



Workforce Alliance WIOA Local Plan Modification Executive Summary May 2022

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, 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, including moving services on-line, our plan moving 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 CT Department of Labor, the Community Colleges, and the Adult Education system and with a range of local and community-based agencies.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

- 1. Provide an analysis of the local area's economic conditions, including information on existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations.**

INTRODUCTION

The South Central Workforce Investment Area, encompassing 30 towns in South Central Connecticut, and the New Haven Labor Market Area (NH LMA), had experienced a strong recovery from the effects of the great recession, with the region's unemployment rate at 3.4% in March of 2020, continuing a downward trend over the past several years. At the time our original plan was written, the unemployment rate in the region was 9.1% largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the unemployment rate has declined to 3.9% at the end of March 2022, the Great Resignation/Great Reshuffle continues to leave sectors such as hospitality with higher than average number of positions to be filled.

EXISTING AND EMERGING IN-DEMAND INDUSTRY SECTORS

Every two years economists at the Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) Office of Research create ten-year industry and occupational employment forecasts. The most recent forecasts at the time of the writing of our original plan in 2020 utilized 2016 data as the base year, and projected employment trends out to the year 2026. The information for this modification of our local plan is based on 2018 data projected out to the year 2028. The purpose of these forecasts are to assist students, schools, training program, businesses, and governments to make informed planning decisions.

As of June 2020, the unemployment rate in South Central Connecticut was 9.1% due to the pandemic, up from as recent low of 3.4% in March. The employment rate was 3.9% in the region at the end of March 2022. The total number of

unemployed in our region is 13,092 down from 29,990 in June of 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 2020. The hoped for V-shaped recovery does not appear to be happening as the recovery looks more gradual with businesses and individuals still coping with the surges due to COVID-19. 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 2018-2028

Industry Title	Base	Projected	Numeric Change	Percent Change
	Employment 2018	Employment 2028		
Health Care and Social Assistance	69,321	77,706	8,385	12.1
Education and Health Services	121,731	128,441	6,710	5.5
Professional and Business Services	39,770	43,728	3,958	9.9
Transportation and Warehousing	11,595	15,348	3,753	32.4
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	63,863	67,112	3,249	5.1

Table 2 presents the 12 South Central Connecticut occupation groupings which are projected to have more than 2,000 annual total openings between 2018 and 2028, accounting for 92% of all openings.

Table 2: Top 12 Growing Industry Occupational Categories 2018-2028

SOC Code	Occupation Title	Base	Projected	Annual Change	Annual Total Openings
		Employment 2018	Employment 2028		
00-0000	Total, All Occupations	374,846	395,387	2,054	40,623
11-1021	Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	26,571	30,229	366	3,557
11-2000	Healthcare Support Occupations	21,896	25,769	387	2,949
11-2011	Food and Beverage Serving Workers	15,212	16,285	107	2,868
11-2022	Education, Training, and Library Occupations	31,859	32,122	26	2,600
11-2030	Nursing, Psychiatric, and Home Health Aides	16,310	19,433	312	2,255
11-3000	Management Occupations	27,013	29,245	223	2,198
11-3010	Production Occupations	20,634	20,956	32	2,078
11-3021	Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occu	15,343	16,586	124	2,025

Industry Forecasts: In 2020, CT DOL projected the highest growing industry sector in the region to be Education and Health Services (a ten-year growth of 7,692 new jobs), followed by Health care and Social Assistance (7,078), Ambulatory Health Care Services (3,980), Arts, Entertainment and Recreation (3,936) and Professional and Business Services (3,907). The latest CT DOL forecasts project the highest growing industry sectors in the region to be Health Care and Social Assistance (8,385), Education and Health Services (6,710), Transportation and Warehousing (3,753), Professional and Business Services (3,958) and Trade, Transportation, and Utilities (3,249).

Table 3 below shows the top five industries predicted to grow by the largest number of jobs over the next ten years. Of course, the pandemic will likely impact industry projections dramatically in all industries and sectors.

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Our region’s top five employers are in health, healthcare supplies and logistics which align with areas of demand the still persist due to COVID-19.

Occupational Forecasts: In 2020, CT DOL forecast projected Personal Care and Service Occupations to be the highest growing occupational category over the next ten years, growing by 3,725 jobs or 17.6%. The next highest occupational growth categories were Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations (3,131 jobs, 11.2%) and Management occupations (2,199 jobs, 9.45%) These projections align with historical occupational growth in Health Services occupations having seen the highest growth over the past decade. Projections for 2018-2028 show the highest growing occupational category over the next ten years to be Transportation and Material Moving (3,557), Healthcare Support (2,949) and Food and Beverage Serving Workers (2,868)¹.

Workforce Challenges: 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 successful workforce and we recognize that there are multiple skill areas that will need to be addressed. Healthcare, IT and manufacturing employers report shortages with specific occupational skills to fill their open positions, and we will need to simultaneously 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. 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, even in 2022, will require that we remain agile and innovative.
- *Transportation and Child Care* Access to transportation and quality 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).

¹ CT DOL 2018-2028 Occupational Growth Projections for South Central Connecticut. Accessed May, 2022



- *Customized 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 that Workforce Alliance adopts a range of best practices and to be effective service providers for a variety of customers.
- *Digital Divide* The shift to hybrid services in the wake of the pandemic has highlighted the need to bridge the digital divide in our region. This divide not only includes physical components such as computers and hot spots for internet access, but also a foundation of digital literacy for customers. We will continue to 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.

LWDB VISION, GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Identify the vision, goals and strategies adopted by the LWDB in response to the passage of WIOA and how these will affect the preparation of an educated and skilled workforce.

OUR VISION

Our vision is 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 Connecticut business has access to a qualified, skilled, job-ready workforce.*

In addition, our vision aligns with the Office of Workforce Strategy's mission which is to build the systems, teams, and approaches that will make Connecticut a talent environment that attracts and motivates students, career builders, and companies alike

GOALS

Workforce Alliance has six (6) *overarching* goals for 2020-2024 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 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 deepen 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 remain barriers to employment for many in the 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 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 the use of Integrated Resource Teams involving partners, provision of assistive technology, and strong connections with employers.

STRATEGIES

The following paragraphs describe several strategies we will utilize to accomplish our vision and goals.

~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 have seen Black



and Latino workers 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, 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 and 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 Services~

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-19 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-19 provide insight into new opportunities to increase engagement with both partners and customers. Customers who previously were limited by lack of transportation or childcare needs can now participate in activities like online training through the Metrics platform and virtual job clubs. We will expand on this new opportunity to offer more virtual services such as industry-based workshops, 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 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 for 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.

Workforce Alliance is an active participant in the system of Regional Sector Partnerships (RSPs) created by OWS to address the regional and local workforce needs through convening industry partners, educators, economic development practitioners. By convening and participating in the two (2) South Central RSP's, we create opportunities with our partners that allow students and job seekers to explore different credentials that are tied to in-demand careers in CT.

~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 services.

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. 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.

~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.

Impact of COVID-19

The past two years have been a period of unprecedented economic change during which labor markets adapted to COVID-19 mitigation. According to Eric Gjede, Vice President of Connecticut Business and Industry Association “Our labor force is down by more than 62,000 people since February 2020, which represents almost half of the region’s losses and 12% of the national decline, while employers are trying to fill 110,000 jobs.”² He further stated that Connecticut has now recovered 82.1% of the jobs lost during the COVID shutdown. Of the 10 major supersectors, five have declined and five have increased: Leisure and hospitality, manufacturing, financial services, construction and mining increased in April 2022. Trade, Transportation, utilities, information, professional and business services, education and health services, and government have declined. Gjede further states “Our recovery remains a fragile one with manufacturing gains and seasonal growth in leisure and hospitality last month offsetting concerning losses in the trade, transportation, utilities, information and professional and business services. Employers are still dealing with numerous challenges including inflation, supply chain disruptions, the surge in COVID positivity rates, and the labor shortage crisis.”³

The impact of COVID-19 on our workforce has been devastating. The Connecticut Voices for Children, *State of Working Connecticut, 2021* report cites Harvard University Economists Lawrence H. Summers and Ana Stansbury’s article *U.S. Workers need more power* in the June 28, 2020 Washington Post “Covid-19 has brought into sharp relief the contrast between the experiences of the higher-income Americans who receive deliveries and the lower-income Americans who fulfill them, between those who can work safely from home and those who must expose themselves to risk, often with inadequate protection, between those who have the power to safeguard their health and their living standards and those who do not.”

While the economic outlook is improving for some, the impact of the pandemic is uneven. In our local area, 44% of families qualify as ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), meaning they have a job, or maybe more than one, but can’t make ends meet on even the most basic budget.

² Christine Stuart, CTNews Junkie, May 19, 2022.

³ Christine Stuart, CTNews Junkie, May 19, 2022.

The graphic below shows how these families are feeling the pressures of the pandemic more than those of us who are better off. ⁴



The A.L.I.C.E. report also states that racial and ethnic disparities in hardship are growing. 57% of Black households and 63% of Hispanic households in Connecticut live below the A.L.I.C.E. threshold. “52% of workers in Connecticut are paid hourly. These workers are more likely to have fluctuations in income, with frequent schedule changes and variation in the number of hours available for work each week/month.”⁵

Workforce Alliance will continue to work in partnership with our community and businesses to meet the needs of industry while at the same time creating the on-ramps and training opportunities to advance individuals from historically marginalized communities.

⁴ Connecticut United Ways, 2020 ALICE Report

⁵ Connecticut United Ways, 2020 ALICE Report