptive services and interpretive services for this delivery model will be needed as well. Our relationship with the Department of Aging and Disability Services (DADS) is a key element of the successes of our efforts to date and we will continue to strengthen that partnership through engagement with DADS staff at multiple levels. Finally, we will create Integrated Resource Teams that involve our community partners to help advance participant career goals.

-Data-driven System-

Use data more effectively to drive continuous improvement and racial equity across all strategies. Building on the work of the Governor's Workforce Council, we will use data across all operations to guide our program planning and performance measurement for greater productivity and accountability, including disaggregating our program outcomes to reveal disparities by race and use those results to inform programmatic changes, including changes to internal policies.