PY 2021-2024 WIOA Multi-Year Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: **Berks County Workforce Development Board**

Effective Date: **July 1, 2021**

1. STRATEGIC PLANNING QUESTIONS: Local Area Workforce and Economic Analysis

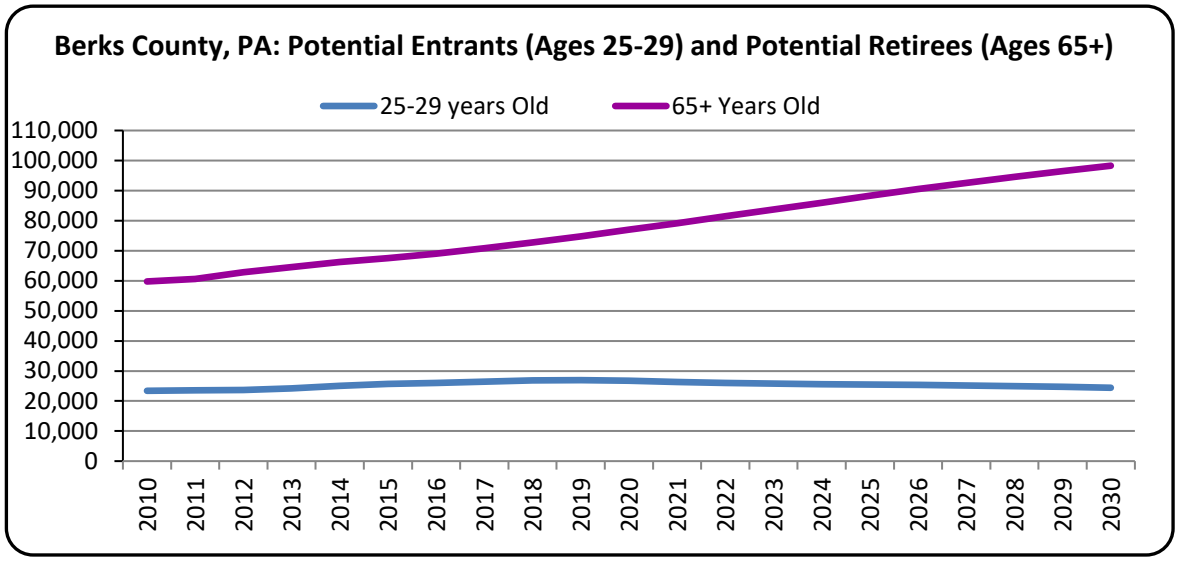
1.1. Identify the composition of the local area's population and labor force.

The Berks County Workforce Development Area 4-year local workforce development plan covers the expected post-pandemic recovery period July 1, 2021 thru June 30, 2025.

Location: Our local economy and associated labor market benefit from a competitively advantaged geographic position in Southeastern Pennsylvania (SE PA) which is the Commonwealth's largest, wealthiest and most dynamic region. However, we are also home to a distinctive local employment profile reinforced by the reality that 61.5% of our local workforce both lives and works in Berks County (Source: Pennsylvania Center for Workforce Information and Analysis [CWIA]). For planning purposes, we also benefit from Berks County workforce development area being coincident with the Reading Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and we will use the terms "Berks County" and "Reading MSA" interchangeably throughout this plan.

Beyond near to medium term-recovery, the most significant long-term changes impacting the Berks County labor market during the period of this plan remain the continuing aging and the diversification of our local population and the available workforce.

Age Distribution: Berks County's population is projected to slowly grow from 421,164 in 2019 to 433,684 in 2030 (Source: Jobs EQ®). This growth will predominantly come in the number of Berks Countians who have reached age 65 due to a historic two-decade shift in the age distribution of our adult population as shown in the graph below:



In short, we face a wave of experienced older adults exiting the local workforce and we lack enough young adults to replace them. From 2010 - 2030, the "potential retiree" population (ages 65+) is projected to grow by **63%** from just under 60,000 to nearly 98,000. As a proportion of the total Berks County population, "potential retirees" will grow from 14.5% to 22.6% or from approximately 1 of every 7 Berks County residents to more than 1of every 5 (Source: JobsEQ®).

Our population of "potential entrants" into the labor force (ages 25-29) is projected to remain essentially flat during this transition period, barely growing from 23,399 to 24,961 – a mere 6.7% increase over two decades. As a proportion of the overall local population, this important young adult cohort beginning their working careers will remain at approximately 5.7% (Source: JobsEQ®).

In the immediate time period, our local labor market continued its surprisingly steady recovery from the initial devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and requisite business establishment shutdowns in March through June 2020. However, due to the quicker than expected rebound of our key local manufacturing, logistics and transportations, and construction sectors, the Reading Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA)/Berks County labor market experienced the best jobs recovery of any MSA in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. By September 2020 our local area was already back to within 0.5% of the number of jobs from a year earlier (Source: Current Employment Statistics: October 2020 Edition; Pennsylvania Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (CWIA).

Our local jobs recovery continued through December 2020 as the seasonally adjusted (SA) local unemployment rate declined to **6.4%,** which remains below Pennsylvania's statewide unemployment rate of 6.7% and the U.S. rate of 6.7%. According to Pennsylvania's Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (CWIA), as of December 2020:

- Our seasonally adjusted local labor force stood at 221,100; 1.01% higher than a year ago. This measure has "settled down" from the dramatic upward "spike" that began nearly nine months earlier with the arrival of the pandemic in March 2020.
- The seasonally adjusted number of employed Berks County residents in December 2020 was 207,000 or 1,100 less than a year earlier.
- At the same time, the seasonally adjusted number of unemployed residents continued to decline but remained relatively high at 14,100 which is 34% higher than a year earlier in December 2019.

With such a dramatic year over year increase in the number of Berks County residents who may be classified as unemployed Adult or Dislocated Workers in the final quarter of calendar year 2020 one might expect that local employers would now be able to attract more applicants with strong employment histories and retain them**.** Unfortunately, the opposite appears to be true - at least at the time that this plan is being written. Beginning in the third calendar quarter (July-September) of calendar year 2020, our PA CareerLink® Berks County Business Services Team (BST) has been inundated by calls for help from local employers in key industries (e.g. Manufacturing, Transportation &Warehousing, etc.) desperate to fill current job openings and reporting almost no responses to their online job postings. The BST and the WDB heard from many of these employers who recently significantly increased their entry-level wages in response to the immediate lack of active job seekers; however, this is not an entirely new situation. As early as September 2019, WDB members identified the growing challenges local manufacturing employers were facing in retaining newly hired production employees. The WDB staff subsequently shared data from CWIA confirming that new hire "churn" in Berks County consistently occurred at remarkably higher rates than any other area in PA. It's too early to know with certainty, but it appears that the pandemic has further exposed long-term structural challenges (including insufficient training and development of their incumbent workforce) that many employers will need to address sooner and more consistently than they have in the past.

Educational Attainment: Berks County historically has been characterized by a substantial local population of available working age adults well-matched to the region's skilled talent needs for good paying middle-skill jobs in healthcare, construction and manufacturing. Most of this experienced workforce combined at least a high school diploma with significant knowledge, skills and abilities acquired through decades on the job with local employers.

However, these same good jobs (and pre-requisite education) are often not readily accessible to our many Berks County residents with limited English language speaking ability. The American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimate (2015-2019) identifies 29,738 Berks County residents (7.6%) who "speak English less than very well". This represents a notable 75% increase from the 17,000 residents identified in our previous 4-year local plan. Our 7.6% rate for residents with this challenge is the third highest rate among Pennsylvania's 67 counties and much higher than the statewide rate (4.3%).

More broadly, the Berks County labor force exhibits a distinctive education-level profile as compared to Pennsylvania as a whole. As reported by the ACS 5-year estimate (2015-2019):

- 13.3% of the County's adults (age 25+) lack a high school diploma or equivalent which is significantly worse than the state as a whole where only 9.5% of Pennsylvania adults lack this critical baseline level of formal education.
- Low educational attainment is particularly a concern among working age (25-64 years of age) residents of the City of Reading where 31.5% lack a high school degree or equivalent (Source: ACS 2014-2018).
- 36.7% of Berks County adults have earned a high school diploma or the equivalent.
- Fewer (24.7%) Berks County adults possess a bachelor's degree or higher as compared to 31.4% of Pennsylvania adults.

A Critical Need for More Appropriately (and Affordably) Educated Workers: It is an unfortunate common practice when evaluating educational attainment to lump together adults who have earned an associate degree with adults who report having "some college, no degree". The WDB is not sure what we can say for sure about the educational attainment of the substantial cohort of our 17.5% of adults age 25-64 reporting having "some college, no degree" (Source: JobsEQ®). It is nearly impossible to determine what level of education such "non-completing" adults may have actually acquired. In the absence of a recognized post-secondary credential, the educational attainment of these adults is best categorized along with their peers who simply report having attained a high school diploma or equivalent. By contrast, our 9.4% of adults who have earned an associate degree (Source: JobsEQ®) should be recognized for this major career achievement and career credential as they are likely well positioned lifelong learners who can adapt to the evolving needs of local employers.

Unfortunately, our current local education profile does not match well with the needs of our region's emerging technology-driven workplace. In the decade ahead, while we may have a sufficient supply of local working age adult residents with 4-year degrees, our local employers need a much larger pool of adults with **associate degrees** (particularly in technical fields of study) or similarly valuable post-secondary educational and skills credentials. Importantly, such post-secondary credentials are proven tickets to career success which can be affordably acquired through registered apprenticeships, technical applied associate (AAS) degree programs, and military or other technical training programs without taking on undue student loan debt.

As Pennsylvania's Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (CWIA) reports in its Long-Term Occupational Employment Projections (2018-28), Berks County firms currently employ 36,720 skilled workers in occupations linked to such affordable and valuable industry-recognized post-secondary credentials. With local employers already reporting difficulty in finding qualified replacements for their many skilled retiring workers, CWIA projects that overall jobs for individuals with such credentials will grow 6.9% to 39,250 by 2028.

Migration and Mobility: Fortunately, Berks County is geographically and economically well positioned to benefit from a net positive inflow of potential workers through "in-migration". This inflow was particularly well-documented by the O'Pake Institute at Alvernia University in their comprehensive *Brain Drain or Brain Gain – What's Happening in Berks County?* report in 2016. The report was part of the *Berks Vital Signs* series funded by the Berks County Community Foundation (BCCF) and in relation to demographic *Migration and Mobility* determined:

- *While Pennsylvania's statewide population has declined since 1980, Berks County has experienced modest population growth during the same time period.*
- *Some of the region's population increase over the last three decades is due to "normal replacement", but much of the growth has resulted from positive net migration.*
- *In recent years, Berks County has benefited from a net influx of young adults (ages 25-34) "probably related to employment".*
- *The County has experienced significant net in-migration from Southeastern Pennsylvania, particularly Montgomery County.*
- *There has also been "a significant migration of those with lower educational attainment to the Reading area from out-of-state and out of the country".*
- *The region is experiencing some out-migration of retirees.*

Local school districts, the BCIU, housing program administrators and community based organizations consistently report to the WDB that a majority of our newly-arriving families (often with school age children) are moving here over the past decade from the greater New York City / Northern New Jersey region which is only 120 miles distant. Like many immigrant families before them, these families come to Berks County in search of more affordable housing, safer schools and better job prospects.

Disconnected/Underprepared Young Adults: Another significant source of unemployment in Berks County with serious long-term implications is the large number of young adults (ages 16-24) who are not engaged in work or education preparing for careers. This critical challenge has been greatly exacerbated by the pandemic and the WDB continues to dedicate significant resources to ensure that we have the most comprehensive and current information available regarding the size and critical characteristics of this elusive population. Most notably, the WDB partnered with the United Way of Berks County (United Way) to fund a project to research and profile disconnected and under-employed young adults with a resulting comprehensive report published in July 2017. Findings from the original report include:

- Berks County is currently home to between 3,000 – 5,000 disconnected individuals who meet the WDBs' definition of a disconnected young adult:
    - an individual age 16 – 24 who has neither been in school or employed for a period of at least six-months at the time of the study; or

  - a young adult age 21 – 24 who is underemployed (would like full-time work but has settled for part-time work or is employed in a position that is inadequate with respect to their skills/training).
- 90% of disconnected young adults reported experiencing life circumstances that are common barriers to employment education.
- Disconnected young adults in Berks County often face multiple and varied barriers to gainful employment and education.
- Over half of disconnected young adults face more than one reason for being disconnected.
- The top barriers disconnected young adults in Berks County face include:
  1. Lack of Transportation
  2. Family Care Obligations
  3. Focus on "Making Money" vs. "Investing in a Career"
  4. Significant Barriers to Pursuing Education

Regretfully, local post-pandemic young adult unemployment data are not available from public sources at the time of the preparation of this 4-year plan. Anticipating this critical labor market information gap, the WDB's Youth Committee approved a statement of work in October 2020 for a competitively procured contract to update this critical data from our 2017 study with an emphasis on quantifying the impact of the pandemic on this vulnerable population. We expect to have the data and information reported under this contract no later than September 2021.

Other Barriers to Employment (U.S. Census): Berks County is home to 27,998 individuals (ages 16-64) with a disability representing nearly 1 in 10 residents in this prime age cohort. Unfortunately, even before the pandemic, only 45.3% of these working age adults with disabilities were in our labor force as compared to 84.9% of adults without a disability in the local labor force. Of those adults with disabilities who were in the pre-pandemic workforce, one in eight were unemployed (12.5%) – an unemployment rate more than twice the rate for individuals in the labor force with no disability. (Source: CWIA and ACS 5-Year Estimates; *2015-2019).*

Initial reports from WDB members and our local community partners indicate that the pandemic has likely made the employment challenges for this vulnerable population even worse. In response, the WDB budgeted WIOA Adult Title I funding for an in-depth local study to be conducted in 2021: (a.) to better understand the reasons working age adults with disabilities in Berks County are disproportionately not employed or are under-employed, both from the individual's perspective and the potential employer's perspective; (b.) to understand how COVID-19 has affected employer's willingness to hire this population and the individual's ability/desire to obtain employment; and (c.) to provide a context for the Board concerning the development of strategies to promote the employment of individuals with disabilities. The study will be competitively procured by April 1, 2021 with the successful contractor to address critical research questions including:

- *What is the percentage of individuals with disabilities in Berks County currently working, broken out by industry sector?*
- *If they are not working – why? What are the barriers / challenges that exist?*
- *If they are under-employed (i.e., working in jobs that require significantly less skill sets than their qualifications, based on individual knowledge, education, experience or abilities), why are they under-employed?*
- *What are reasons employers do/do not more regularly and fully employ individuals with disabilities?*

- *What do individuals with disabilities want/need from an employer to support their employment? Conversely, what do employers want/need in relation to the employment of individuals with disabilities?*

As described above, the Berks County WDB expects to have plentiful entry-level job openings in the decade ahead providing good opportunities for properly prepared residents to earn steady, family-sustaining wages. As a result, our labor market is well-positioned to help lift many residents out of the poverty which is so often tied to a lack of regular gainful employment. However, we have plenty of room for improvement as, even prior to the onset of the pandemic, one in ten (10.3%) of Berks County adults and pre-adult teenage residents (ages 16-64) were living below the poverty line. While our local poverty rate was somewhat better than Pennsylvania's poverty rate of 11.2% for this traditional working age group, we realize that our strong local labor market of the past five years largely left this substantial population of 33,255 residents behind. Disturbingly, the majority (57.2%) are not in the labor force at all. That is 19,024 of these potential or emerging workers who were neither employed nor actively looking for employment. Here again, our local rate was slightly better than the 61.3% statewide rate. (Source: CWIA and ACS, 5-Year Estimates; *2015-2019).*

Individuals in poverty can be especially challenging to serve as they often have multiple barriers to employment such as unstable housing, low educational attainment, lack of reliable and effective transportation, etc. These combinations of barriers can make it difficult for these residents to establish a strong employment history which then becomes another barrier to future opportunities. As a result, our local workforce system must continuously improve on our design and delivery of effective comprehensive services to assist this important pool of human potential and talent help create and share in our local prosperity.

Closely related to the challenges facing the Berks County WDB in serving adults living below the poverty line is the pressing need to effectively serve our 11,246 families led by a single parent representing 25.4% of all local families with at least one dependent child. This local pre-pandemic rate was roughly equivalent to the statewide rate of 24.3% (Source: CWIA and ACS, 5-Year Estimates; *2015-2019).* Early indications are that the pandemic has been especially disruptive to the careers and job stability of single parents (mostly women) with school age children and potentially long-lasting detrimental impact on their earnings.

Berks County is also home to a large population of individuals with involvement in the criminal justice system and approximately 75% of all Berks County Jail inmates are unemployed upon release. The Berks County Adult Probation and Parole Office and the PA Board of Probation and Parole's Reading Sub-Office combined supervises over 9,800 individuals on either state or county parole living in Berks County.

Historically, a record of involvement with the criminal justice system has been a major barrier to gainful employment and one of the Berks County WDB's top priorities to address over the past four years. Beginning in 2017, the WDB established a strategic partnership with Berks Connections Pretrial Services (BCPS), our local lead agency to assist reentrants attain the skills, support and work experience to gain meaningful and family-sustaining employment. To expand and sustain this work in collaboration with other publicly funded workforce partners, BCPS joined and remains a partner in the PA CareerLink® Berks County.

The best example of the fruits of the partnership is BCPS's ***"R3" - Rebuilding Reentrants and Reading*** **registered pre-apprenticeship program** for the construction sector. R3 has become a widely recognized best practice re-entry program across the Commonwealth of PA and we look forward to partnering with BCPS to improve and grow R3 even further in the next four years.

With the local area's return to relatively low overall unemployment (i.e. "functional full employment") beginning in 2017, the WDB efforts have been reinforced by greater employer flexibility in considering such candidates. Prior to the pandemic, slowly but steadily, local employers began to place a greater focus on the skills and abilities that individuals with a history of involvement with the criminal justice system can bring to the workplace. The WDB anticipates maintaining momentum for this mutually beneficial employment trend post pandemic.

Unfortunately, datasets reflecting breakdowns of employment status by demographic categories for the last six months of 2020 will likely not be made available from the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) or CWIA in time to be included in this local plan prior to the required submission date on April 2, 2020. We look forward to receiving more detailed post-pandemic data to inform our local programming and future updates to this four-year plan.

1.2. How are skills gaps defined in the local area? Provide a description of the skills that are required to meet the needs of employers in region and local area?

The Berks County WDB remains committed to local employer engagement through rigorous industry sector analysis. This allows the WDB to continuously update and deepen our understanding of the current and future skills needs of our employers and to develop responsive programming in conjunction with local partners to address critical gaps.

As a result of our long-standing commitment to this proven approach, the Berks WDB is home to local labor market subject matter expertise in the knowledge, skills and requisite industry-recognized credentials needed to contribute to the growth of a qualified talent pool, the recruitment and retention of qualified employees, and the upskilling of "home grown" talent. Benefits of the WDB's industry sector approach to employer engagement include:

- Greater **focus** by engaging employers with common workforce and skills development needs.
- The ability to **prioritize** and target the impact of limited workforce development funds to address common critical skills needs.
- Improved **alignment** which breaks down "silos" among the WDB and our partners in economic development, education, community-based organizations, etc. as we collaborate to meet common skills needs identified in conjunction with local employers.

The Berks WDB and the PA CareerLink® Berks County Business Services Team (BST) then develop a more detailed understanding of the skills and experience related to current and future employment projections by utilizing print and on-line job ad analysis, employer surveys, employer feedback via in-person, phone and email interviews, and by active WDB and BST participation in educational provider Occupational Advisory Committees (OACs) and Industry Partnerships (IPs). The Berks WDB and BST also employ occupational research capabilities using workforce development software, Transferable Occupational Relationship Quotient (TORQ) comparison, O*net and CIP/SOC comparison, and pre-employment assessments, such as Work Keys®, of the fundamental knowledge, skills, and abilities required by employers.

It is the Board's practice to broadly share occupational and industry sector employment information with our economic and education partners and community-based organizations. When doing so the WDB requests feedback that these partners may receive directly from employers. For example, the Board is an active partner in the innovative and impactful local Career Ready Berks initiative which supports K-14 career planning through career pathway development and counseling resource tools with the Berks Business and Education Coalition (BBEC), the Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU), Reading Area Community College (RACC) and our 18 local public school districts. Increasingly, we are engaging with our four local 4-year colleges and universities in this collaborative work leading to even greater insights into the education and skills needs of regional employers.

At times, the WDB determines that its ongoing analysis and established "iterative" processes for identifying local skills gaps may not provide all of the labor market insight we need. When this is the case, the WDB budgets available WIOA funding to competitively procure contracts for targeted studies to help us better understand and meet the skills needs of employers in the local area and broader region. Examples of such competitively procured studies include (Please see Attachment 4 for links to the following):

- *Berks County Disconnected Young Adult Study (2017)*
- *Berks County Employer Retention and Development Best Practices Study (2020)*
- *Greater Berks Advanced Manufacturing Skills Gap Study (2020-2021)*

In keeping with this employer engagement strategy and in preparation for the development of this post-pandemic WIOA four-year plan, the WDB completed its most recent bi-annual analysis of local industry sectors in November 2020. Using the latest economic data and labor market information (LMI), the WDB confirmed and approved five priority industry sectors on which to focus from 2021 through 2025:

- Priority A Sector (1) **– Manufacturing**
- Priority B Sectors (2) **– Healthcare** and **Construction**
- Priority C Sectors (2) **– Agriculture** and **Transportation & Warehousing**

Manufacturing Industry Needs: Berks County's singular "Priority A" Industry Sector is Manufacturing. Over the past decade, our region's manufacturing employers thrived in a competitive international economy by developing *world-class products, processes and people* – the defining characteristics of what we sometimes refer to as *advanced manufacturing*. Until recently, regional manufacturing employers have benefited from a stable and experienced workforce which was able to adapt to the changing technological environment. Due to successful process improvement strategies and significant capital investment in new manufacturing technologies, our advanced manufacturing employers were able to increase output with the same number or even fewer employees. However, the retained employees need a higher skill level as reflected in advanced manufacturing's highest priority skilled technical occupations. In particular, our region's economic health is tied closely to our ability to maintain the historically-available supply of technically skilled precision machining occupations, industrial maintenance/mechatronics technicians, high-end welders and metal fabricators, diesel engine technicians and manufacturing "technologists" in emerging fields such as additive manufacturing, robotics and the Internet of Things (IoT).

Over the past four years, our region's manufacturing employers have consistently expressed concern regarding both the quantity and quality of workers interested in and available for high-skill

manufacturing employment. These concerns can be categorized under two key themes: (1) An insufficient pipeline exists to fill current openings for skilled manufacturing technicians and to replace skilled "baby-boomer" incumbents who are retiring in large numbers; and (2) less-skilled manufacturing production workers or potential entrants into manufacturing are difficult to attract and are often not prepared to adapt to changes in the new manufacturing work environment or be "upskilled" into the skilled manufacturing technicians on which the less-skilled positions depend for continued employment. Low numeracy levels among both incumbent workers needing to be upskilled and job applicants is a growing problem identified by local manufacturing employers.

Most critical to the long-term health of their businesses, regional employers identify a chronic shortage of skilled technicians available for hire. Largely uninterrupted by the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, many high-paying jobs in advanced manufacturing remain unfilled around the region as employers struggle to find qualified internal or external candidates. Small to medium-size manufacturers (SMMs) feel the crunch most acutely. Distressingly, many regional SMMs currently report a hesitation to invest in new technology or are even missing orders or deliveries because of insufficient talent within their organizations with the necessary technical skills.

The Berks County WDB's ongoing industry sector analysis and engagement with local economic development partners leads us to conclude that success in building an ever-stronger manufacturing workforce in the Greater Berks region will foster an attractive manufacturing investment environment, resulting in expanding economic output and the creation and retention of tens of thousands of good jobs and careers in the sector. Clearly, the decade ahead offers attractive career opportunities for manufacturing workers who are prepared and positioned to compete and ever-growing risks for those who are not. Failure to effectively address the skills shortage will lead to declines in our region's manufacturing production and potential layoffs of manufacturing workers in a broad range of occupations should our employers miss out on successful transition to the new increasingly technology-driven era.

In early 2020, the Berks County WDB competitively procured a contract with the Economic Development Company (EDC) of Lancaster County's *Center for Regional Analysis* to develop, conduct and report-out on a comprehensive study of current and projected advanced manufacturing skills gaps impacting employers in the Greater Berks region (defined as Berks County and the six bordering counties of Chester, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lehigh, Montgomery and Schuylkill Counties). These advanced manufacturing skills are commonly found in technical occupations such as precision machining, industrial maintenance/mechatronics, robotics, additive manufacturing, precision welding, and diesel engine technology. The study further sought to identify emerging occupations and skills such as those necessary to support a successful transition of our regional manufacturing enterprises to *Industry 4.0* by 2030.

The resulting *Greater Berks Advanced Manufacturing Skills Gap Study* was delivered by the EDC to the WDB in January 2021 and provides specific and actionable recommendations. The report provides a road map as to how the Berks County WDB can partner with surrounding local WDBs, economic development partners, education and training providers, public policy makers and most importantly manufacturing employers to address identified and projected advanced manufacturing skills gaps. A link to the full report can be found under Attachment 4 to this plan - highlights include:

- *By 2019, the manufacturing sector in this seven-county region was comprised of 3,900 firms and 174,200 employees (or 13% of the region's workforce). As a share of PA's manufacturing*

sector, it represented 27% of establishments and 30% of the manufacturing workforce.

- *At the three-digit NAICS level, nearly every manufacturing subsector is present in every county in the Greater Berks Region.*
- *In Berks County, manufacturing's share of GDP is a considerable 21.5% and for the other counties in the target Greater Berks Region, it ranges from 10-24% of local GDP.*
- *Manufacturing is made up of small, medium and large firms. Nearly 30% of establishments are larger and represent half of the employment base. The balance, 70% of all manufacturing establishments, represent firms that average fewer than 50 employees.*
- *In 2019, the Greater Berks Region had 94,300 production workers and 8,700 maintenance workers. Collectively, they represent just under 60% of the manufacturing sector's workforce.*
- *With over 100 production occupations in the Greater Berks Region, just 20 capture 70% of production workers. Ten of these are identified as Advanced Manufacturing occupations and grouped into the following categories: CNC operators and programmers, machinists, machine operators and tenders, and welders.*
- *Demand for advanced manufacturing workers (production and maintenance occupations) is projected to grow in the Greater Berks region, rising from 28,450 in 2019 to between 32,040 and 39,440 by 2029.*
- *The supply of manufacturing workers is projected to fall over time, driven by retirements and limited attraction of young workers to the industry.*
- *43,800 workers in the manufacturing sector are expected to retire by 2029. Of these, around 7.100 are likely to be retiring from mission- critical skilled advanced manufacturing production and maintenance occupations.*
- *The net shortage of advanced manufacturing workers by 2029 is estimated to be between 5,890 and 13,890.*

In addition to the important information contained in the EDC's Greater Berks study, the Berks County WDB's ongoing engagement with manufacturing employers confirms a continuing rise in employer demand for qualified precision machining and industrial maintenance/mechatronics technicians:

- **Precision machining** occupations have well-defined technical skills development curves along established career paths and/or ladders that can result in greater job responsibility and wages approaching $30 per hour in time. Precision machining occupations are consistently identified by the PA Dept. of Labor & Industry as "High Priority Occupations" which are in demand by employers, have higher skill needs, and provide family sustaining wages. Many Berks County employers are recruiting adult candidates even before graduation/program completion directly from Berks Career and Technical Center (BCTC) and Reading Area Community College (RACC) programs. Our highly sought-after young adult student participants often receive multiple job offers for good jobs awaiting their graduations from both programs. Most are willing to provide on the job (OJT) upskilling immediately upon hiring. Unfortunately, only a handful of regional precision machining employers sponsor registered apprenticeship (RA) programs – a proven best practice commonly utilized by precision manufacturers in other regions of the Commonwealth.
- **Industrial maintenance/mechatronics technicians** are in even greater demand in the region and across industry sectors - generating upward pressure on already excellent wages. Nearly 60% of the current Berks workforce occupying industrial maintenance occupations is 45 years or older compared to 47% of the regional workforce in all industries. By 2025, at least 25% to 30% of the total Berks County industrial maintenance workforce will be retired or near, at or above retirement age (Source: JobsEQ® 2020Q2 data). The skill sets and key

competencies for this critical job family closely match the skills local employers demand from graduates of Reading Area Community College's Schmidt Training & Technology Center's (RACC-STTC) Mechatronics program. RACC has been pro-active in its response to this employer demand for qualified candidates skilled in the Industrial Maintenance/Mechatronics competencies by partnering with the two Berks Career & Technology Centers in the creation of a 2+2+2 Mechatronics Technical Academy, devoted to nurturing this career-path talent pipeline beginning at the secondary school level. Employers looking to hire workers proficient, specialized, and ready to plug in "out of the gate" talent are constantly soliciting RACC for qualified job candidates.

Employer need for both experienced and entry-level talent in these high demand advanced manufacturing job families extends well beyond Berks and our six bordering counties. The Berks WDB, in partnership with and on behalf of the six county (Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia) WDBs that make up the SE PA planning region was the lead applicant in a collective regional petition initiative to have three skilled production/mechatronics related SOC codes reinstated to and retained on the High Priority Occupations list across the region.

Healthcare Industry Needs – The Berks County WDB has identified the Healthcare sector as a "Priority B - Sustaining" Industry. The sector currently employs 25,146 workers (13.6% of local employment) and prior to the pandemic demonstrated steady employment growth that would likely approach the employment levels of our larger manufacturing sector by 2028.
Two regional hospital systems are among the top 10 employers in Berks County – Tower Health System (#2) and Penn State-St. Joseph's Regional Health Network (#10). Executives from both systems serve on the Berks County WDB helping to make sure that we have current insights into employer needs in this this increasingly significant sector. They confirm our sector analysis showing that the local top five local occupations by employment/5-year growth/annual growth percentage are:

Occupation	Current Employed	5 Year Employment Growth	% Annual Growth
1. Registered Nurses	**3,620**	**520**	**0.6%**
2. Personal Care Aides	**2,037**	**833**	**2.7%**
3. Nursing Assistants	**1,829**	**501**	**0.5%**
4. Licensed Practical & Licensed Vocational Nurses	**909**	**160**	**0.8%**
5. Medical Assistants	**885**	**184**	**1.5%**

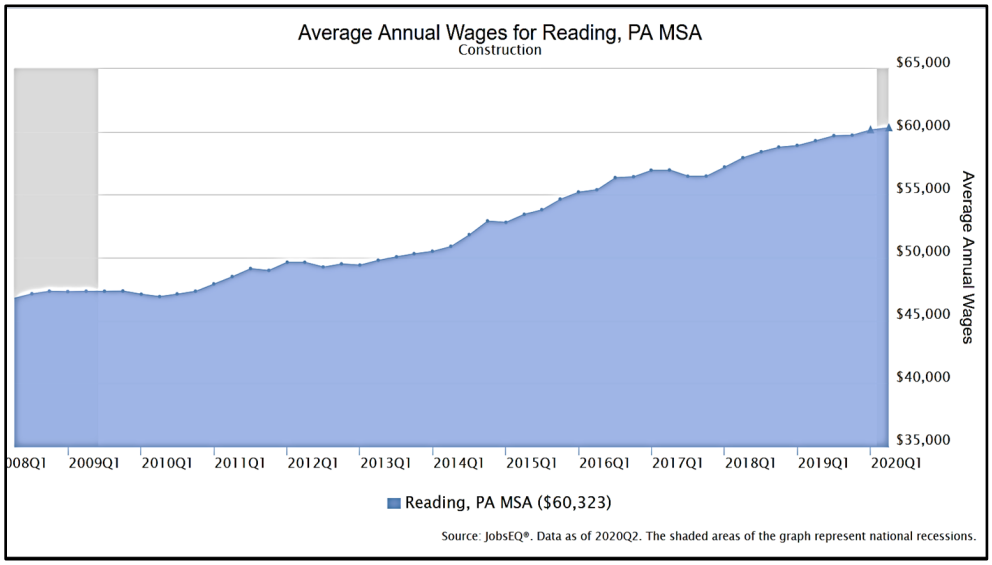
- Registered Nurses (RNs) will remain one of the most attractive local occupations and career paths for the foreseeable future. Many opportunities for RNs will develop outside of the traditional acute care hospital environment to include home healthcare.
- Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) are also projected to remain in demand. LPN certification can be a great return on postsecondary education investment as it represents a well-paying entry point on the nursing career pathway.
- In contrast to the LPN certification, the WDB remains skeptical about the value of the Nursing Assistant (NA) credential. While we project continued strong demand for Nursing Assistants, we see little evidence of individuals with the NA credential moving up into LPN, RN or other well-paying healthcare occupations nor do we know of effective local employer

sponsored programs to help them do so.

- Despite near-term challenges brought on by the pandemic, Home Health and Personal Care Aide occupations are also projected to grow substantially over the next decade. However, evaluation and projections of these occupations is particularly challenging given the employer fragmentation and changing environment of service delivery in this subsector. The Berks County WDB's observations on Home Healthcare Occupations include:
  - Local employer feedback indicates that the actual growth of home healthcare industry employment may well exceed already significant growth projections from current models.
  - Unlike most other healthcare occupations, industry-recognized credentials in home healthcare are under-developed.
  - These occupations are too often characterized by low pay, few benefits, high turnover and little movement onto or along more attractive healthcare career pathways.
  - A primary focus of employers and community-based training providers in this subsector should be to identify and screen career-oriented entrants with barriers to employment into high quality training programs with ongoing support following initial employment placement. Career development planning and additional training will be critical to retain and grow new-hires and incumbents on pathways that result in better paying high-priority healthcare occupations.

Construction Sector Needs

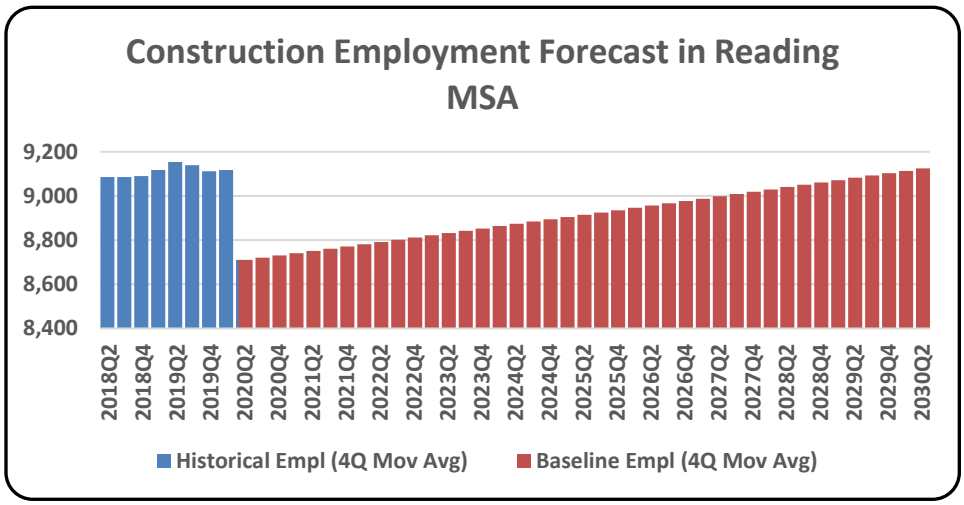
Though not nearly as large as our local manufacturing or healthcare sectors, our Berks County construction contractors generate significant wealth coming to and remaining within the County while sustaining and expanding our region's critical infrastructure. Our construction sector currently provides 8,700 jobs with great (and growing) family sustaining wages and benefits in career pathways that do not require an expensive 4-year degree to get started. In fact, Jobs EQ® reports that the average annual wage in our local construction industry has grown to $60,300 (see graph below).



Jobs EQ® also projects that wages will continue to grow in the sector's top five occupations by employment (5-year mean wage progression/regression percentage: BLS 2015 versus 2019 Occupational Employment Statistics Data):

Occupation	Current Employed	5 Yr. Wage % Δ
1. Construction Laborers	**1,259**	**17.4%**
2. Carpenters	**868**	**10.5%**
3. Electricians	**549**	**0.7%**
4. Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters	**495**	**5.9%**
5. HVAC/R Mechanics & Installers	**404**	**21.9%**

Following three years of sustained high employment levels the business shutdowns required of construction contractors triggered by the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in Berks County led to a dramatic drop in employment levels during the second quarter of 2020 (see graph below):



Despite the setback, we at the Berks County WDB project steady jobs recovery through the next decade. Initial feedback from local contractors indicates that this recovery may happen much more quickly than our JobsEQ modeling yet shows.

A looming concern related to this sector is the need for large numbers of replacement workers over the next ten years as currently 49% of Berks County residents employed in construction occupations are 45 years of age or older age. Compounding this aging demographic issue is the reality that over 3,400 workers (39% of Berks industry employment) are employed in skilled trades and construction machine operating occupations that require long-term training, apprenticeships, and licensing certification (Source: JobsEQ® 2020Q2 data). These high demand occupations include Carpenters, Electricians, Plumbers & Pipefitters, HVACR Technicians, and Operating Engineers and Heavy Construction Equipment Operators.

Recognizing that construction firms typically contract for projects that are regional and might require hiring outside of their local workforce development area, the Berks WDB works with WDBs across the Southeast PA region who share our level of concern surrounding the supply versus demand for these skilled occupations and the need for their continued proper classification as High Priority Occupations. Accordingly, the Berks County WDB served as the lead applicant in a collective regional petition initiative for the inclusion of the Carpenters, Electricians, Plumbers & Pipefitters, HVAC/R Technicians,

and Operating Engineers and Heavy Construction Equipment Operators SOC codes on the High Priority Occupations list in all six local WDBs (Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia WDBs) comprising our SE PA planning region.

CDL/Driver Needs – The Logistics, Transportation, and Warehousing Industry remains a "Priority C – Watch Industry" under the Berks WDB's sector strategy analysis as it is much smaller and less impactful than either our local manufacturing or healthcare sectors Dramatic changes in distribution systems and supply chains accelerated during the pandemic in 2020, leading to a marked increase in both the size and number of local distribution/fulfillment centers. This sudden demand also pushed up competition for workers as well as entry-level wages in the sector. Despite this welcome job and wage growth, the WDB remains skeptical about the quality of these jobs as reflected in high turnover and limited career advancement options as compared to higher priority sectors.

Within this sector, the Berks WDB has identified an ongoing shortage of qualified CDL Drivers that threatens regional growth. Observations on CDL/Driver Occupations include:

- A CDL certification may still be the surest credential and shortest training path for jobseekers in the region to attain gainful employment at family-sustaining wages.
- Ongoing shortages of qualified candidates with CDL certifications throughout Eastern Pennsylvania have led to upward movement of these wages. Sign-on bonuses of up to $5,000 and other incentives have become common recruitment practices.
- CDL training remains our topmost training activity in terms of local Individual Training Account (ITA) funding expenditure in recent years and this pattern is likely to continue.
- Reflecting a national industry reality, regional employers report very high turnover among CDL drivers – sometimes reaching 50-100% annual turnover. However, a 2014 Berks WDB review of CDL training participants determined that even if new entrants did not stay long in their initial position, participant wage records showed that medium-term earnings met or exceeded expectations. If new CDL entrants did not stay with their initial placement, they consistently are able to find comparable employment within or without the occupation and industry. Recent local labor market intelligence and WIOA performance data reveal that these benefits to jobseekers from a CDL credential still hold.

Adult Numeracy– Low numeracy represents a significant barrier to local efforts to prepare or upskill adult residents to meet projected employer needs for skilled technology workers in the decade ahead. Based on extensive experience working with local adult and dislocated workers, combined with consistent reports from local employers and training providers, the Berks County WDB has concluded that uncompetitively low levels of adult numeracy among incumbent workers and job seekers alike is a skills gap of major concern. While the WDB is limited in data on adult literacy available at the local level, we do have estimates provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) *Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)* from their skills map launched in 2019 predicting that, compared to the state of Pennsylvania, Berks County has a statistically higher number of adults (ages 16-64) scoring poorly in numeracy. According to the PIAAC, not only is the Berks average adult numeracy scale score estimate statistically lower than Pennsylvania (which is pretty much in the middle of the pack as compared to other states across the nation), but more specifically:

- 33% of Berks County adults are estimated to be at or below Level 1 (statistically higher than Pennsylvania). NCES reports that at this level adults "may be at risk for difficulties with numeracy" or may even be "functionally innumerate."

- 38% of Berks County adults are estimated by NCES to be at Level 2. At this level, adults can usually perform simple measurements and interpret relatively simple data and statistics in text, tables and graphs. However, the large number of local adults projected at this level may still struggle to perform numeracy tasks.
- NCES estimates that 29% of Berks County adults have reached "proficiency" in numeracy (at or above Level 3). Unfortunately, this is statistically lower than Pennsylvania as a whole.

(Source: the National Center for Education Statistics (NCEW) *Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) U.S. Skills Map* https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/piaac/skillsmap/)

The strategic workforce and economic development risk posed by our worrisome low adult numeracy in Berks County has been decades in the making with its roots in stagnant levels of demonstrated mathematics proficiency among our 70,000 local elementary and secondary school students. A key milestone of mathematics proficiency is student performance on the annual 8th grade mathematics assessment required of local school districts under the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). The WDB's Policy, Planning and Priorities (PPP) Committee regularly monitors these annual reports at this crucial educational crossroads. We realize that our 8th grade students and their families are beginning to make critical career and education decisions that will have lifelong implications. 8th graders who demonstrate proficiency on this very challenging assessment are likely on track to graduate from high school as numerate young adults with outstanding career and post-secondary education options available to them here in Berks County and beyond. Those that do not could be in real trouble with only 4 short years to get back on track toward numeracy and undoubtedly are at higher risk of not graduating from high school at all as compared to their peers who successfully demonstrated mathematics proficiency before leaving 8th grade.

Regretfully, based on the results from our 20 local public intermediate and junior high schools on the last pre-pandemic PSSA assessments in 2019 (see Attachment 4), well less than half of our 8th graders were able to demonstrate this desired level of mathematics proficiency. In fact, in only two of our schools (both in the Boyertown Area School District) did a narrow majority of local 8th graders score at the proficient or advanced level. Another twelve local schools had less than half of 8th graders demonstrate proficiency in mathematics though more did so than the problematic statewide average of 32.2%. At six of our schools, the percentages of 8th graders demonstrating proficiency was less than the statewide average.

The WDB understands that the need to dramatically improve adult numeracy is now mission-critical for too many of our jobseekers and employers. Meeting this challenge will require a broad County-wide effort through a problem-solving dialogue with and among our local education partners, elected officials, community organizations, philanthropists and employers over the next four years. In fact, this numeracy issue likely needs to be addressed even before our children begin their formal elementary education with a stronger community pre-K focus for all families on the value of education and the resources to access it. Our PPP Committee recommends that we support partnerships with libraries/social services/medical clinics/churches/etc. to better coordinate providing free age-appropriate educational material for parents and their children.

1.3. *What are the challenges the local area faces in aligning existing labor force skills and education and training activities with the needs of regional employers?*

Berks County will prosper if we can successfully prepare our working age adults (including young adults) for the great career opportunities generated by the many expected retirements described in section 1.1 and planned regional economic growth over the next decade. As we look ahead to continued economic and labor market recovery from the pandemic, Berks County employers and the Berks County Workforce Development Board (WDB) together face significant workforce development opportunities and challenges. Fortunately, we have and will continue to implement effective joint strategies to meet these challenges.

Incumbent Worker Training, Employment Retention and Layoff Aversion Strategy. As a forward-thinking job retention, layoff aversion, and economic development strategy, the Berks WDB actively promotes incumbent worker technical training in key industry sectors. We must continue to partner directly with employers to build worker competencies while matching newly entering talent with experienced employees for knowledge transfer. Immediately following the local arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, the WDB reviewed and updated our work-based training policy in June 2020 to align with current conditions as well concurrent industry sector analysis and priorities.

Two goods-producing industry sectors are especially vital to the continued health and advancement of Berks County' economic and workforce employment base - advanced manufacturing and construction (both commercial and residential). The COVID-19 pandemic has and will continue to change the employment landscape in Berks County, affecting the way businesses must operate in the "new normal" and redefining a workforce needing to be equipped with new competencies in and knowledge of evolving industrial controls and technology. These two sectors will also have to build even stronger foundational competencies within their workforces regarding Environmental, Health and Safety (EHS) practices.

The many adjustments in the "new normal" operations required of our local advanced manufacturing and construction employers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic will surely be compounded by talent attraction and retention issues during the next four years. The Berks County WDB intends to support these employer's efforts to upskill new entrants as well as retrain existing employees if employers are to successfully recover, thrive and expand in order to remain viable and competitive. Unlike our larger manufacturing sector, the Berks construction industry boasts an established foundation of 49 distinct employer-sponsored registered apprenticeship (RA) "earn and learn" training models on which to build. These RA programs deserve significant and consistent support as a proven "best practice" strategy incorporating well-defined career and wage progression to recruit, develop, and retain workers.

The Berks County WDB's key strategic vehicle for assisting local advanced manufacturing and construction employers to cooperatively address these challenges is the Berks WDB Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) Services Consortium. Since 2017, our IWT Consortium has supported cooperative training solutions that have benefited incumbent workers and employers alike by reimbursing the eligible federal portions of training costs to sponsoring employers who commit to required matching cash contributions.

Focused matching funding from the WDB for Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) helps local employers develop and grow a qualified, highly competent workforce. Individual workers employed in manufacturing production, construction trades and industrial maintenance occupations will directly benefit by attaining broad-level employment security in the sector and avoiding future job loss. In

cases where upskilled workers do become dislocated, the enhanced technical skills and/or successful apprentice status provided by such training will enable them to be more quickly re-employed in similar well-paying jobs at other, more commercially successful local employers. Upskilling local incumbent workers has proven to lead to career and wage advancement opportunities. This upward mobility in turn creates quality employment opportunities and openings for new entrants into these attractive career pathways. Individuals in these occupations often have skills that allow them to readily move across these technology-driven sectors.

WIOA allows local WDBs to utilize up to 20% of their annual Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker funding allocation to support local employers upskill their incumbent workforce. In program years 2018, 2019 and 2020, the Berks County WDB successfully budgeted WIOA Title I funding to match eligible employer expenditures for this purpose - including for qualifying investments in related instruction delivered under eligible registered apprenticeships. In continuance of this board-approved policy, the Berks WDB will seek and, as appropriate, "braid" additional sources of public and private matching funds to sustain and support needed technical skills training for incumbent workers in the advanced manufacturing and construction industries. In addition to WIOA Title I funds, such funding sources may include federal WIOA Rapid Response funds, National Emergency Grants, and state discretionary grants.

This manufacturing/construction talent attraction and retention challenge has been decades in the making. Local employers, especially small-medium size firms, are unlikely to solve it solely within their own resources. Without a proactive strategy, these skills gaps could serve as barriers to effective operation and maintenance capabilities thereby negatively impacting employer judgments about their ability to find, develop and retain the talent they need to positively impact their recovery and long-term expansion planning decisions. The current reality is that most semi-skilled and entry-level workers lack the technical skills needed to advance into higher-paying positions without additional education and training. As a result, these individuals may lack present and/or future employment security in a changing technology-driven environment and could be at risk for job elimination or forced replacement. Our proven employment retention and layoff strategy is directly aimed at minimizing such disruptions for workers in these valuable industries.

Promoting Employer Best Practice Employee Development and Retention Strategies. In response to broader skills gaps across industry sectors and just prior to the arrival in March 2020, the Berks County Workforce Development Board contracted with Educational Data Systems, Inc. (EDSI) to conduct a comprehensive study of current employer recruitment, retention, development, satisfaction and engagement best practices in the Greater Reading and Berks County area. The focus of this initiative was to better understand local employer best practices in response to ongoing talent challenges with an emphasis on identifying successful employer strategies leading to lower turnover, higher employee satisfaction, and improved talent development. More than 150 employers in the region participated in the study. Respondents completed a Talent Assessment, rating themselves on five key talent metrics: employee retention, employee development, employee attraction, talent and culture, and overall talent strategies. After completing the assessment, employers were invited to participate in focus groups to discuss specific best practices.

After launching the project in early March 2020, the scope was amended to include a review of how employer best practices have been impacted by COVID-19.
Selected findings from the study show that local high-performing talent organizations:

1. *Have a talent strategy and vision in place that is connected to the overall strategy and is clearly communicated and supported*
2. *Understand that competitive wages, benefits, and work environment are fundamental for attracting and retaining talent.*
3. *Focus on developing long term recruiting pipelines, in part by establishing recruiting and workforce development relationships with local educational institutions.*
4. *Promote from within their organizational culture, offer job sculpting, internal career ladders, individualized training and career plans, flexible schedules, and opportunities for employees through company growth.*

For the WDB, the most important recommendation from the study is that we integrate its findings and recommendations into our annual goals and future strategic plans such as this one. In order to do so, the WDB will begin in 20201 by implementing two of the report's most urgent and important subsidiary recommendations to assist local employers:

- There are systemic issues (usually related to particular skill shortages and lack of talent pipelines) that cannot be addressed through individual employers following best practices. Identifying these challenges by industry and organization size and seeking opportunities to address through new partnerships and collaboration is critical.
- Insuring that the PA CareerLink® Berks County Business Services Team (BST) initiate follow up conversations with employer survey participants to encourage and assist in following individual employer recommendations included in the report, create customized next steps, and identify areas where further customized support is needed.

Further, in order to promote the employer best practices identified in the report, the Berks County WDB will engage with other key stakeholders as follows:

- **Individual employers**: Survey participants will receive a full report of survey results and best practices and received a summary of their results at the time of participation. Employers are encouraged to understand their strengths and weaknesses in the survey items, review the corresponding best practices, identify best practices with significant opportunity for improved implementation, and to make targeted investments in their workforce and talent strategy based on their particular situation. Employers are also encouraged to identify systemic challenges beyond their scope and to communicate these items to the WDB.
- **PA CareerLink® Berks County Business Services**: Business services staff have received a thorough review of the survey and best practices results and marketing material summarizing results. Staff have been given measurable goals to conduct follow up on conversations with survey participants to encourage taking full advantage of the survey results and best practices report. Our goal is to use the report as a platform for outreach and "coaching" engagements with other local employers who did not participate in the original study but who could benefit from implementing some of the best practices identified by the study.
- **WDB and Outside Partners**: There are many systemic talent issues that cannot be successfully addressed by individual employers implementing best practices on their own. Identifying these issues and developing long-term responses is critical. The WDB will ensure that industry sector partners understand the survey results and best practices and bring members together to address industry-specific talent issues and support industry-specific best practices. The WDB has already begun to partner with chambers and industry

associations to promote follow up opportunities for analysis and facilitate individual employer and sector-based talent efforts.

Career Ready Berks (K-14) Career Planning and Future Talent Pipeline Strategy - The future looks bright for the 70,000 plus kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) public-private school students in Berks County, but only if they are properly prepared for the needs of our strong local industries. If these students are not properly guided and prepared, our local employers will suffer greatly from a "silver tsunami" of ongoing baby-boomer retirements in the decade ahead. The WDB clearly understands and consistently communicates the serious risk to our local prosperity if we fail to address the root causes of the mismatch between the evolving needs of local employers and the skills and qualifications of the available workforce. Frankly, too many adult Berks County residents, while they were still in our elementary and secondary school systems, did not receive the education, workplace skills and career knowledge that they need to succeed in our rapidly changing economy.

To promote wider-scale cooperation, the WDB was a founding member of a committed local partnership of educators, employers, and workforce and economic development leaders to champion the **Career Ready Berks (CRB)** alliance. Through an innovative and well-strategized model of oversight, the CRB alliance brings multiple stakeholders and their collective expertise to the table together to coordinate the development and delivery of several distinct but complementary career exploration activities under one universal "enterprise umbrella". The WDB has consistently applied for and received discretionary Pennsylvania Business Education Partnership (PA BEP) funding to advance the work of this partnership. As a result of the effectiveness or our work, this well-designed and fully scalable CRB model has been recognized by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) as a leading elementary and secondary education best practice that has been adopted and adapted to local business-education collaborative needs by other areas across the Commonwealth.

As is the case throughout the country, youth in Berks County lack current and sufficient knowledge about career paths in key industry sectors to inform their career and education decisions. Our youth also too often lack early understanding of the academic preparation necessary to succeed in rigorous career and technical education programs, particularly in STEM-related fields. As a result, attracting needed numbers of well-prepared and motivated students onto these career pathways is a key long-term workforce development strategy. CRB's ***Engineering & Industrial Technology*** and ***Science & Health*** career clusters have been identified by the Berks WDB as priority career clusters driving the economic viability of our county. These two clusters effectively incorporate the Berks WDB's five priority industry sectors of Advanced Manufacturing, Agriculture, Construction, Healthcare and Transportation & Logistics.

Perkins V Implementation Strategy. On July 31, 2018, the federal *Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act* (Perkins V) was signed into law with bipartisan support. Key points of this important legislation were meant to assist educators, employers and local workforce development boards collaboratively address skills gaps by:

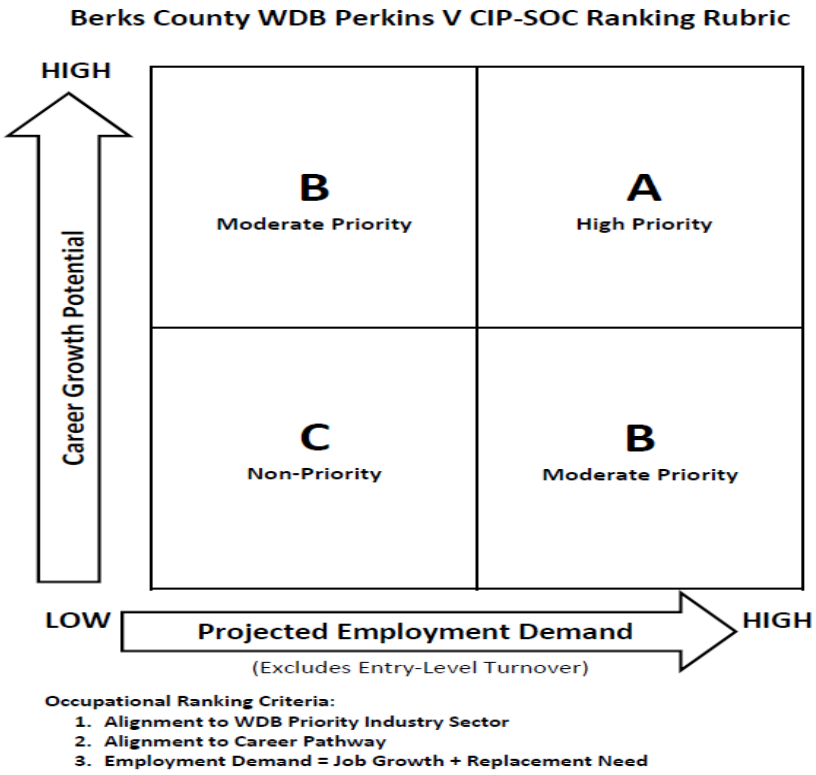
- Aligning career and technical education (CTE) with secondary, postsecondary and business and industry to strengthen CTE programs and post school outcomes.
- Preparing students for high-demand, high-skill, and high-wage careers.
- Increasing underserved populations' access to CTE and high-demand, high-wage careers.

- Completing a Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (CLNA) to review career and technical education (CTE) grant recipient data, identify strengths and gaps, and develop strategies/interventions to close the gaps.

During the 2019-2020 school year, the Berks County Workforce Development Board (WDB) developed and led a process to concurrently analyze area needs and evaluate technical education programs for all three local institutions receiving Perkins V funding - Reading Area Community College (RACC), Reading Muhlenberg Career & Technology Center (RMCTC) and Berks Career & Technology Center (BCTC).

- The focus of this process was to review each institutions' programs and discuss their alignment with the county's workforce development priorities.
- During a joint meeting with our local Perkins V partners in October 2019. Mr. Rory Stevenson of the Berks County WDB shared the details of our industry sector and occupational priorities with the Perkins V Stakeholders Committee.
    - Industry sectors of priority include:
        - Priority A: Manufacturing
        - Priority B: Healthcare & Construction
        - Priority C: Transportation & Warehousing and Agriculture (watch industries)
    - Construction has been elevated by the WDB to a Priority B Infrastructure industry as jobs are abundant with high wages and an increase in apprenticeships.
    - Transportation and Warehousing opportunities have grown over the last several years.
    - Agriculture in Berks County is also a priority and has remained a stable source of local economic output. The WDB is seeing more interest in agricultural occupations, such as crop and animal growth, food processing, and food manufacturing.
    - Mr. Stevenson explained that the review of each institution's program's and their Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) should focus on alignment to Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes, the Pennsylvania In-Demand Occupations List (IDOL), and the Berks High Priority Occupation List (HPO).

- Mr. Stevenson also shared the ranking rubric (below) developed by the Berks County WDB to evaluate the overall projected employment demand of program-related occupations versus the corresponding career/wage growth potential participants will receive from enrollment in the various technical education programs offered at all three institutions in order to prioritize these programs under their successful individual Perkins V funding applications. This simple but effective rubric was subsequently adopted as a best practice by many other local areas in the Commonwealth for completing their own initial local needs assessment under Perkins V.
- This process will serve to ensure that our publicly funded technical educations remain aligned with the needs and priorities of our local employers in Berks County.



1.4. Provide an analysis of local area workforce development activities, including education and training.

Areas of Strength –

As describe above in Sections 1.2 and 1.3, the Berks County WDB's commitment to industry sector analysis to inform our programming priorities led us four years ago to design, implement, fund and expand our **Incumbent Worker Training Consortium in Advanced Manufacturing and Construction**. Each program year the WDB strategically budgets available WIOA Title I matching funds to subsidize local employer investments in upskilling eligible technical incumbent workers. In doing so, the WDB promotes the benefits derived from such high quality training to (1) strengthen individual company competitiveness and viability, (2) expand the overall talent pool of individuals with such in-demand skills and (3) provide workers with more career options to contribute their talents with our best employers in key industries while at the same time providing for the needs of their families. Increasingly, our economic development partners and business representatives confirm that local talent availability rather than access to financial resources has become the determining factor in business decisions regarding where to locate new establishments or expand existing ones. Simply put, companies will not invest in facilities and equipment in areas where they may not be able to find and grow the talent needed to profitably operate and expand their business.

Berks County has another competitive workforce development advantage as we are home to possibly the most comprehensive and accessible career and technical training and education (CTE)

infrastructure of any local area in the Commonwealth. **Reading Area Community College (RACC)** is geographically well-positioned at the center of the County (95% of RACC enrollees are County residents) and within the City of Reading (nearly 40% of enrollees are City residents) to serve the region's evolving future workforce. In fact, RACC is the first of only two institutions of higher education in the Commonwealth to be designated by the federal government as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) with 36.6% of the student body self-identifying as Hispanic.

RACC is also programmatically well-positioned to meet the education and workforce development needs of key regional industry sectors and employers. Recognizing that 21st Century careers require significant training and education beyond high school, local employers worked with and donated to Reading Area Community College (RACC) to launch the ***Schmidt Training and Technology Center (RACC-STTC)*** in 2006. Since its founding, RACC-STTC has become widely acknowledged as the best advanced manufacturing training facility in the Commonwealth, with expanding programs (both *for credit* and *non-credit)* serving the needs of employers and students/jobseekers alike.

In addition to its world-class manufacturing programs, RACC offers a number of programs to meet the needs of Berks County's large and growing healthcare industry. For-credit programs include Associate degrees in Nursing, Medical Laboratory Technology, Respiratory Care and Electronic Health Records Technology as well as a clinical-based Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) program. Non-credit career training programs are also offered including Nurse Aid (NA), Phlebotomy with EKG Training, Pharmacy Technician, Medical Assisting, Medical Insurance & Coding Specialist, and Dental Assistant.

While many regions in the state allowed advanced manufacturing and similar programs at their secondary Career and Technical Education Centers (CTCs) to wither or close over the years, local leadership commitment to excellence in such crucial programs here in Berks County remained rock steady. As a result, **Berks Career and Technology Center (BCTC) and Reading Muhlenberg Career and Technology Center (RMCTC)** provide state of the art industry facilities, equipment and instructors to all high school students in Berks County who are interested and qualified for high-demand careers in mechatronics, precision machining, welding, health care technology, diesel engine technology, construction trades, information technology, etc. BCTC operates two campuses, one at the east end of the County and one at the west end of the County. RMCTC is located at the center of the County, adjacent to the City of Reading and neighboring Muhlenberg Township where the school has developed a unique core competence in meeting the needs of the rapidly expanding (and mostly young) Hispanic population of both municipalities. BCTC and RMCTC also provide excellent adult education and training programs and are often the providers of choice for displaced workers looking to retool for re-entry into the local job market.

With encouragement and support from the Berks County WDB, local business representatives and our economic development partners over the past ten years, **Reading Area Community College (RACC)** reached back to the County's two excellent high school career and technology centers - **Berks Career and Technology Center (BCTC) and Reading Muhlenberg Career and Technology Center (RMCTC)** to establish mutually beneficial agreements for high school Career and Technical Education (CTE) students to earn college credit for high-end technical coursework. In effect, the **Berks County Technical Academy** serves as an *honors program* for qualified CTE students, allowing them the potential, depending on their chosen program, to acquire up to 25 college credits at no cost prior to high school graduation. Such focused and talented students are highly sought after by local employers for paid co-ops or internships during the school year, while on summer break and again

upon high school graduation. Once hired, Technical Academy graduates often receive financial support from their employers while they complete their Associate degrees at RACC. RACC has been particularly effective in assisting qualifying students to access federal Pell grants to cover tuition costs. If the students wish to continue their technical training and education beyond RACC, they may do so at aligned 4-year institutions (e.g. **Penn State – Berks)** through additional articulation agreements that are part of the Technical Academy pathway.

While our local technical training infrastructure is excellent, our capable training and education providers must continue to evolve to meet the needs of local industry. As just one excellent recent example, following a comprehensive labor market occupational analysis supported by the Berks County WDB in 2018, **Berks Career and Technology Center (BCTC)** undertook a major expansion with a new state of the art welding training facility to prepare both high school CTE students and local adults for exciting and lucrative welding careers.

The business case for the new facility was so compelling that in 2019 Governor Tom Wolf announced approval of $200,000 in state funds under his administration's *Manufacturing PA* initiative to support the last phase of the new facility. In his funding announcement, Governor Wolf correctly stated "This Training-to-Career grant will enable Berks Career and Technology Center to significantly expand manufacturing training and job opportunities for Berks County residents," and "We commend BCTC's work to help Pennsylvania build the strongest workforce in the nation and reaffirm our commitment to our commonwealth's manufacturing industry." Completed during the pandemic in 2020, this expansion project has already enabled BCTC to increase their welding class size for high school CTE students from 25 to 40 students for both morning and afternoon instruction.

BCTC's expanded facility has also become a popular choice for local unemployed and underemployed adults wishing to master a variety of welding skills and earn valuable industry-recognized American Welding Society (AWS) credentials. Program completers with such skills and credentials readily attain gainful employment with our regional manufacturing or construction employers.

Berks County WDB's Community-based Pre-Apprenticeship Strategy. The Berks County WDB firmly supports Governor Wolf's strategy of implementing and expanding pre-apprenticeship programs across the Commonwealth in order to create greater opportunity for underemployed and nontraditional candidates, many of whom face barriers to gainful employment. Accordingly, in early 2019, the WDB issued a request for proposals (RFP) from community-based organizations (CBOs) sponsoring innovative projects to implement or expand high quality pre-apprenticeship programs. The WDB specifically targeted this funding to help adults with barriers to employment attain entry-levels skills in our growing Construction or Healthcare sectors. As a successful bidder on the RFP, ***Berks Connections/Pretrial Services (BCPS)*** was awarded $225,000 in Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker funds from the WDB to sustain and expand their proven best practice ***"R3" - Rebuilding Reentrants and Reading*** registered pre-apprenticeship program for the construction sector.

Since its inception in 2017, R3 has grown to become a best practice workforce development program widely recognized across the Commonwealth of PA for successfully introducing its more than 160 program graduates to work-based experience and skills acquisition in construction trades occupations leading to good jobs that pay family sustaining wages. In 2018, R3 became the first approved registered pre-apprenticeship for reentrants in the Commonwealth with the Associated Builders and Contractors, Inc – Keystone Chapter (ABC-Keystone) serving as the registered apprenticeship sponsor.

Unfortunately, like many other Berks County residents with such significant barriers to employment, R3 graduates saw their employment disproportionally disrupted by the pandemic in 2020. Yet, as 2021 began, 54% of R3 graduates are maintaining stable employment and most importantly 89% have not recidivated. The WDB looks forward to partnering with BCPS to improve and grow R3 even further as Berks County recovers from the pandemic over the next two years.

Commercial Driver's License (CDL) Training: Berks Career & Technology Center (BCTC) has continuously improved its excellent CDL Training Program for adults. Specifically, BCTC has implemented a successful English/Spanish Language CDL program that taps into our growing significant Hispanic resident adult population in Berks County. This popular program along with two other local private school commercial driving instruction programs are supplying many qualified, licensed CDL Driver candidates to employers and family sustaining wages to job seekers from a community that has traditionally experienced significant barriers to economic upward mobility.

RACC is also the Title II adult education coordinator for the Berks County region and partners with other adult education providers such as the **Literacy Council of Greater Reading-Berks** to meet the extraordinary needs for GED (high school equivalency diplomas) and ESL (English as a Second Language) education in Reading and the surrounding municipalities.

In keeping with Berks County's history of a local economy oriented to middle-skill occupations, Berks County is not home to a major research university. For some regions, this would be seen as a major weakness, but our employers in key industry sectors know that it can be a competitive advantage to be located in a region that produces educated jobseekers with skills that well match their actual long-term needs. For example, **Penn State – Berks** is a centrally located and thriving institution with a long tradition of providing high quality post-secondary education relevant to the needs of local employers. Originally founded by local textile industrialists in 1933 as the Wyomissing Polytechnic Institute, the school became part of the Penn State system in 1958. Along with its growth as a full-scale academic institution to include resident student housing and the conferring of four-year degrees, Penn State – Berks continues to enroll large numbers of traditional and working adult students in rigorous degree programs (e.g. Electro-Mechanical Engineering Technology) geared toward the needs of Berks' strong regional industry sectors of advanced manufacturing and healthcare. Berks County is fortunate to also be home to three other four-year colleges – **Kutztown University, Albright College, and Alvernia University** – each with robust ties to local industry, strong programs, and expanding articulation agreements to meet those needs.

The School of Health Sciences at Reading Hospital offers a well-regarded Registered Nursing program which is accredited by the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN) and approved by the Pennsylvania State Board of Nursing. The school also offers accredited programs for many other health care occupations in association with Tower Health, our area's second largest employer. Alvernia University has a popular BSN – Nursing program while Penn State-Berks and RACC offer LPN-Nursing certifications.

In February 2019 our local capacity to educate and train highly-skilled professionals for the regional healthcare industry took a giant leap forward with the signing of a 20-year academic agreement between Tower Health (West Reading) and Drexel University College of Medicine (Philadelphia) allowing the first cohort of twenty third-year Drexel medical students to begin their core clinical rotations at Reading Hospital in May 2019. In June 2019, Tower Health and Drexel University held a

groundbreaking ceremony for the **Drexel University College of Medicine at Tower Health** four-year regional campus at the Knitting Mills development in West Reading. At the ceremony, Drexel University President John Fry stated "Our relationship with Tower Health and this four-year regional campus creates an excellent destination for our medical students to build the emerging skills required by today's physicians to meet the ever-growing needs within health care.

The District Administrator for the **Berks-Schuylkill District Office of Pennsylvania's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)** is a member of the Berks County Workforce Development Board and OVR is a partner in the PA CareerLink® Berks County. Local OVR staff members have been particularly active with the Berks County WDB's Youth Committee and local education providers to implement OVR's transition policy in reaching out to youth with disabilities and their families beginning at age fourteen (14) and at least two (2) years before graduation. Summer 2020 was the fifth year of this partnership between the WDB, OVR, and Goodwill Keystone Area. OVR entered into an Interagency Agreement with the Berks Career and Technology Center (BCTC) effective in 2014 *to provide school-to-work transition services to OVR eligible youth with disabilities who are enrolled in approved training programs at the BCTC and attend one of the 16 public school districts within Berks County* associated with BCTC.

The *WDB's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee* is a standing committee of the board consisting of board members and off-board members with expertise in human resources or serving/advocating for the community of individuals with disabilities**.** While respecting all aspects of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, the group leads and monitors the impact of WDB activities on individuals with disabilities with a priority focus on increasing in the percentage of individuals with a disability in the workforce by offering meaningful employment opportunities through strong local partnerships.

This Committee organized highly successful Employer Symposia in 2018 and 2019. Held on September 11, 2019 our second annual Employer Symposium included special recognition of our disabled veterans and again focused on educating hiring managers and human resources professionals on the many talents that our residents with disabilities can bring to employment in their organizations. The 2019 Symposium's expanded program led to a 35% growth in attendance over our inaugural event in 2018. The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted plans for a third annual Employer Symposium in 2020. In response, the WDB modified its PY2020 annual budget to allocate sufficient WIOA Title I Adult funds to competitively procure a study to determine how employment prospects for local adults with disabilities have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is expected that the results of the study will be presented to the DEI Committee and full WDB in September 2021 to help inform local programming.

Berks County is also home to a comprehensive network of community-based organizations (CBOs) that cooperate with the local workforce development board to leverage private and public funding to assist jobseekers and their families reach economic prosperity. Many of these service providers receive financial support and coordinate efforts through the **United Way of Berks County** whose Senior Vice President of Community Impact serves on the Berks County WDB. Leaders from workforce-focused CBOs also have been appointed to and served on the Berks County WDB, including **Olivet Boys and Girls Clubs of America and Threshold Rehabilitation Services, Inc.**

Registered Apprenticeship (RA) Challenges and Opportunities. The Berks County commercial construction industry has long been home to successful registered apprenticeship (RA) programs sponsored by our local union contractors through three joint-labor management programs (e.g. IBEW Local 743, Sheet Metal Workers Local 19, and Steamfitters Union Local 420). as well as by over twenty individual non-union contractors currently sponsoring "active" registered apprenticeships. The IBEW Local 743 anticipates expanding its current training enrollment to upwards of 100 apprentice trainees in 2021 and, statewide, the IBEW recently revised its apprenticeship & training standards to emphasize a greater focus on attraction of non-traditional candidates into the IBEW training programs. The Sheet Metal Workers Local 19 is looking to add up to 80 new apprentices into its training programs in anticipation of an increased contractor need in the coming year.

However, a significant weakness of our local workforce development system has been the reluctance of local employers in our two largest industry sectors of manufacturing and healthcare to embrace this proven registered apprenticeship (RA) "earn and learn" model that increasingly is being adopted by employers in those same sectors outside of our region. Despite continued promotion of the RA model by the WDB's active Training & Industry Partnership (T&IP) Committee since 2017, we have had only two new manufacturing apprenticeship programs registered with the state and neither has yet to enroll a single apprentice. No local healthcare employers have yet adopted the RA model.

Apprenticeship is designed to benefit the employer by meeting job skill requirements for development, advancement and retention of a qualified, highly competent workforce and the Berks County WDB remains committed to engaging with local employers in the development and sponsorship of new apprentice models and to sustain existing sponsorships.
In Program Year 2018, after in-depth discussion on the need to amend the WDBs' Work-Based Training (WBT) Policy and to locally support Governor Wolf's goal to expand the registered apprenticeship model across industries, the T&IP Committee recommended the inclusion of a registered apprenticeship related-instruction subsidy in the WBT Incumbent Worker Training Policy. This policy enhancement was unanimously approved by the full board and is targeted to the WDBs' expressed priority industry sectors. Subsequently, the WDB authorized the allocation of Program Year 2019 and 2020 Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I funds to be used for a Registered Apprenticeship Strategy targeted to apprenticed incumbent worker upskill training.

This policy is designed to incentivize more local employers to adopt the apprentice model and to support them once their sponsorship is formally established. WIOA funds subsidize the employer cost, under an allowable matching scale basis, for the delivery of off-the-job related instruction for eligible registered apprenticeship programs. Since adopting this policy, it has been the T&IP Committee's charge to annually review these expenditures and recommend WDB budget allocations for each subsequent program year. By assisting sponsoring employers through the availability of these matching funds, their apprentices will have access to multi-levels of related instruction, obtaining the skills necessary to achieve the status of registered apprenticeship journeyperson and, thereby, attaining broad-level employment security. Upskilling apprenticed incumbent workers can lead to advancement opportunities which create entry-level opportunities for new entrants to these attractive career pathways.

In order to bring more resources to the board's priority goal of promoting RA programs outside of the commercial construction sector, the WDB's T&IP Committee developed a statement of work to request proposals from contractors interested in extending the RA model with "State Apprenticeship Expansion

Grant" funding provided by the PA Department of Labor & Industry in Program Year 2018. These funds were awarded to the WDB to expand outreach to employers promoting apprenticeship sponsorship and staff a dedicated full-time individual to perform these outreach activities. Unfortunately, the WDB's Request for Proposal (RFP) competition led to not a single contractor submitting a proposal for funding. Next, the WDB turned to our local PA CareerLink® Berks County Business Services Team (BST) to investigate local employer reasons for interest or lack thereof in the apprenticeship model. On February 27, 2020, the BST provided its report and recommendations to the T& IP Committee detailing research interviews and surveys conducted with 81 local employers in our top priority industries of manufacturing, healthcare and construction. The presentation was followed with active and in-depth committee discussion of the local talent pool makeup, hiring trends and workforce challenges, and key insights regarding employer and public-at-large perceptions (and misperceptions) of the apprenticeship model. Regretfully, the COVID-19 pandemic struck Berks County just three weeks after the report was delivered preventing the T&IP Committee from taking any significant follow-up steps for at least 16 months through June 2021.

Within the first two quarters of program year 2021, the Berks County WDB Training & Industry Partnership Committee will revisit the BST report findings with, once again, specific emphasis on the workforce challenges and employer and public-at-large perceptions (and misperceptions) that are negatively impacting wider acceptance of the apprenticeship model as a talent attraction and retention strategy. Our preliminary understanding is that this has been an employer enlightenment issue in our manufacturing and healthcare priority industry sectors.

The Berks County WDB will welcome the significant process improvements recently announced by the Commonwealth's Apprenticeship and Training Office (ATO), that are expected to enhance the standard acceptance process for Registered Apprenticeship (RA) and Pre-Apprenticeship programs. The creation of a new ATO registration guide and transitioning to registration documents that are more user-friendly and inclusive of all program types will lessen employer reluctance due to misinformation and can only help to facilitate employer education on the benefits of apprenticeship as a hiring and employment retention best practice. The WDB commits to employing these tools in active promotion of and support for greater business-education engagement in the development, implementation, and utilization of pre-apprenticeship/apprenticeship models, to better guide employers and training providers through the process in collaboration with the ATO, to encourage the pursuit of PAsmart and other grant opportunities, and to continue to provide eligible funding subsidy of incumbent worker training and registered apprenticeship related-instruction that can add to the incentive.

1.5. Describe strategic planning elements including a regional analysis of economic conditions.

As calendar year 2021 began, the Berks County Local Workforce Development Area (LWDA) labor market remained roiled with uncertainty resulting from the ongoing economic and public health crisis stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic which first hit the area in March 2020:

Local Labor Market Pandemic Recovery – A "V", a "W", or a "K"?

Berks County's local labor market continued its steady recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic through December 2020 with our seasonally adjusted (SA) local unemployment rate continuing its decline to **6.4%.** By comparison, this local rate for Berks County was measurably lower than both Pennsylvania's unemployment rate of 6.7% and the U.S. unemployment rate which also stood at 6.7% in December. While still well above our 4.7% rate from a year earlier in December

2019, our local 6.4% rate is now closing in on rates seen during previous periods of economic recovery (e.g. such as 6.0% in April 2002 and 6.2% in November 2013).

This recovery in our local labor market has largely been driven by a quicker than expected rebound of our key local manufacturing, logistics and transportations, and construction sectors. In fact, the Reading Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA)/Berks County labor market has experienced the best initial six months jobs recovery of any MSA in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. By December 2020:

- The number of non-farm jobs in Berks County declined to 182,600 which is within 700 jobs (-0.4%) of where we were in December 2019. (By comparison, the Commonwealth of PA lost 7.8 % of non-farm jobs over the past year.)
- The seasonally adjusted number of employed Berks County residents has recovered to 207,000 which is 1,100 fewer employed residents than a year earlier.
- Our critical "wealth-generating" local Construction and Manufacturing sectors appear to have now recovered all jobs lost as compared to December 2019.
- Unfortunately, our large local healthcare & social service sector remains down approximately 1,400 jobs (-4.7%) from a year ago.
- The number of officially unemployed Berks County residents continued to decline but remained relatively high at 14,100 in December. This number is 34% higher than a year earlier (December 2019).

With such a dramatic year over year increase in the number of Berks County residents still unemployed in the final month of calendar year 2020, one might expect that local employers should be able to attract plenty of applicants with strong employment histories and retain them**.** Unfortunately, the opposite appears to be true - at least for now.
During the second half of calendar year 2020, our PA CareerLink® Berks County Business Services Team (BST) was inundated by calls for help from local employers in key industries (e.g. Manufacturing, Transportation &Warehousing, etc.) desperate to fill current job openings and reporting almost no responses to their online job postings. The BST and the WDB heard from many of these employers that they have significantly increased their entry-level wages by as much as $3.00-$5.00 per hour to try to attract candidates off the sidelines or from other local employers.

The WDB notes that this is not an entirely new situation. Over a year ago, the WDB highlighted the growing challenges local manufacturing employers were facing in retaining newly hired production employees. The WDB utilized aggregate data reported to the WDB by CWIA (from Pennsylvania's database of new hires) to confirm that new hire "churn" in Berks County consistently occurred at remarkably higher rates than other areas in Pennsylvania during 2018-2019.

Healthcare employers have also reported growing nursing shortages due to COVID-19 related stresses on staffing, especially registered nurses (RNs) for Emergency Room (ER) care. These employers note increased demand for entry-level workers to perform in-hospital services such as food, environmental and patient personal care services and transport. Many current openings also exist for lab technicians and other technician positions. Like our manufacturing employers, one of our local hospitals has reported significant competition for entry-level workers from Amazon's local hiring campaign in late 2020 and early 2021.
Fortunately, as compared to other regions of the Commonwealth, large layoff announcements or plant closings remained relatively low in Berks County during the second half of 2020. This is a bit

surprising given the great disruption that the pandemic visited upon our local economy, families and communities. However, scattered closing announcements did occur, including:

- **Fulton Bank** announced in early October that it will be closing two Berks County branches in early January as part of a wider consolidation initiative. Six local branches are to remain open.
- Our iconic **VF Outlet** in West Reading permanently closed on Christmas Eve 2020. The site's current owner, Kontoor Brands based in North Carolina, stated that the closure is the result of a "strategic evaluation."

Local Economic Conditions. As reported to the WDB by the Lancaster EDC's *Center for Regional Analysis,* in January 2021, economic forecasters expect the U.S economy to grow through 2021, with estimated increases in GDP ranging from 3.7% - 5.0% outpacing 2018 and 2019. However, the EDC warns that a "K-shape" recovery would involve some segments being left out or trailing the recovery. Local data on Berks County highlights its economy sharing in these economic opportunities and risk with key sectors for both employment and GDP such as manufacturing, business and professional services, and transportation and warehousing all showing continued strong recovery. Berks County unemployment data through the end of 2020 continued to track relatively well. However, local consumer spending and consumer sentiment showed mixed results entering 2021.

Rising COVID cases at the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021are posing headwinds to economic momentum gained through the third quarter of this year.

- Businesses, while generally sharing positive outlooks and reporting confidence in their measures to provide safe workplaces, note labor market challenges that will only intensify with increasing public health concerns and mitigation strategies.
- The data also continues to show that some sectors of the economy and portions of the community have not necessarily been carried along in the economic recovery. Despite generally improving conditions, the strain on these hard-hit portions of the economy – namely education, accommodation and food service, and administrative and waste services, continue to see weak customer demand and thin revenue streams. For these sectors, prolonged uncertainty to their top line make them more vulnerable to any economic slowdown in the coming months.

Employment and Unemployment (UC) Claims. The EDC also reports that unemployment compensation (UC) claims for local residents have generally fallen month over month since peaking in April and May. At its height, Berks County had 47,400 UC claims, representing nearly 28% of its total labor force. By the end of September, total claims had fallen by almost 65% to 16,650 claims.

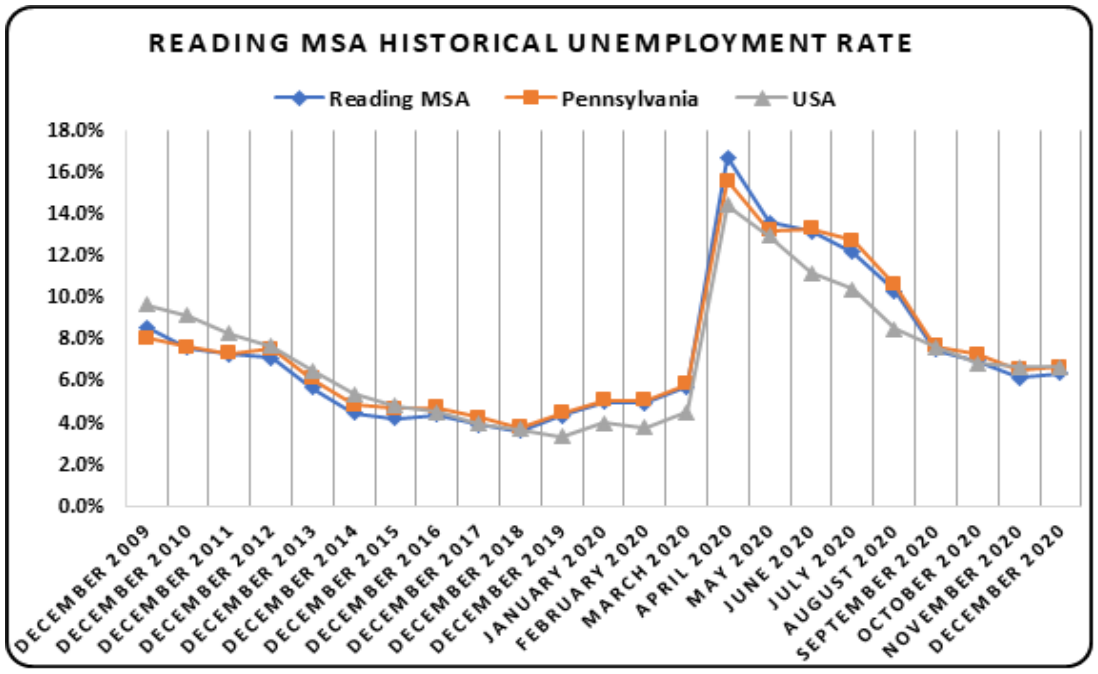
Through September, the decline in UC claims is believed to be associated with individuals returning to work as a result of the economy reopening and employers adjusting to the pandemic economy. Both second and third quarter employment figures and the initial claims data substantiate this interpretation. Sectors important to Berks County's workforce had made significant gains in employment. By September, employment in manufacturing and retail had returned to normal levels, and health care was down 8%. Additionally, initial claims fell through the summer months to reach pre-COVID levels by early fall (averaging around 600 initial claims per week in September and October).

However, October's interpretation of the decline in continued claims is more complicated. The last week of October marked 33 weeks since the initial and dramatic volume of UC claims caused by efforts to manage the spread of the coronavirus. Through the month of October, week-over-week declines in continued claims accelerated. This trend coincides with recipients exhausting benefits rather than returning to work. November and December 2020 brought modest but measurable upticks in the both new and continuing UC claims to end the year.

The sustained "wallet shift" brought on by the pandemic is likely to continue through early 2021, especially with rising COVID cases as noted above. This suggests that the sectors still operating under capacity or with restrictions, such as **food and accommodation**, will continue to struggle. Increasing concern is being shared with us about the financial sustainability of businesses in these sectors especially since revenue streams will not likely resume/recover until late 2021.

Closely linked to recovering retail and consumer spending, the October survey of manufacturers in the Philadelphia area (Third Federal Reserve District) reported current activity increasing. Both shipments and new orders for the **manufacturing** sector were up and coupled with increased labor needs. These findings were consistent with our interviews. Healthy third quarter revenue and anticipated growth looking ahead were consistent themes in interviews with manufacturers.

As we prepare this four-year plan, insufficient local Berks County data is yet available to understand how our region's resurgence of local COVID-19 cases in December and statewide mitigation measures have impacted the county. In short, it's too early to tell whether our local "V" shaped recovery from June through November 2020 will regress into a "W" shaped recovery during the first quarter of 2021. However, it is likely that our local economic and labor market recovery period from the pandemic will be significantly sharper and shorter than the extended eight-year recovery (2009-2017) recovery from our last recession.



Source: US DOL Bureau of Labor Statistics

As in the previous post-recovery period of sustained low unemployment beginning in 2017, our expected post-pandemic recovery in the first two years of this plan (July 2021 – June 2023) is likely to bring many employment opportunities for job seekers looking to change jobs or enter the labor market. *Fortunately, the services offered at the PA CareerLink® Berks County has continued to evolve help match such job seekers with the excellent local job opportunities. For example,* our one-stop staff utilize social media platforms to perform additional outreach to the community regarding one-stop services, openings with regional employers, and training opportunities with eligible providers. These forums are an excellent means of connecting with individuals that have not been previously engaged with one-stop services as well as reconnecting with those that have not participated in services for an extended period. The strongest of these platforms has proven to be Facebook, where the PA CareerLink® Berks County page's following of 4,500 profiles is the strongest of any one-stop in the Commonwealth.

Strategic Planning to Support our Post-pandemic Recovery and to Meet Employer Needs - As described above in Section 1.2, The Berks County WDB remains committed to local employer engagement through rigorous industry sector analysis. This allows the WDB to continuously update and deepen our understanding of the current and future skills needs of our employers and to develop responsive programming. As a result of our long-standing commitment to this proven best practice, the Berks WDB is home to local labor market subject matter expertise in the knowledge, skills and requisite industry-recognized credentials needed to contribute to the growth of a qualified talent pool, the recruitment and retention qualified employees, and the upskilling of "home grown" talent. Proven benefits of our industry sector approach include:

- Greater **focus** by engaging employers with common workforce and skills development needs.
- The ability to **prioritize** and target the impact of limited workforce development funds to address common critical skills needs.
- Improved **alignment** which breaks down "silos" among the WDB and our partners in economic development, education, community-based organizations, etc. as we collaborate to meet common skills needs identified in conjunction with local employers.

Following our most recent analysis of all local industry clusters, in December 2020 the Berks County WDB formally adopted the following workforce development sector priorities for calendar years 2021-2024:

I. Priority A *(Driver Industry)*: Manufacturing

- Largest sector by annual economic output (2019) = $4.5 Billion (21.2% of Berks GDP)
- Largest sector by employment: 32,065 jobs (17.6% of local employment 2020Q2).
- Leading local pandemic jobs recovery:
  - Despite the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, this sector experienced no total year over year job losses between August 2019 and August 2020.
  - Increasing number of alerts from employers bypassing orders due to overextended workforce.
  - Critical current and future skills shortages for technical occupations, especially precision machining, industrial maintenance/mechatronics technicians, welders and quality systems professionals.
  - Entry-level production worker hiring/retention increasingly difficult.

- *Average Weekly Wages for local manufacturing workers grew 4.3% in one year (4th Quarter 2018 versus 4th Quarter 2019) per the US DOL Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).*
- Industry average annual wage = $62,115 *(JobsEQ® 2020Q2 dataset)*
- 519 establishments (including 1st and 3rd largest employers① – East Penn Manufacturing and Carpenter Technology Corp.)
- Very Strong Location Quotient (LQ) = **2.13** (projected to remain static through 2025)
- Local Manufacturing Sector is broad-based but with some significant concentration in certain sub-sectors. Top three manufacturing sub-sectors by employment (51% of total sector employment):

Industry Sub-Sector (JobsEQ® 2020Q2 dataset)	LQ	Employment	% Industry
1. Electrical Equipment, Appliance, and Component Manufacturing	**18.54**	**8,667**	**27%**
2. Primary Metal Manufacturing	**9.64**	**4,243**	**13%**
3. Food Manufacturing (does not include Beverage & Tobacco)	**1.79**	**3,490**	**11%**

- Significant multiplier effect supports many jobs in supply chain and other sectors
- Continued productivity growth will drive increased economic output with moderate decline expected in manufacturing job growth through 2025 (i.e. Berks will remain successful if we retain ≈30,000 manufacturing industry jobs thru 2025).
- >27% of manufacturing workers are age 55 or older – need 6,000 new entrants by 2025 to maintain current workforce level due to exit forecast.
- Failure to address talent pipeline/skills shortages and incumbent talent upskilling will lead to reduced business investment and lower economic output with a significant negative impact on local economic prosperity.

II. Priority B *(Sustaining Industry)*: Healthcare (excludes Social Assistance)

- 2nd largest sector by employment: 25,146 jobs (13.6% of local employment 2020Q2)
- 2nd largest employer (Tower Health/Reading Hospital) and 10th (Penn State Health - St. Joseph Medical Center) largest employers①
- Despite being hit especially hard by the pandemic, this sector is projected to have steady job growth - ≈200 per annum total growth demand through 2025
- Industry average annual wages = $61,634 (JobsEQ® 2020Q2 dataset)
- 2019 Location Quotient = 1.17, slightly above national average
- 10.6% of Berks GDP = $2.2 Billion (2019)
- Top five Healthcare occupations by employment/5-year growth/annual growth percentage:

Occupation	Current Employed	5 Year Employ Growth	% Annual Growth
1. Registered Nurses	**3,620**	**520**	**0.6%**
2. Personal Care Aides	**2,037**	**833**	**2.7%**
3. Nursing Assistants	**1,829**	**501**	**0.5%**
4. Licensed Practical & Licensed Vocational Nurses	**909**	**160**	**0.8%**

5. Medical Assistants	**885**	**184**	**1.5%**

- Excellent system of industry-recognized licenses and credentials driving education & career pathways. Good opportunities for middle-skill jobs and career paths
- Service industry with limited jobs multiplier effect

III. Priority B (*Infrastructure Industry)*: Construction

- Approximately 8,700 jobs (4.8% of Berks total employment 2020Q2)
- Annual economic output (2019) = $967 Million (4.6% of Berks GDP)
- Location Quotient (LQ) = **0.82**, below national and PA (0.90) concentrations
- Industry average annual wage = ≈$60,300. Significant upward pressure on wages expected to continue through 2025.
- Top five Construction Trades occupations by employment - 5-year mean wage progression/regression percentage *(BLS 2015 versus 2019 Occupational Employment Statistics Data)*:

Occupation	Current Employed	5 Yr. Wage % Δ
1. Construction Laborers	**1,259**	**17.4%**
2. Carpenters	**868**	**10.5%**
3. Electricians	**549**	**0.7%**
4. Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters	**495**	**5.9%**
5. HVAC/R Mechanics & Installers	**404**	**21.9%**

- 25% currently employed at or above age 55 or older years
- Employment forecast – modest increase to ≈8,900 by 2025Q2. Lagging talent pipeline will continue to pose a threat, however, *the Berks construction industry currently has 49 distinct employer-sponsored apprenticeship "earn and learn" training models with well-defined career and wage progression to recruit, train, and retain workers.*

IV. Priority C (*Watch Industries):*

A. Transportation and Warehousing:

- Approximately 8,600 jobs (1,500 new jobs = 21% growth over last five years).
- 7th largest employer① – Penske Truck Leasing
- Industry average annual wage = $49,682 *(JobsEQ® 2020Q2 dataset)*
- 2019 Location Quotient = **1.00**, equal to the national average
- Dramatic development of new facilities along I-78 and across the larger region has generated greatly increased competition for available workers
- Predominantly low-skill entry-level positions; however, significant upward pressure on wages expected to continue through 2025. Sector lacks strong career ladders
- Ongoing demand in 2016-2028 for CDL Drivers (425 on-line ads in September 2020)

B. Agriculture

- Legacy industry – 114 establishments, ≈3,600 jobs (2% Berks employment 2020Q2)
- Relatively stable employment – less than ±1% average annual change in the last 5 years
- Industry average annual wage = ≈$39,500 *(JobsEQ® 2020Q2 dataset)*
- $400 Million annual output (2019) – 1.7% of Total Berks GDP
- 2020 Location Quotient = **1.46**, above the national average
- Tied closely to food production (manufacturing sub-sector) with "locally-sourced" advantage

- Related regional demand for mechanics/technicians to service increasingly sophisticated farm and production equipment – including electronic, hydraulic and diesel technicians.

2. STRATEGIC PLANNING QUESTIONS: Vision and Goals

2.1. *What are the local board's strategic vision and goals for preparing its workforce?*

The Berks County Workforce Development Board's (Berks County WDB) vision is to support the development and maintenance of a skilled and competitive workforce in alignment with the broader economic development efforts to attract, retain and grow business in Berks County.

In support of this vision the Berks County WDB has established a reputation for offering effective services and programs and for continuously improving the quality of services and programs. In response to the needs of local employers and job seekers and in alignment with WIOA requirements, the Berks County WDB has developed implementation and improvement strategies for our anticipated COVID-19 pandemic recovery in Program Years 2021 – 2022. *Given the extreme uncertainty regarding the long-term effects of recovery and the lack of post-pandemic data yet available, the Berks County WDB will regularly review our strategic vision and goals as the situation develops and more post-pandemic information becomes available. We fully anticipate the need to adjust these goals in support of our strategic vision even before the final two years covered by this plan (Program Years 2023 and 2024) from July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2025.*

In support of this vision and to promote post-pandemic economic growth and economic self-sufficiency for local families, the WDB's Policy, Planning and Priorities (PPP Committee) developed five goals which were submitted to the full WDB and approved on December 11, 2020. The WDB's Youth Committee considered and endorsed two of the goals (IV and V) specifically related to the needs of young adults on November 19, 2020.

I. Building on our Strengths – Local Industry Sector Priorities and Related Technical Training Strategies

Because of the Berks County WDB's long-standing commitment to industry sector analysis, priority setting and employer engagement (section 1.2 above), our Board is home to extensive local labor market subject matter expertise in the knowledge, skills and requisite industry-recognized credentials needed to contribute to the growth of a qualified talent pool, the recruitment and retention of qualified employees, and the upskilling of "home grown" talent. Benefits of the WDB's industry sector approach to employer engagement include:

- Greater **focus** by engaging employers with common workforce and skills development needs.
- The ability to **prioritize** and target the impact of limited workforce development funds to address common critical skills needs.
- Improved **alignment** which breaks down "silos" among the WDB and our partners in economic development, education, community-based organizations, etc. as we collaborate to meet common skills needs identified in conjunction with local employers.

It is the Board's practice to broadly share occupational and industry sector employment information with our economic and education partners and community-based organizations and request feedback that they may receive separately from employers. For example, the Board is an active partner in the innovative and impactful local Career Ready Berks initiative

which supports K-14 career planning through career pathway development and counseling resource tools with the Berks Business and Education Coalition (BBEC), the Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU), Reading Area Community College (RACC) and our18 local public school districts. Increasingly, we are engaging with our four local 4-year colleges and universities in this collaborative work leading to even greater insights into the education and skills needs of regional employers.

Finally, when the WDB determines that its ongoing analysis and established "iterative" processes for identifying local skills gaps may not be providing all of the labor market insight we need, the WDB may budget available WIOA funding and competitively procure additional resources to conduct targeted studies to help us better meet the needs of employers in the local area and broader region. For example, our *Greater Berks Advanced Manufacturing Skills Gap Study* completed in January 2021 will position the Berk County WDB to better understand regional manufacturing needs and lead the coordination of near-term, medium-term and long-term workforce system responses in close collaboration with our economic development, education and community partners.

In keeping with this employer engagement strategy and in preparation for the development of this post-pandemic WIOA four-year plan, the WDB completed its most recent biannual analysis of local industry sectors in November 2020. Using the latest economic data and labor market information (LMI), the WDB confirmed and approved five priority industry sectors to focus on through 2025:

- Priority A Sector (1) **– Manufacturing**
- Priority B Sectors (2) – **Healthcare** and **Construction**
- Priority C Sectors (2) **– Agriculture** and **Transportation & Warehousing**

Specifically, the WDB will continue to connect local employers with valuable sources of matching funds to offset some of their costs for training activities associated with incumbent workers, including registered apprenticeship related instruction. Our focus on incumbent worker training can be especially helpful to small and medium-size employers in key industry sectors with similar needs and scarce internal training resources. This strategy will assist proven incumbents develop and grow with their companies and as a result allow the hiring of less-skilled new hires into these attractive career pathways. Many of these new hires may also need assistance from other WDB-sponsored programs (e.g. employer on the job training contracts – "OJT's") in order to get started along these attractive regional career pathways.

II. Engaging with Employers in Talent Retention and Development

As part of the our mission to continuously monitor development in our local economy an labor market, in late 2019 and well before the arrival of the pandemic in Berks County, the WDB identified uniquely and stubbornly high local levels of new hire "churn" in our local labor market as compared to other local labor markets across the Commonwealth. At the WDB's quarterly meeting in September 2019, the issue of turnover among entry-level production and potential employer responses was a major topic of Board-level discussion and focus.

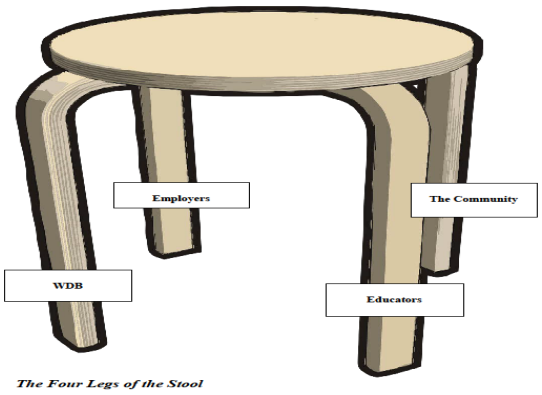
By December 2019, the WDB reviewed additional data provided by CWIA confirming that the crisis reported by WDB members and local employers in September was real and that new hire "churn" in the local Berks County labor market was remarkably higher than rates in any

other area in the state. According to CWIA, during the first quarter of 2019, a whopping **14,010** of all employed Berks County residents were new hires – representing **7.8%** of the local workforce. By the 2nd quarter CY2019, our local new hire jumped even higher to **8.5%.** CWIA provided a further breakdown of the new hires in Berks County by local industry sector showing that:

- **Manufacturing sector employers** (exclusive of our County's single largest employer) hired 1,078 workers in the 2nd quarter 0f 2019 equaling 4.7**%** of their total workforce.
- **Construction sector employers** hired 715 new workers or 11.6% of their total workforce.
- **Administrative and Support Services sector employers** reported hiring 6,058 new employees in the 2nd quarter of 2019 – 72.0% of the sector's employment. Based on our understanding of local employer practices, we project that many if not most of the new hires in this sector were assigned to help staff manufacturing and warehouse establishments**.**

The WDB's analysis of this talent retention challenge determined that this was not just a cyclical/recovery phenomenon. Rather, despite the pandemic we project that labor talent shortages will be a reality for employers for many years to come. If local employers are to be successful over the long-term, they will have to pro-actively respond to and plan for the new environment by adjusting their policies, practices and overall workplace cultures to focus on not just talent attraction but also on the retention, development, satisfaction and engagement of employees who will have many local employment options. The WDB has identified four categories of supporting partners directly interested in promoting a strong workforce development environment in Berks County:

A. The Berks County Workforce Development Board (WDB)
B. K-16 Education and Adult Training Providers
C. **The broader Berks County Community** (including jobseekers, policymakers, community-based organizations, labor organizations, and citizens).
D. Employers



The Four Legs of the Stool

Evidence suggested to the WDB that the first three legs of this "four-legged stool" have consistently been credibly and solidly engaged in workforce development throughout the business cycle. Under normal labor market conditions of equilibrium (or of labor surplus) this

system has generally demonstrated itself to be sufficiently capable of matching local talent supply with employer needs. Unfortunately, such a surplus or even equilibrium is unlikely to exist in our local labor markets for the next decade, yet many employers continue to operate in an outdated paradigm in which they believe that the supply of experienced local talent they need to grow and thrive will be readily available.

At the same time, other local and regional employers have implemented best practices in response to this challenging environment. Therefore, the Berks County Workforce Development Board contracted in February 2020 with Educational Data Systems, Inc. (EDSI) to conduct a comprehensive study of current employer recruitment, retention, development, satisfaction and engagement best practices in the Greater Reading and Berks County area. Despite the interruption of the pandemic, more than 150 employers in the region participated in the study. Respondents completed a talent self-assessment tool, rating themselves on five key talent metrics: employee retention, employee development, employee attraction, talent and culture, and overall talent strategies. After completing the assessment, employers were invited to participate in focus groups to discuss specific best practices.

Selected findings from the study published in October 2020, show that local high-performing talent organizations:

- Have a talent strategy and vision in place that is connected to the organization's overall strategy and is clearly communicated and supported.
- Understand that competitive wages, benefits, and work environment are fundamental for attracting and retaining talent.
- Focus on developing long term recruiting pipelines, in part by establishing recruiting and workforce development relationships with local educational institutions.
- Promote from within their organizational culture, offer job sculpting, internal career ladders, individualized training and career plans, flexible schedules, and opportunities for employees through company growth.

For the WDB, the most important recommendation from the study in our area of direct responsibility is that we integrate its findings and recommendations into annual goals and future strategic plans. In order to do so, the WDB will begin by implementing two urgent and important subsidiary recommendations from the report to assist local employers:

- *There are systemic issues (usually related to particular skill shortages and lack of talent pipelines) that cannot be addressed through individual employers following best practices. Identifying these challenges by industry and organization size and seeking opportunities to address through new partnerships and collaboration is critical.*
- *Insuring that the PA CareerLink® Berks County Business Services Team (BST) initiate follow up conversations with employer survey participants to encourage and assist in following individual employer recommendations included in the report, create customized next steps, and identify areas where further customized* support is needed.

III. No Talent Left Behind: Increasing Employment Opportunities for Adults with Barriers to Employment, including:

- ***Adults with Disabilities***
- ***Adults with Histories of Convictions***
- ***Adults who are English Language Learners (ELL)***

- ***Adults with Low Literacy and Numeracy***

The Berks County WDB will also need to expand and upskill the overall talent pool of existing adult workers to meet the needs of our key industry sectors. The WDB's Diversity, ~~Equality~~ Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee consists of board members and off-board members who represent their employers or who otherwise have proven expertise in human resources or serving/advocating for the community of individuals with barriers to employment. While respecting all aspects of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, the focus of this committee is to increase the percentage of individuals with barriers who are gainfully employed. This will be accomplished by leveraging strong partnerships with businesses in Berks County. To support this focus and to inform future local programming, the WDB budgeted PY2020 Title I Adult funds to competitively procure a local study of barriers to employment faced by adult residents with disabilities.

Despite a quicker than expected initial labor market recovery in early Program Year 2020, underemployment continues to be a significant issue for many low-income Berks County residents with barriers to employment. At the same time, local employers in key industry sectors report having many unfilled entry-level job opportunities with attractive career pathways that do not require college degrees to get started. Flexible and innovative pre-apprenticeship programs can help low-income residents and other underemployed adults explore and prepare for success along these pathways. For example, the WDB leveraged WIOA Title I Adult funding in 2019 to competitively procure a contract to support the expansion of *Rebuilding Re-entrants and Reading (R3)* - a best practice community-based pre-apprenticeship program in the construction sector. R3 is currently the only registered pre-apprenticeship program in the Commonwealth exclusively serving re-entrants with recent histories of convictions. Based on the success of this pilot program, the WDB will prioritize additional funding as available to help launch, expand or sustain more such community-based pre-apprenticeships that help adults with barriers to employment attain entry-level skills and industry certifications in key industry sectors and in-demand occupations.

IV. Connecting Young Adults (Ages 18-24)

While the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly disrupted the career plans and opportunities of local workers of all ages, our young adults (ages 18-24) have been particularly vulnerable to being knocked off-track, or in the case of our already disconnected young adults being pushed even further behind.

Four years ago, the Youth Committee of the Berks WDB identified a unique and crucial role for the Board as the key convener of local partners with the mission and capacity to meet the extensive needs of connecting young adults. The Youth Committee also recognizes that we often lack good local data regarding the extent of the problem of disconnected young adults in our communities. In order to proceed with the best information available, the WDB joined with the United Way of Berks County (United Way) to fund a research study to quantify and profile disconnected and under-employed young adults. The resulting report was completed in July 2017 and has since informed our local priorities and programs. Findings from the report include:

- Berks County is home to between 3,000 – 5,000 disconnected individuals who meet the WDBs' definition of a disconnected young adult.

- 90% of disconnected young adults reported experiencing life circumstances that are common barriers to employment or education.
- Disconnected young adults in Berks county often face multiple and varied barriers to gainful employment and education.
- Over half of disconnected young adults face more than one reason for being disconnected.
- The top barriers disconnected young adults in Berks County face include:
  - Lack of Transportation
  - Family Care Obligations
  - Focus on "Making Money" vs. "Investing in a Career"
  - Significant Barriers to Pursuing Education

As a result of long-term demographic changes in the County, we have, and projections indicate will continue to have, a relatively small numbers of residents in this age cohort compared to our projected workforce needs. Therefore, we have great urgency in making sure that they have the necessary skills, education and direction to be well established on a gainful career pathway before they reach 25 years of age. Clearly, the needs of this age group deserve special focus if we are to have a sustainable post-pandemic recovery and long-term local prosperity

V. Future Talent Pipeline – Career Reading Berks (K-14)

The future looks bright for the 70,000 plus kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) public-private school students in Berks County, but only if they are properly prepared for the needs of our strong local industries. If these students are not properly guided and prepared, they will not be readily available to our local employers who will struggle in facing a "silver tsunami" of ongoing baby-boomer retirements in the decade ahead. The WDB clearly understands and consistently communicates the serious risk to our local prosperity if we fail to address the root causes of the mismatch between the needs of evolving needs of local employers and the skills and qualifications of the available workforce. Frankly, too many adult Berks County residents, while they were still in our elementary and secondary school systems, did not receive the education, workplace skills and career knowledge that they need to succeed in our rapidly changing economy.

According to our latest information from JobsEQ®, 52.8% of Berks County adults (age 25 to 64 years) have successfully achieved a high school education but not an associate degree or higher. (Only 35.9% of Berks County adults within the same age demographic persevered with their formal education to complete an associate degree or higher.) This profile may have been a good match for a 20th century economy, but it does not meet the needs of our region's current and future technology-driven workplace.

To promote wider-scale cooperation to address our long-term workforce needs, the WDB has joined a committed local partnership of educators, employers, and workforce and economic development leaders to champion the **Career Ready Berks (CRB)** alliance. Through an innovative and well-strategized model of oversight, the CRB alliance has brought multiple stakeholders and their collective expertise to the table to coordinate the development and delivery of several distinct but complementary career exploration activities under one universal "enterprise umbrella". Our effective Career Ready model has been recognized by

the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) as a leading best practice that has been adopted and adapted to local needs by other areas in our region.

As is the case throughout the country, young adults in Berks County often lack current and sufficient knowledge about career paths in key industry sectors to properly inform their career and education decisions. In addition, our youth too often lack early understanding of the academic preparation necessary to succeed in rigorous career and technical education programs, particularly in STEM-related fields. As a result, our local economy already lacks the needed numbers of well-prepared and motivated students onto these career pathways and as discussed above (Section 1.1) the gap is likely to grow further in the next decade.

Career Ready Berks' ***Engineering & Industrial Technology*** and ***Science & Health*** career clusters have been identified by the Berks WDB as priority career clusters driving the economic viability of our county. These two clusters effectively incorporate the Berks WDB's five priority industry sectors of Advanced Manufacturing, Agriculture, Construction, Manufacturing, Healthcare and Transportation & Logistics.

While the WDB's Title I Youth funding will continue to be largely dedicated to out of school young adult (OSY) programs as appropriately required by WIOA, another major priority of the Berks WDB under this overarching goal will be to build on the widely recognized gains of our successful local ***Career Ready Berks*** partnership with a particular focus on providing ongoing support for Career and Technical Education Pathways in conjunction with our local Perkins V partners.

These challenges and opportunities are not unique to our local Berks County workforce development area. Fortunately, we are part of the six-county Southeastern Pennsylvania (SE PA) planning region which is the most dynamic economic region in the Commonwealth. Through ongoing coordination with the other five local WDBs in SE PA, the Berks County WDB's strategic vision and goals described above align with and complement SE PA's latest 4-year regional plan under which this local plan is being submitted for approval.

Acknowledging the existing regulatory reality as our workforce system transitioned to full implementation of WIOA, the Berks WDB is confident that the strategic priorities and goals included in this local plan are the right ones for local employers and jobseekers alike. In particular, the priority given to meeting the challenges local employers currently face with the wave of experienced "baby-boomer" worker retirements now underway will position the WDB to meet any new metrics designed to determine the WDB's *effectiveness in serving employers*. In particular, the emphasis that the Berks WDB will place on WIOA's permissible use of adult and dislocated worker funds allocated to the Board for training activities associated with incumbent workers will be especially attractive to small and medium-size employers with similar needs and scarce training resources. This will facilitate a closer and more consistent engagement with these employers, thereby allowing the WDB to understand and meet their recruitment and training needs. This strategy will help proven, trained incumbents develop and grow with the companies and allow the hiring of less-skilled new hires into these attractive career pathways. As a result, the WDB's performance will be enhanced against the more traditional employment, retention and earning metrics for eligible Adult, Dislocated and Youth job seekers.

The Berks WDB's commitment to continuing our proven industry sector priorities and strategies will further support attainment of negotiated measures. In particular, this commitment will help the Berks WDB understand which *key credentials* are valued by industry and which credentials are not. At the same time, the WDB will continue to develop a broader expertise in understanding and *measuring skill gains* attained through a variety of training strategies, programs and partnerships.

The Berks WDB recognizes that perhaps its biggest challenge will be building strong programs and partnerships to help the region's disconnected young adults and under-employed young adults join sustainable career pathways to family-sustaining occupations with local employers. As mentioned above, experience has proven that this elusive population is difficult to find, to keep engaged and to stay connected with following program participation. As a result, the Berks WDB's determination to continue a leadership role within Berks County is essential to achieving negotiated Youth performance measures in all six specified areas of measurement.

Finally, a candid look as the root causes of the mismatch between the needs of current employers and the skills and qualifications of the available workforce leads the Berks WDB to the inescapable conclusion that too many Berks County residents, while they were still in our elementary and secondary school systems, did not receive the education, workplace skills and career knowledge that they need to succeed in our rapidly-changing economy. This is a national, state and local problem, but we know that many other developed countries do a better job in this area – particularly in providing in-school youth (ISY) with high quality work-based learning opportunities. By expanding and sustaining local summer youth employment programs (SYEPs), the Berks County WDB will help create the conditions for our current Young Adults and future Adult and Dislocated Worker job seekers to more easily navigate the inevitable labor force disruptions they will encounter in their careers and to *find* and *maintain* gainful employment leading *to family-sustaining earnings.* This will promote wide-spread *economic self-sufficiency in accordance with WIOA 116(b) (2) (A).* As a result, these individuals will also more likely become life-long learners who acquire *industry-recognized credentials* and are able to demonstrate *measurable skill gains* throughout their working careers. A local workforce with such qualities will serve as a competitive advantage for employers seeking to expand in or relocate to Berks County, the foundation of economic growth as targeted by the performance measures described in WIOA *116(b)(2)(A).*

2.2. *What is the local board's strategy to work with the entities that carry out the core programs to align resources available to the local area, in order to achieve the strategic vision and goals for the local area?*

Local Title I Youth, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs are managed by two third-party contractors procured by the County of Berks through a competitive process planned and managed by the Berks County WDB and the County of Berks Purchasing Department. The Berks WDB *One-Stop Oversight Committee* and *Youth Committee* provide oversight and policy guidance over the course of the contract period.

Staff employed by the PA Department of Labor & Industry (L&I) Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations (BWPO) are located at the PA CareerLink® Berks County and provide Wagner-Peyser program services under the supervision of the Career Services Team Supervisor who in functionally reports to the Administrator – PA CareerLink® Berks County.

The Berks-Schuylkill District Office of Pennsylvania's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) is a partner in the PA CareerLink® Berks County. The District Administrator for OVR is a member of the Berks County WDB and vice-chair of the WDB's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee which, while respecting all aspects of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, has been charged with working with local employers to increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

As described above in Section 1.4, the Berks County WDB prioritizes close collaboration and helps to secure available funding for both local Career and Technical Centers (BCTC and RMCTC) and Reading Area Community College (RACC) to ensure that training programs align with industry needs and high priority occupations. The Berks County WDB's COO serves on Executive Advisory Boards for both BCTC and RMCTC and reviews requests for state equipment grants, providing letters of support as appropriate.

As described in section 1.3, Berks WDB staff also serve on Perkins V advisory committees for all three schools. During the 2019-2020 school year, the Berks County Workforce Development Board (WDB) developed and led a process to concurrently analyze local area needs and evaluate technical education programs for all three local institutions receive Perkins V funding - Reading Area Community College (RACC), Reading Muhlenberg Career & Technology Center (RMCTC) and Berks Career & Technology Center (BCTC).

Strategically, the WDB has identified and promotes the **Berks County Technical Academy** as a model "2+2+2" career and education pathway for qualifying students in selected programs at BCTC, RMCTC and RACC that well serves high school students (and their families) in combining state-of-the art technical skills and industry credential acquisition with affordable post-secondary education even beyond the technical associate (AAS) degrees that they can earn from RACC. Once hired, Technical Academy graduates may receive financial support from their employers while they complete their associated degree programs at RACC and RACC has been particularly effective in assisting qualifying students to access federal Pell grants to cover tuition costs. If the students wish to continue their technical training and education beyond RACC, they may do so at aligned 4-year institutions (e.g. Penn State – Berks) through additional articulation agreements that are part of the Technical Academy pathway often with financial assistance from their employers.

The best practice Berks Technical Academy is our most developed and comprehensive career and education pathway, yet it is not the only example of how the Berks WDB local board coordinates education and workforce investment activities with relevant secondary and postsecondary education programs and activities to coordinate strategies and avoid duplication of services. The Berks County WDB regularly applies for and secures additional funding from relevant competitive state and national grants, such as statewide Business Education Partnership (BEP) grants and Teacher in the Workplace (TIW) grants. By facilitating and overseeing partner performance in such discretionary grants, the WDB brings additional outside resources to the area with great and lasting impact. For example, the series of successful BEP and TIW grants over the past four years have supported effective programs to educate and enhance Berks County grade 6-12 teacher and student awareness of and exposure to diverse, but realistic, education and career opportunities here in the greater Berks County region.

RACC is the Commonwealth's local *WIOA Title II Adult Educational and Literacy* program contractor for the Berks County. Reflecting the primary importance of coordinating WIOA Title I and Title II program services and strategies to avoid duplication and maximize our limited local resources, RACC's

Director of Career Training, Community Education & Professional Development (who leads RACC's Title II program services) was appointed to the WDB where she serves on the WDB's One Stop Oversight Committee. The Executive Director of one of RACC's key Title II sub-contractors, the *Literacy Council of Reading-Berks* also is a non-Board member of the Berks County WDB's *One-Stop Oversight Committee*. He also is a former President of the Pennsylvania Association for Continuing Education (PAACE) and is recognized as a statewide expert on adult education and literacy and how to coordinate Title I and Title II programs. As a result, both of these adult education leaders serve to ensure that the WDB's One Stop Oversight Committee is well-positioned to help coordinate local Title I and Title II services and strategies with all PA CareerLink® Berks County partners.

The Berks WDB also works closely with the Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU) which coordinates additional educational services for Berks County's eighteen public school services within Berks County and is also represented on the Berks County WD Board's Youth Committee. The Berks Business Education Coalition (BBEC) is chaired by a local business leader and the BBEC's membership includes the County's five colleges and the eighteen public school districts as well as business leaders. The BBEC is an active partner with the Berks County WD Board on programs to facilitate employer-educator collaboration and to provide local students with valuable work-based learning opportunities throughout the County. The BBEC's Executive Director is a member of the Board's Youth Committee.

Both the BCIU and the BBEC partner with the Berks County WDB and our 18 local school districts to promote career awareness and preparation programs with a focus on equitable access for all 70,000 K-12 students regardless of which school district their families might reside in. The Berks WDB, BCIU and BBEC together champion the **Career Ready Berks (CRB)** alliance to promote and sustain wide-scale cooperation between educators, business partners, and workforce and economic development. The strategy of the CRB alliance is not to dictate a "one-size-fits-all" county-wide career pathways model but, rather, to offer well-researched recommendations and supports to enhance and expand K-12 career education. Through an innovative and well-strategized model of oversight, the CRB alliance brings diverse stakeholders and their collective expertise to the table to coordinate the development and delivery of distinct but complementary career exploration activities under one universal "enterprise umbrella." Since forming in 2016, this alliance of local stakeholders meets regularly to strengthen and expand collaboration among all 18 Berks County school districts, career and technical centers, postsecondary institutions, employers, workforce agencies, and other community stakeholders. From our mutual commitments and respective talents, we created a countywide, self-sustaining framework that builds and supports rigorous career pathways for all learners; leverages and aligns resources; coordinates and expands communication among stakeholders; and supports regional workforce needs.

Finally, the Berks County WDB maintains a close working relationship with the Higher Education Council of Berks County (HECBC) whose membership includes the presidents of the County's five non-profit and public institutions for higher education. The HECBC also serves as the nominating entity for education sector representatives appointed to the WDB. The Berks WDB COO serves on the Kutztown University Business Advisory Council where he provides timely and practical guidance on programs and local labor market information (LMI).

2.3. *How will the local board's vision and goals align with, support, and contribute to the governor's vision and goals for the state's workforce development system, as well as any of the goals and strategies articulated in the regional plan?*

The Berks County Workforce Development Board's vision and goals as detailed in Section 2.1 align extremely well with and mutually support the governor's visions and five broad goals for the Commonwealth's workforce development system.

- **PA Goal #1 - Establishment of Career Pathways** – The Berks WDB's first goal *of Building on our Strengths – Local Industry Sector Priorities and Related Technical Training Strategies* is the foundation that supports the development of relevant career pathways in our region. The WDB constantly reinforces to local education and training partners our key insight that career pathways are best nurtured within a well-established industry sector strategy. Time and again our experience at the WDB shows that career pathways independent of a robust local industry sector too often lead to occupational dead ends for job seekers and unfilled positions for employers – an unfortunate "lose-lose" scenario. Such dead ends are especially detrimental for *adults with barriers to employment* that are the focus of our third local goal detailed in this plan. Such adults simply have much less room for recovery from ill-advised training programs. Flexible and innovative pre-apprenticeship programs can help low-income residents and other underemployed adults explore and prepare for success along these our most promising pathways.

  The Berks WDB's focus on the needs of employers, strong sector strategies and sustained summer-employment programs for in-school youth emphasizes the mutual benefits of career pathways leading to high-priority occupations within expanding industry sectors. This focus aligns well with our fourth goal aimed at *Connecting Young Adults (Ages 18-24)* and our fifth local goal to develop an effective *Future Talent Pipeline through Career Ready Berks* in partnership with our K-14 educators. In addition, as described above in Sections 1.4 and 2.2, the WDB fosters ongoing collaboration among secondary and post-secondary institutions (including our three key Perkins V technical education partners) to prioritize our most relevant and fruitful career pathways for adults and young adults alike.

- **PA Goal #2 - Invest in Talent and Skills for Targeted Industries in Strategic Partnership with Employers and Educational Institutions** – There is nearly 100% alignment between the governor's goal and the Berks WDB The Berks WDB's first goal of *Building on our Strengths – Local Industry Sector Priorities and Related Technical Training Strategies* described above in Sections 1.2 and 2.1. Unfortunately, as detailed above in Section 1.4, local employers outside of the construction sector remain reluctant to adopt the registered apprenticeship models actively promoted by the State Plan. To close that gap, the WDB amended our Work-Based Training (WBT) Policy to locally support Governor Wolf's goal to expand the registered apprenticeship model across industries by the inclusion of a registered apprenticeship related-instruction subsidy in the WBT Incumbent Worker Training Policy. In support of this goal, the WDB plans to continue our strategy of budgeting annual Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I funding to be used for a Registered Apprenticeship Strategy targeted to apprenticed incumbent worker upskill training. This approach also supports the WDB's second goal of *Engaging with Employers in Talent Retention and Development* within our targeted industry sectors as apprenticeship is designed to benefit the employer by meeting job skill requirements for development, advancement and retention of a qualified, highly competent workforce. In accordance with Governor Wolf's goal to expand registered apprenticeships across the

Commonwealth, the Berks County WDB remains committed to engaging with local employers in the development and sponsorship of new apprentice models and to sustain existing sponsorships.

- **PA Goal #3 - Increase Work-Based Learning Opportunities for Youth** - Here there is significant alignment between the governor's goal with our WDB's fourth goal aimed at *Connecting Young Adults (Ages 18-24)* and our fifth local goal to develop an effective *Future Talent Pipeline through Career Ready Berks* in partnership with our K-14 educators. In pursuit of the common goals, we will continue our local emphasis on work-based training and pre-apprenticeship programs for disconnected and under-employed young adults as well as for our in school youth to keep them connected and to bring relevance to their high school academic preparation. The Berks WDB recognizes that perhaps our biggest challenge will be building strong programs and partnerships to help the region's disconnected young adults and under-employed young adults embark on sustainable career pathways to family-sustaining occupations with local employers. As mentioned above, experience has proven that this elusive population is difficult to find, to keep engaged and to stay connected with following program participation. As a result, the Berks WDB's determination to continue our leadership role across the region in addressing this challenge by promoting work-based learning opportunities is a key component of our strategy.

- **PA Goal #4 - Engage Employers to Strengthen the Connection of Education and Training and the Economy, Increase Investment in Critical Skills and Increase Jobs that Pay –** In response to the many workplace challenges facing local employers the WDB established it second goal of *Engaging with Employers in Talent Retention and Development* that aligns closely with Governor Wolf's Goal #4 focusing on engaging employers to be even better workplaces for loyal and talented employees. The WDB's analysis of our current local talent retention and development challenges determined that these result from long-term structural demographic and cultural changes and not just a cyclical/recovery phenomenon. Rather, despite the immediate impact of the pandemic, we project that labor talent shortages will be a reality for employers for many years to come. If local employers are to be successful over the long-term, they must pro-actively respond to and plan for the new environment by adjusting their policies, practices and overall workplace cultures to focus on not just talent attraction but also on the retention, development, satisfaction and engagement of employees who will have many local employment options. Engagement of employers, particularly small to medium-size employers in key sectors like manufacturing is best accomplished at that local level through frequent and sustained personal contacts. Two priorities of the Berks County WDB that focus on supporting the needs of employers through funding incumbent worker training as authorized by WIOA and our emphasis on sector strategies support this goal. In addition, hundreds of Berks County employers are engaged through the Career Ready Berks alliance to support career awareness and growing and sustaining youth employment programs.

- **PA Goal #5 - More Effectively Use Data** – This is less of a priority at the local level, but the Berks WDB looks forward to working with state initiatives in this area. In the meantime, we will continue to use the best available local labor force data to inform our priorities as

detailed in our first goal of *Building on our Strengths – Local Industry Sector Priorities and Related Technical Training Strategies* while continuously pursuing our third local goal of No Talent Left Behind: Increasing Employment Opportunities for Adults with Barriers to Employment.

2.4. *What are the local levels of performance that have been negotiated with the governor and chief elected officials?*
How will the local board's goals relate to the achievement of these measures?

The WDB negotiated PY2020 and PY2021 local levels of performance for the federal measures are found in Attachment 1.

Relation of Goals to Negotiated Performance Measures. The Berks County WDB is widely recognized for sustained competence in developing and implementing strong processes to insure the proper oversight of its publicly-funded programs and has a proven track record of meeting annual negotiated performance measures and consistently positive annual program, equal opportunity (EO) and fiscal monitoring reports from the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry (L&I). The Berks WDB's commitment to our approved industry sector priorities and strategies will further support attainment of negotiated measures. For example, this commitment will help the Berks WDB understand which key credentials are valued by industry and which credentials are not. At the same time, the WDB will continue to develop a broader expertise in understanding and measuring skill gains attained through a variety of training strategies, programs and partnerships.

The Berks WDB is confident that the strategic priorities and goals included in this local plan are the right ones for local employers and job seekers alike. In particular, the priority given to meeting the challenges local employers currently face including the wave of experienced "baby-boomer" worker retirements now underway, the increasingly problematic entry-level turnover or "churn" among new hires (as addressed in our second goal of *Engaging with Employers in Talent Retention and Development*) and the challenges posed during and after the pandemic will position the WDB to meet the new metrics designed to determine the WDB's *effectiveness in serving employers*. In particular, the emphasis that the Berks WDB will place on WIOA's permissible use of adult and dislocated worker funds allocated to the Board for training activities associated with incumbent workers will be especially attractive to small and medium-size employers with similar needs and scarce training resources. This will facilitate a closer and more consistent engagement with these employers, thereby allowing the WDB to understand and meet their recruitment and training needs. This strategy will help proven, trained incumbents develop and grow with the companies and allow the hiring of less-skilled new hires into these attractive career pathways. As a result, the WDB's performance will be enhanced against the more traditional employment, retention and earning metrics for eligible Adult, Dislocated and Youth job seekers.

The Berks WDB's commitment to continuing our proven industry sector priorities and strategies will further support attainment of negotiated measures. In particular, this commitment will help the Berks WDB understand which *key credentials* are valued by industry and which credentials are not. At the same time, the WDB will continue to develop a broader expertise in understanding and *measuring skill gains* attained through a variety of training strategies, programs and partnerships.

The Berks WDB recognizes that perhaps its biggest challenge will be building strong programs and partnerships to help our area's disconnected young adults and under-employed young adults with needed education and work in accordance with our fourth local goal. The experience of the WDB and our local partners has proven that this elusive population is difficult to find, to keep engaged and to stay connected with following program participation. As a result, the Berks WDB's determination to continue our leadership role within the region is essential to achieving negotiated Youth performance measures in all six specified areas of measurement.

At the same time, we are called to help all youth (local goal #5) and adults with barriers to employment (local goal #3) access sustainable career pathways leading to family-sustaining occupations with local employers.

Finally, a candid look as the root causes of the mismatch between the needs of current employers and the skills and qualifications of the available workforce leads the Berks WDB to the inescapable conclusion that too many Berks County residents, while they were still in our elementary and secondary school systems, did not receive the education, workplace skills and career knowledge that they need to succeed in our rapidly-changing economy. This is a national, state and local problem, but we know that many other developed countries do a better job in this area – particularly in providing in-school youth (ISY) with high quality work-based learning opportunities. By expanding and sustaining local summer youth employment programs (SYEPs) and high quality year round paid work experiences (PWE), the Berks County WDB will help create the conditions for our current Youth (ISY) and future Adult and Dislocated Worker job seekers to more easily navigate the inevitable labor force disruptions they will encounter in their careers and to *find* and *maintain* gainful employment leading *to family-sustaining earnings.* This will promote wide-spread *economic self-sufficiency in accordance with WIOA 116(b) (2) (A).* As a result, these individuals will also more likely become life-long learners who acquire *industry-recognized credentials* and are able to demonstrate *measurable skill gains* throughout their working careers. A local workforce with such qualities will serve as a competitive advantage for employers seeking to expand in or relocate to Berks County, the foundation of economic growth as targeted by the performance measures described in WIOA *116(b)(2)(A).*As described in Sections 2.1 and 2.3, the Berks County Workforce Development Board (WDB) goals are aligned with the broader WIOA goals of placement in employment or education/training, credential attainment, retention in employment/education/training, and effectiveness in servicing employers.

Beginning with full WIOA implementation in 2016, the WDB's policy has been to use our federal WIOA Title I youth funding exclusively to serve out-of-school youth through programs that offer GED and access to post-secondary education and training through individual training accounts, work-based learning opportunities tied to employer needs, and follow-up services that engage youth with continued supportive services and practical training (budgeting, etc.) that are aimed at ensuring their continued success after program exit.

As described in the WDB's first goal of Building on our Strengths – Local Industry Sector Priorities and Related Technical Training Strategies, our focus on the manufacturing, healthcare and construction sectors (with a lesser focus on the growing transportation and warehousing industry in Northern Berks and the continued small but no less important agriculture industry) is meant to ensure that job seeker customers of the PA CareerLink® Berks County are provided access to and information concerning the most promising careers in the county, while benefiting employer customers through recruitment efforts targeted towards job seekers meeting their skill requirements. This focus is

translated at the PA CareerLink® Berks County to services such as individualized job development for adult and dislocated workers and the extensive use of work-based training to bring the job seeker and employer together. This two-pronged approach is meant to increase the likelihood of employment and retention for the job seeker while meeting the hiring needs of the employer customer.

3. OPERATIONAL PLANNING QUESTIONS: Local Area Workforce System and Investment Strategies

3.1. *Provide a descriptive overview of the governance structure for the workforce system, including key stakeholders and entities in the local area.*

Please see Attachment 2: Organizational Chart.

Local Workforce Development System

The Berks County Workforce Development Board (WDB) was appointed effective July 1, 2015 by the Berks County Board of Commissioners. The Board continues the work begun in 1999 by its predecessor organization the Berks County Workforce Investment Board (WIB). Federal funding under the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014* provides most of the financial support for Board activities and programs.

The purpose of the Berks County Workforce Development Board is to identify the long-term, strategic workforce development needs of the community; propose strategies to meet those needs; set priorities; build partnerships to align resources in support of those strategies; test specific initiatives to advance those ends; and measure and evaluate results. We support the development and maintenance of a skilled and competitive workforce in alignment with the broader economic development efforts to attract, retain and grow business in Berks County.

WDB members are unpaid members of the local community. By federal law and state policy, representatives of the local business community must constitute a majority of the Board's membership. Local labor organizations, community-based organizations, economic and community development entities and educational institutions are also represented on the Board. The Board normally holds public meetings once each calendar quarter and members also serve on Committees which meet regularly. Board Committees may also include non-Board members with particular workforce development experience and expertise.

The Board designates the operator(s) and oversees the operation of the PA CareerLink® Berks County (one stop delivery system).

Berks County is a single-county Workforce Development Area. The Chief Elected Official is the elected Chair of the Berks County Board of Commissioners, a body consisting of three Commissioners, elected for four-year terms as specified by the Third Class County code. The Berks County Board of Commissioners has entered into a partnership with the WDB for the planning and governance of workforce activities authorized under WIOA with respective roles and responsibilities delineated in the partnership agreement effective April 1, 2020. In general, the WDB is responsible for the administration of these activities and acts as a convener and facilitator for broader workforce issues in the county and collaborates with neighboring boards on issues of importance that cross county borders or have mutual benefit to their respective workforces.

WDB staff are County of Berks employees reporting to the Chief Operating Officer/Director of Workforce Development, who in turn reports to the full WDB and administratively to the County's Chief Administrative Officer. Staff assist the board in the development of its strategic vision and plans and manage the implementation of board initiatives; develop and facilitate community partnerships which advance the goals of the board; maintain relationships with Federal, Commonwealth, and other funding sources; and assure the flow of information to assist the board in oversight and decision-making functions.

The County has elected not to designate a Fiscal Agent for funds received under WIOA and therefore this role is maintained at the County level.

The Board is composed of the required mix of leaders from business, labor, education, community-based organizations, and economic development entities as defined in WIOA and subsequent Federal and Commonwealth guidance. The Board meets quarterly to approve policy and conduct other high-level functions. The "heavy-lifting" work of the board is conducted in the committees of the board:

- *Executive Committee* which has responsibility, directly or through delegation to the Chief Operating Officer, for setting Board operating procedures and Board management issues; making recommendations to the Chief Elected Official on Board membership; tracking, through the Committee structure as appropriate, implementation of the Board's plans; maintenance of required working relationships with the Chief Elected Official, State and Federal authorities, and the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Association; setting broad policy direction for the Board; coordinating the work of the various committees; and Performance Appraisal of the Chief Operating Officer. Executive Committee meetings are advertised in advance through public notice and allot time on the agenda for public comment.

- *Finance Committee* reviews budgets for the broad allocation and distribution of funds and make recommendations to the full Board, as well as identifying and obtaining additional and/or more flexible funding to advance the Board's priorities.

- *Policy, Planning and Priorities Committee* has primary responsibility for working with Board staff to develop strategic plans for review and approval by the full Board. In particular, the Committee will develop and periodically review the Board's local plan(s) to ensure alignment with federal guidelines under WIOA, state policy and the Board's priorities. The Committee will provide input into other required plans, including WIOA regional plans.

  The Committee conducts analysis of the current state of the local labor market; identifies and analyzes gaps; recommends priorities and strategies for Board action and support; and identifies opportunities for future priorities and strategies in need of further exploration. The Committee regularly reviews and updates the Board's industry sector strategies and priorities in conjunction with the Training and Industry Partnership Committee and makes recommendations for approval by the Board. The Committee has the principal responsibility for guiding and tracking implementation of the Board's plans, including development and maintenance of alliances, partnership and key working relationships – particularly those leading to regional planning efforts.

  The Committee coordinates closely with the Board's Youth Committee (which has similar related planning responsibilities for youth programs overseen by the Board) and incorporates

input from the Youth Committee into the overall planning process. The Committee assists in the development of local and regional economic development, community development and education and literacy plans as appropriate.

The Committee develops and reviews general Board policies, including the Board's By-Laws and governance agreements as required.

- *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee* (Formally the Committee on Increasing Opportunities for Individuals with Disabilities.)-While respecting all aspects of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, the focus of this committee is to increase the percentage of individuals with a disability in the workforce by offering meaningful employment opportunities through strong partnerships with businesses in Berks County.

- *One-Stop Oversight Committee* has primary responsibility for discharging the Board's responsibilities toward the "one-stop" system. These include making recommendations to the Board on:
    - the selection and retention of the One-Stop Operator; and
    - the approval of the Memorandum of Understanding between the One-Stop Partner organizations; and any major modifications to this agreement; and
    - the selection and retention of the Business Services subcontractor; and
    - the selection and retention of the Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker subcontractor; and
    - the selection and retention of the Employment Advancement and Retention Network (EARN) subcontractor; and
    - policies integral to PA CareerLink® Operations as appropriate (e.g. Incentives, Priority of Service policies, etc.)

  This Committee regularly reviews usage and performance of the PA CareerLink® Berks County system through performance information, meetings and consultation with the One-Stop Operator management, and monitoring by Board staff. Through this process the committee may, from time to time, make recommendations to the One-Stop Operator on changes or improvements.

- The *Youth Committee* assists in the development of those portions of the Board's plan which pertain to youth and young adults; recommends to the Board priorities for the expenditure of Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act youth funding; recommends selection of youth and young adult service providers; and provides coordination and oversight of youth and young adult workforce development activities. In addition, the Youth Committee serves as a convening and coordinating body for larger community partnerships for youth and young adult workforce development.

- The *Training and Industry Partnership Committee* is charged with understanding employer training needs, particularly relative to key regional industry sectors and with making recommendations to the Board to meet those needs. This includes oversight of any Industry Partnerships (IPs) in which the Board may be engaged, particularly as they relate to incumbent worker training activities and funding. In addition, this Committee will review progress on performance on local and regional grants related to industry training needs and

priorities. This group will assist with the development of regional sector-based training strategies to include career pathways and the identification of high priority occupations.

The Committee may also make recommendations to the Board regarding training provider qualifications or significant gaps in training capacity. The Committee will make recommendations regarding Board training policies in coordination with the One-Stop Oversight Committee as appropriate. The Committee may also be asked to review training vendor performance.

Equal Opportunity (EO) Officer -In accordance with the latest guidance from the Pennsylvania's Department of Labor & Industry (L&I), the WDB's Equal Opportunity Officer reports directly to the Chairperson of the WDB in matters related to EO policies, complaints, etc. On January 25, 2021 the Berks County WDB and its EO officer John W. Moser were formally recognized by L&I's Office of Equal Opportunity for EO program best practices related to adaptive technologies, disability assistance technology and our annual Employer Symposia. Mr. Moser's contact information is:

John W. Moser
Berks County Workforce Development Board
1920 Kutztown Road, Suite G
Reading, PA 19604
610-988-1358
jwmoser@countyofberks.com

3.2. *What are the programs included in the local workforce delivery system and how will the local board work with the entities carrying out all workforce programs to support service alignment?*

Please see Attachment 3: Program Partner/Provider List

The WDB ensures the workforce-related needs of employers, workers, and job seekers in Berks County are met, to the maximum extent possible with available resources.

The WDB will, at a minimum:

- In cooperation with the CEO, design and approve the PA CareerLink® Berks County. This includes, but is not limited to:
    - Adequate, sufficient, and accessible one-stop center,
    - Sufficient numbers and types of providers of career and training services (including eligible providers with expertise in assisting individuals with disabilities and eligible providers with expertise in assisting adults in need of adult education and literacy activities),
    - A holistic system of supporting services, and
    - One competitively procured one-stop operator.
- In collaboration with the CEO, designate through a competitive process, oversee, monitor, implement corrective action, and, if applicable, terminate the one-stop operator,
- Approve annual budget allocations for operation of the PA CareerLink® Berks County,
- Help the one-stop operator recruit operational Partners and negotiate MOUs with new Partners,

- Leverage additional funding for the PA CareerLink® Berks County to operate and expand one-stop customer activities and resources, and
- Review and evaluate performance of the one-stop operator.

WDB Staff specific responsibilities include, at a minimum:

- Provide operational and grant-specific guidance to the one-stop operator,
- Investigate and resolve elevated customer complaints and grievance issues,
- Prepare regular reports and recommendations to the WDB, and
- Oversee negotiations and maintenance of MOUs with one-stop Partners.

Four standing committees of the WDB focus to varying degrees on partner collaboration and service alignment within the local workforce delivery system:

Policy, Planning and Priorities Committee
The Board's Policy, Planning and Priorities Committee has primary responsibility for working with Board staff to develop strategic plans for review and approval by the full Board. In particular, the Committee will develop and periodically review the Board's local plan(s) in alignment with federal guidelines under WIOA, state policy and the Board's priorities. The Committee will provide input into other required plans, including WIOA regional plans.

The Committee conducts analysis of the current state of the local labor market; identifies and analyzes gaps; recommends priorities and strategies for Board action and support; and identifies opportunities for future priorities and strategies in need of further exploration. The Committee regularly reviews and updates the Board's industry sector strategies and priorities in conjunction with the Training and Industry Partnership Committee and makes recommendations for approval by the Board. The Committee has the principal responsibility for guiding and tracking implementation of the Board's plans, including development and maintenance of alliances, partnership and key working relationships – particularly those leading to regional planning efforts.

The Committee coordinates closely with the Board's Youth Committee (which has similar related planning responsibilities for youth programs overseen by the Board) and incorporates input from the Youth Committee into the overall planning process. The Committee assists in the development of local and regional economic development, community development and education and literacy plans as appropriate.

Executive Committee - The Committee develops and reviews general Board policies, including the Board's By-Laws and governance agreements as required.

One-Stop Oversight
This Committee has primary responsibility for discharging the Board's responsibilities toward the "one-stop" system. These include making recommendations to the Board on:

- the selection and retention of the One-Stop Operator; and
- the approval of the Memorandum of Understanding between the One-Stop Partner organizations; and any major modifications to this agreement; and
- the selection and retention of the Business Services subcontractor; and
- the selection and retention of the Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker subcontractor; and

- the selection and retention of the Employment Advancement and Retention Network (EARN) subcontractor; and
- policies integral to PA CareerLink® Operations as appropriate (e.g. Incentives, Priority of Service policies, etc.)

This Committee regularly reviews usage and performance of the one-stop system through performance information, meetings and consultation with the One-Stop Operator management, and monitoring by Board staff. Through this process the committee may, from time to time, make recommendations to the One-Stop Operator on changes or improvements.

Youth Committee
The Youth Committee assists in the development of those portions of the Board's plan which pertain to youth and young adults; recommends to the Board priorities for the expenditure of Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act youth funding; recommends selection of youth and young adult service providers; and provides coordination and oversight of youth and young adult workforce development activities. In addition, the Youth Committee serves as a convening and coordinating body for larger community partnerships for youth and young adult workforce development.

The one-stop Memorandum of Understanding is executed between the WDB, PA CareerLink® Berks County One-Stop Partners and the Chief Elected Official of the County of Berks. The Memorandum of Understanding is developed to confirm the understanding of these parties regarding the operation and management of the PA CareerLink® Berks County. Further detail concerning the governance of the one-stop can be found in section 4.1.

Workforce services available to special populations include:

Veterans and covered persons are given priority of service. We notify all visitors of Priority of Service through posters at our entrance. At all points of service delivery, we distribute flyers in English and Spanish that fulfill several functions: 1) describe who is eligible for the entitlement of Priority of Service, 2) list all the USDOL programs and services at the PA CareerLink® Berks County, and 3) provide contact information for each program. When the veteran/covered persons apply for positions on the statewide PA CareerLink® website, they are identified with an American Flag, enabling staff to prioritize those referrals. Walk-in veterans and covered persons verbally disclose eligibility. Program areas request veteran status on their applications or enrollment forms. All veterans/covered persons who attend our Welcome/RESEA Orientation receive an initial intake and assessment. Veterans and covered persons decide whether they are interested in WIOA Individualized Career Services and/or Training Services. Veteran/covered persons are at the head of the group to be scheduled for WIOA registration and case management appointments. When applications for WIOA Individual Training Accounts are reviewed, those from veterans and covered persons are reviewed first. Staff may also refer a veteran to the OVR or other social service agencies for help with disabilities or more comprehensive needs.

Individuals that are basic skills-deficient have their educational needs met by the Adult Basic Education Title II provider, Reading Area Community College (RACC) or their subcontractor, The Literacy Council of Reading-Berks. Services include a CASAS assessment, Test for Adult Basic Literacy

(TABE), Adult Basic Education (ABE), English as a Second Language (ESL), math and English remediation courses, as well as General Equivalency Diploma (GED) classes.

Individuals who receive public assistance are helped through the Employment, Advancement, and Retention Network (EARN) for employment services. EARN staff, services and clients are located at the PA CareerLink® Berks County**.** An income maintenance caseworker from the Berks County Assistance Office (BCAO) is located at the PA CareerLink® Berks County to provide orientations to BCAO-referred "A Project" clients, providing case management and advising them of the requirements to maintain eligibility for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits. The income maintenance caseworker also provides information to TANF-eligible clients in the Young Adult program, which is also located at the PA CareerLink® Berks County.

Low-income individuals may access Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) home assistance and weatherization programs that help eligible families make minor home repairs and/or reduce energy consumption and overall energy bills through the installation of cost-effective energy conservation measures. The Berks Community Action Program, Inc. administers these programs in the local area.

Older individuals who may be eligible under Title V are referred to the Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP) offered by AARP. In addition, the PA CareerLink® Berks County often serves as a host agency**.**

Returning citizens receive guidance and counseling to prepare for employment through Berks Connections/Pretrial Services (BCPS). Staff from the PA CareerLink® Berks County volunteer at BCPS job fairs to assist returning citizens to prepare for successful participation in the event. BCPS runs a "Tips for Job Seekers with Criminal Records" workshop at the PA CareerLink® semiannual job fairs. The PA CareerLink® Berks County will run dedicated "How to Identify Your Skills" sessions upon request for referrals from Berks County Domestic Relations Services. The WDB, through a competitive process spanning Spring of 2019, has committed to help fund the BCPS operated Rebuilding Reentrants and Reading (R3) through the 2020 program year. This program was originally funded through the U.S. Department of Labor. This registered pre-apprenticeship program offers an opportunity for individuals with a criminal history to acquire skills in the construction trades that lead to gainful employment and assists with the renovation of the City of Reading's most blighted neighborhoods.

BCPS partners with Habitat for Humanity of Berks County (HFHBC) and the Reading Muhlenberg Career and Technology Center (RMCTC) to provide the three components of the training: classroom instruction at RMCTC, hands on learning on site at HFHBC properties and an employment focused cognitive curriculum delivered by BCPS staff. BCPS developed this innovative model which is based on best practices of reentry programming and adult career and technical education. The combination of best practices - classroom learning, hands-on experience, and cognitive interventions - not only improves employment outcomes for participants, it significantly reduces recidivism as well.

The training portion of R3 occurs over the course of 8-week cohorts. BCPS provides case management, mentoring, and support for one year following graduation. The comprehensive case management includes financial literacy and coaching as well as job search, placement, and retention support. The Associated Builders and Contractors, Inc., Keystone (ABC Keystone). Is the Registered

Apprenticeship sponsor for this pre-apprenticeship program. Participation in R3 gives graduates 6 months credit toward one of ABC Keystone's 7 apprenticeship programs.

Individuals with disabilities are provided equal access to services at the PA CareerLink® Berks County. Staff receives Equal Opportunity training semiannually. Customers choose whether or not to disclose disability information. Appropriate referrals are made to the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) for evaluation and OVR has an office at the PA CareerLink® Berks County. Eligible OVR customers receive multiple individualized services such as, diagnostic testing, vocational counseling and guidance, vocational evaluation, restoration, occupational training, and job placement. Under WIOA, OVR provides both eligible and potentially eligible youth with pre-employment transition services (PETS) to better prepare these students for life after high school. PETS include paid work experience, job shadowing, workplace readiness training, and career guidance. (The WDB partners with OVR to provide work experience to high school eligible youth through a summer youth work experience program.) OVR also provides multiple services to the business community designed to assist with onboarding of pre-screened qualified employees with disabilities. OVR business representatives are a vital part of our Employer Outreach Team made up of representatives from PA CareerLink® Berks County partners who are engaging local employers.

Underemployed individuals are referred to Welcome Orientation, where they receive labor market information, resume guidance, and a full description of our Basic Career Services, Individual Career Services, and Training Services. Individuals complete an initial assessment and choose their next steps by completing an Initial Plan.

Unemployed individuals are identified through Rapid Response activities and RESEA claimant lists. Individuals are referred to Welcome Orientation, where they receive labor market information, resume guidance, and a full description of our Basic Career Services, Individual Career Services, and Training Services. Individuals complete an initial assessment and choose their next steps with their Initial Plan. Trade Adjustment Act (TAA) dislocated workers participate in a Benefits Rights Interview (BRI) meeting and subsequent Enrollment/Assessment meetings to develop an Individual Employment Plan to pursue employment.

Migrant or Seasonal Farm Workers (MSFWs) access services through PathStone. They receive the full range of employment services, benefits and protections, including counseling, testing, and job and training referrals. PathStone has a staff member in the PA CareerLink® center one day a week.

3.3. *How will the local board work with the entities carrying out core programs to:*

- *Expand access to employment, training, education and supportive services for eligible individuals, particularly individuals with barriers to employment.*

WIOA core programs require certain eligibility criteria while other non-WIOA core programs may differ in their degrees of eligibility criteria. Title II ABE program uses an assessment to help determine their services and are the final arbiter of eligibility for Title II programming; Title III W/P Employment Services require no eligibility criteria and Title IV Voc. Rehab have unique eligibility criteria based on the individual's assessment.

It is the policy of the WDB that no individual receives WIOA Title I Adult/Dislocated Worker/Youth program services until the applicable eligibility requirements for said program have been documented

and verified by appropriate workforce staff. This ensures that only those individuals for whom funds are targeted receive services.

Definitions:

- Verification means to confirm eligibility requirements through the examination of documents or speaking to the representatives of authorized agencies.
- Documentation means to maintain physical evidence, which is obtained during the verification process, in participant files. Documentation is used as the basis to verify eligibility.
- Self-Certification is a statement signed by an individual used to verify eligibility items requiring documentation that may cause undue hardship for the applicant to obtain or that may be unavailable due to loss of the documentation for the following reasons:
    - Natural or man-made disaster.
    - Eviction from residence resulting in a loss of supporting documentation.
    - Individual is fleeing or has fled an abusive or untenable home situation.
- Telephone/Electronic Verification is the verification of documentation through a telephone contact or email contact with a recognized governmental or social service agency. This form of verification is to be used as the last step prior to the use of self-certification.
- Document Inspection Verification is the verification of documentation through inspection of a document when the document can either not be copied or copying of the document is not possible.

Eligibility Determination

1. Eligibility Determination Prior to Program Enrollment. The WDB administers programs from multiple funding streams with varied eligibility requirements. Under all circumstances program eligibility must be verified by the appropriate staff prior to enrollment of a participant. Failure to do so may result in contractor disallowed costs.

   Eligibility to receive services under WIOA Title IV may only be determined by a qualified OVR Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. OVR Counselors work with customers to develop an Individual Plan for Employment, providing services necessary to meet their specific vocational goal. Examples of services include diagnostic assessment and evaluation, counseling and guidance, restoration, training and placement services. OVR often collaborates with other workforce program partners to provide services, outreach and assessment. Training for OVR staff is at the discretion of the local OVR District Administrator. OVR staff supervision and direction are the responsibility of the local OVR District Administrator.

2. Eligibility Documentation. Documentation required to determine eligibility is defined by the funding stream. If not defined by the funding stream or in cases where the funding stream is not clear the WDB will define the documentation requirement. Documentation requirements will be made available by the WDB to program operators as applicable to operator responsibilities.

3. Eligibility WDB Review. The WDB is the final arbitrator of eligibility verification. All WIOA Title I Adult/Dislocated Worker/Youth funding applications are reviewed and approved by WDB staff prior to program enrollment.

Self-Certification

1. Allowable Use. Self-Certification is only to be used as a last resort and will only be accepted as verification of eligibility for the following elements:
    a. WIOA Title I Adult
        i. Homeless
    b. WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker
        i. Date of Dislocation
        ii. Displaced Homemaker
        iii. Reemployment Opportunity is Poor/Unlikely to Return to Work
        iv. Permanently or Temporarily Laid Off as a Consequence of the Disaster
    c. WIOA Title I Youth
        i. English Language Learner
        ii. Homeless
        iii. In/Aged Out of Foster Care System
        iv. Offender
        v. Pregnant or Parenting
        vi. Requires Additional Assistance
        vii. Runaway
        viii. School Status at Time of Registration

2. Random Sampling. The use of self-certification will be monitored by the WDB. Review may include an interview with the case manager determining eligibility, a search for applicable documentation not already in the file, and an interview with the participant. Failure to properly use self-certification may result in contractor disallowed costs.

- *Facilitate the development of Career Pathways and co-enrollment, as appropriate, in core programs (specify on-ramps from adult education).*

Program co-enrollment where permissible and practical will be supported through the active cultivation of a referral system among the one-stop Partners. The WDB through the One-Stop Oversight Committee and regular WDB staff technical assistance will ensure one-stop Partners:

- Familiarize themselves with the basic eligibility and participation requirements, as well as with the available services and benefits offered, for each of the Partners' programs represented in the PA CareerLink® Berks County,
- Develop materials summarizing their program requirements and making them available for Partners and customers,
- Develop and utilize intake, eligibility determination, assessment, and registration processes,
- Provide substantive referrals to customers who are eligible for supplemental and complementary services and benefits under partner programs,
- Regularly evaluate ways to improve the referral process, including the use of customer satisfaction surveys,
- Commit to robust and ongoing communication required for an effective referral process, and
- Commit to actively follow up on the results of referrals.

Reading Area Community College (RACC, Title II) and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR, Title IV) are long standing partners of the PA CareerLink® Berks County and are represented on the Board. The referral strategies discussed above will be applicable to these partner programs. The one-

stop operator and partners will also develop and implement a strategic outreach plan to market all one-stop programs.

Reading Area Community College (RACC) is the Title II contractor with the PA Dept. of Education. RACC subcontracts with the Literacy Council of Reading-Berks for adult literacy services.

The Literacy Council's CASAS competency-based assessment is held the first Friday of the month and is a 3-hour assessment. Welcome Orientation is now able to directly refer to the CASAS competency-based assessment. The participants who are assessed through CASAS will then be referred to the Literacy Council's English as a Second Language Class at the PA CareerLink® office. This class will run two days a week (Tues. & Thurs.) for a total of four hours a week.

The TABE 11/12 is very staff intensive. The Young Adult team will provide 3 – 4 staff to assist. The Literacy Council's TABE Reading & Reading locator are held once a month on Thursdays and are open to partner referrals. The TABE Math & Math locator are held once a month on Fridays and are open to partner referrals. Career Services Team customers need only the Reading assessment for referral to training providers. EARN Team customers will need both the Reading and Math for referral for GED services.

The Literacy Council will hold a two-days a week, 2-hour a day (Mon. & Wed.) class at the PA CareerLink® office covering basic math and basic reading (ABE). This will be an open entry, open exit class. The target audience is young adults who do not assess at a level enabling them to enroll in our Young Adult program's GED class as well as adults from the general population. The curriculum will run on a 4-week rotation. The instruction will enable attendees to move on to a GED class or pass an employer's pre-employment assessment. Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes are not currently in session due to the pandemic. When a referral is made to ABE, contact will be made to the Literacy Council to begin classes again.

The vast disruption wreaked by the slowly receding pandemic warrants a reinvigorated response to the needs of the most vulnerable adults in our community, particularly those with uncompetitive English literacy and numeracy. The WDB looks forward to promoting increased connections between Title II and other local Workforce Development Programs tied to the Career Pathways we have ~~been~~ developed in conjunction with designated Berks WDB staff through teamwork with our one-stop Business Services Team, Title I and Title II staff, educators and local employers to determine high priority career opportunities in the Berks County Workforce Development Area. This connection helps ensure that our Career Pathways are well-grounded in key local industry sectors (see Sections 1.2 and 2.1) and our local (and regional) high priority occupation (HPO) needs. Care is taken to identify "on ramps" for customers depending on their skills levels, training needs, etc. These pathways are then explained to the customers. A viable education and training plan is created, focusing on raising basic literacy skills, building employability skills, and developing sound study skills (in the case of a student pursuing post-secondary training).

The WDB will dedicate available Title I Adult funding in Program Years 2021 and 2022 via a competitive grant process to support community-based registered pre-apprenticeship models in the Construction sector and other key industry sectors as warranted. In April 2021, such funding was awarded under a two-year contract with Berks Connections / Pre-Trial Services (BCPS) a PA CareerLink® Berks County partner. These funds will help BCPS expand its registered pre-

apprenticeship program titled "R3" to serve more adult re-entrants. Over the past four years, R3 has successfully and dramatically reduced recidivism among program participants and had placed graduates in good paying jobs. However, R3 graduates and candidates alike often reach adulthood without the literacy and numeracy for admission into our most selective local construction sector registered apprenticeship (RA) programs. To address this continuing challenge, BCPS will be encouraged to expand their Title II referrals to RACC and the Literacy Council before and after completion of the 8-week R3 program. Such referrals can assist these adults receive the best possible "second chance" to not just survive but to help our communities thrive.

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation is the sole WIOA Title IV provider of programs under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In that role, OVR staff provide technical assistance regarding the provision of disability related services to one-stop staff and partners. The vocational rehabilitation program is mandated to provide vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities based on the program's authorizing statute. Eligible OVR customers receive multiple services from qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors that may include but not be limited to; diagnostic, vocational counseling and guidance, vocational evaluation, restoration, training, job placement and pre-employment training services for eligible and potentially eligible high school students with disabilities. OVR also provides multiple services to the business community designed to assist businesses with onboarding pre-screened qualified employees with disabilities.

The WDB sets aside WIOA Title I funds for occupational and work-based training by funding stream. Additional Rapid Response training funds are available for dislocated workers – if exhausted, the WDB requests additional rapid response funds from the PA Department of Labor & Industry. The WDB will continue to search for alternative funding sources to supplement adult and youth training funds. Referrals of successful adult Title II completers will allow more deserving residents to take full advantage of Title I funded training programs in our area.

As described above (Section 1.4), since 2017 the WDB's active Training & Industry Partnership (T&IP) Committee has consistently promoted the best practice Registered Apprenticeship (RA) "earn and learn" workforce development model. Apprenticeship is designed to benefit the employer by meeting job skill requirements for development, advancement and retention of a qualified, highly competent workforce and the Berks County WDB remains committed to engaging with local employers in the development and sponsorship of new apprentice models and to sustain existing sponsorships.

In support of building a supportive local "ecosystem" for the registered apprenticeship model, the WDB also provides Title I Adult funding via a bi-annual competitive procurement process with awards going to community-based pre-apprenticeship programs in targeted industry sectors (see Section 2.1). Such programs are particularly useful for preparing adults and young adults with barriers to employment as they seek to pursue attractive career pathways.

3.4. *What strategies will be implemented in the local area to improve business/employer engagement that:*

- *Support a local area workforce development system that meets the needs of businesses in the local area;*

The Berks WDB believes that recruiting and retaining the right local business leaders to serve on the

WDB is the most important factor in sustaining the engagement of employers, including small employers and employers in in-demand sectors or who employ workers in high priority occupations. This strategy is reflected in the diversity and positive contributions of the WDBs fourteen business sector representatives. The WDB's six manufacturing employer representatives on the Board range from the County's top HR executive for the largest employer with over 7,000 local employees to the HR manager of a small urban firm employing less than 50 full-time employees. The urgent and specific needs of our rapidly-expanding Construction sector are represented by the owner of one of the County's premier mechanical contractors as well as by two experienced joint labor-management registered apprenticeship leaders for the IBEW Local 743 and for the Sheet Metal Workers Local 19. The County's two hospitals are represented on the WDB by both of their top HR executives - helping us understand and respond to the region's rapidly-changing healthcare delivery system. With the WDB's continued emphasis on the *Agriculture/Food Production* and *Transportation & Logistics* sectors, members with specialized experience in these areas serve on the WDB as well. Other key business sectors represented on the Berks WDB include *Financial Services* and *Business & Professional Services*. The *Greater Reading Chamber Alliance (GRCA)* serves as the nominating entity for the Berks WDB and has been instrumental in identifying and recruiting an excellent cross-section of business representation on the WDB.

The Berks County WDB has also been successful in assisting local eligible employers engage with RACC and Kutztown University's Small Business Development Center (KU SBDC) to access WEDnetPA reimbursement funding for qualifying higher-technology incumbent worker training needs.

As described above in Section 1.3, in response to broader skills gaps across industry sectors and just prior to the arrival of the pandemic in March 2020, the Berks County Workforce Development Board contracted with Educational Data Systems, Inc. (EDSI) to conduct a comprehensive study of current employer recruitment, retention, development, satisfaction and engagement best practices in the Greater Reading and Berks County area. The focus of this initiative was to better understand local employer best practices in response to ongoing talent challenges with an emphasis on identifying successful employer strategies leading to lower turnover, higher employee satisfaction, and improved talent development. More than 150 employers in the region participated in the study. Respondents completed a Talent Assessment, rating themselves on five key talent metrics: employee retention, employee development, employee attraction, talent and culture, and overall talent strategies. After completing the assessment, employers were invited to participate in focus groups to discuss specific best practices. Between November 2020 and January 2021, our PA CareerLink® Berks County Business Services Team (BST) has already engaged with twenty local employer respondents to review their talent assessment results and to offer advice and assistance in how to build on the customers' employment best practice areas of strengths and to help in areas where improvement may be needed.

The Berks County WDB utilizes WIOA Title I Adult/Dislocated Worker funds to promote employer engagement in a hiring and retention strategy supported by our Work-Based Training Policy (see section 1.3). The policy provides eligible employers/employees with financial subsidies for foundational skills development at entry-level through enhanced competencies skills training as incumbents and apprentices. Individual Training Accounts (ITA) can focus the jobseeker on the learning and credentials required for entry into a in demand career path. On-the-Job Training funds can assist the employer in rapidly on-boarding new-hires through intensive short term training plans that will lead the new hire to functionality in their new workplace environment. WIOA guidelines for each level of subsidy are

followed and monitored. The ITA → OJT → WIOA Required 6 Month Employment History → IWT (Incumbent Worker upskilling and/or Registered Apprenticeship) progression shows the most advantageous employer process for the utilization of these funds for an optimal entry-level through incumbent employee retention/ layoff aversion strategy. The following tables provide examples of targeted IWT/RA training considered eligible for IWT/RA matching funds. In addition to supporting the employer/employee needs, these funds also provide wider support to CTC, RACC and other educational provider programs through the opportunity for analysis and customization, design/development, and delivery of these programs on a local basis.

IWT Mfg./Construction Consortia Eligible Training (specific but not limited to)
Industrial Maintenance/Mechatronics: Hydraulics, Pneumatics, Motor Controls, PLCs, Electrical Circuits, Mechanical Drives, Robotics, Refrigeration Systems, Maintenance Master Certification
CNC Machine Operation: Milling, Turning, Lathe, Grinding, Engineering Graphics, CAD/CAM, CNC Programming, Electrical Discharge Machining Technician, 3D Printing
Welding Technology/Metal Fabrication
Quality Systems: Advanced Statistical Process Control, Failure Mode Analysis, Root Cause Analysis, Global Standards for Plastics Certification, Lean Tools Workshop Series, Lean Master Certification, Lean Six Sigma Green Belt & Black Belt, Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) Certification
Construction Trades Related Training: Carpentry, Cement/Concrete/Masonry, Electrical, Heavy Equipment Operation, HVACR, Plumbing

Eligible Industry Sector	Eligible Registered Apprenticeship Related Instruction (but not limited to)
Construction	Carpenter Apprentice Electrician Apprentice Heating, A/C & Refrigeration Mechanic & Installer Apprentice Operating Engineer/Construction Equipment Operator Apprentice Painter, Construction & Maintenance Apprentice Plumber, Pipefitter & Steamfitter Apprentice Sheet Metal Worker Apprentice
Healthcare	Dental Hygienist Apprentice Dental Assistant Apprentice EMT & Paramedic Apprentice Medical Coder Apprentice Medical/Clinical Laboratory Technician Apprentice Physical Therapist Apprentice Pharmacy Technician Apprentice
Logistics & Transportation	Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Driver Apprentice Industrial Truck & Tractor Operator Apprentice Mechanic & Diesel Engine Specialist Apprentice
Manufacturing	Computer-Controlled Machine Tool Operator Apprentice Computer Numerically Controlled Machine Tool Programmer Apprentice Extruding & Drawing Machine Setters, Oprs & Tenders Apprentice Electro-Mechanical Technician Apprentice Industrial Machinery Mechanic Apprentice Machinist Apprentice Welders, Cutters, Solderers & Brazers Apprentice
Information Technology (as ancillary to the above)	Computer Systems Analyst Apprentice Computer User Support Specialist Apprentice Computer Network Support Specialist Apprentice Software Developer Apprentice Web Developer Apprentice

- *Manage activities or services that will be implemented to improve business engagement;*

Over the years and across the business cycle, the PA CareerLink® Berks County Business Services Team (BST) has established a reputation as a trusted partner with local employers. The region's growing shortage of qualified candidates for critical and "opportunity" occupations is especially acute and local employers need help. While some of the current skills shortage results from the long, steady cyclical recovery from the Great Recession of 2009-2010, an underlying wave of baby-boomer retirements will drive continuing shortages even if regional economic growth stalls. Our employers have never seen anything like this in the past and the Berks County WDB will play a crucial role in

continuing to develop and implement long-term solutions along with our Business Services Team (BST) and local partners. During the remainder of PY2020 the BST will be conducting follow-up discussions with the employers that responded to the Employer Best Practices survey discussed earlier. These discussions will present targeted support as appropriate based on the results to the survey.

During the pandemic, services to businesses needed to adapt by incorporating virtual and remote services. On-site recruitments at the PA CareerLink® Berks County and job fairs have been put on hold, while employers face a critical shortage of skilled workers – even in a period of high unemployment. The BST will research best practices to offer alternatives to job seekers and employers with the target of implementation during 2021.

In order to avoid "employer fatigue" from multiple outreach activities, in late 2016 the PA CareerLink® Berks County and Berks County WDB formed an Employer Outreach Team that meets regularly to share information, coordinate employer outreach, maximize available resources, and tailor responses to the specific needs of individual employers. This team is comprised of individuals from Business Services, EARN, Young Adult, OVR, BCPS and the WDB who come together monthly to discuss and share business/employer intelligence. The goals of the team are to ensure employers receive a consistent message from the team members, that employer visits are coordinated to maximize outreach efforts, diminish employer program fatigue, and to maximize job seeker placements through the sharing of hiring information.

Rapid Response is also another important avenue of business engagement here in Berks County. Our Rapid Response team's proactive and coordinated efforts include access to Pennsylvania's economic development assistance resources, such as helping businesses that are at risk of closing to keep their doors open, as well as helping employers reduce the size of, or prevent a layoff.

It is important to note that the state-assigned Rapid Response representative works with the PA CareerLink® Berks County BST to identify the labor needs of new and existing employers. During layoff events, BST representatives often attend initial fact-finding meetings to learn about the dislocating workforce and identify suitable new employment opportunities for that group. Knowledge of the skill sets of the available dislocated workers is valuable to the BSTs in helping them to market to those employers who are hiring. Business Service Team members also assist the Rapid Response staff to coordinate dedicated job fairs for large groups of dislocated workers with the goal of returning the dislocated workers to suitable new employment as soon as possible. We are fortunate that our local Rapid Response Team members as well as our regional coordinator assigned to our area from L&I are quite experienced and are fully capable of offering a full range of Rapid Response services to impacted workers in both English and Spanish.

As described in Section 1.3, a key emphasis of the Berks WDB will be placed on assisting local employers with good jobs in key industries further develop the skills of their incumbent workers. To sustain longer-term incumbent worker upskilling plans, the Berks WDB has implemented a pro-active *Employment Retention/Layoff Aversion Strategy* to support local employers and incumbent workers in our top priority advanced manufacturing and construction sectors (see Section 1.3). In ongoing support of this strategy, the Berks WDB annually allocates a budget drawn from its WIOA Title I Adult Worker funding to be used solely for the purpose of incumbent worker training (IWT). Based on the utilization of these funds in the prior program year, the WDB Training & Industry Partnership

Committee submits a recommendation to the full board for the upcoming program year's incumbent worker training (IWT) allocation as a company matching subsidy to expand high quality incumbent worker training in support of the Berks County manufacturing and construction employer base. The Training & Industry Partnership Committee sets policy for the reimbursement of employer training costs and eligible training is restricted to criteria validated by expressed industry needs that includes registered apprenticeship related-instruction.

The Berks County WDB utilizes WIOA Title I Adult/Dislocated Worker funds to promote employer engagement in a hiring and retention strategy supported by our Work-Based Training Policy. The policy provides eligible employers/employees with financial subsidies for foundational skills development at entry-level through enhanced competencies skills training as incumbents and apprentices.

This focus on incumbent worker training will be especially attractive to small and medium-size employers with similar needs and scarce training resources. The strategy will help proven, trained incumbents develop and grow with the companies and allow the hiring of less-skilled new hires into these attractive career pathways. Many of these new hires will need assistance from other WDB-sponsored programs (e.g. OJTs) in order to take advantage of these proven career opportunities.

Within the first two quarters of program year 2021, the Berks County WDB will employ the experience and expertise of the Training & Industry Partnership Committee to frame a pre-apprenticeship statement to be added to our Work-Based Training Policy and used to promote and support greater business-education engagement in the development, implementation, and utilization of pre-apprenticeship models. These models may include condensed versions of existing CTE and/or post-secondary curricula, already being utilized as related instruction programs for established apprenticeships, to attract young adults/adults for entry into in-demand apprenticed occupations in our WDB approved priority industry sectors or new innovative community-based models targeted to populations with barriers. As one example of this commitment, the WDB will continue to endorse our Berks Connections/Pretrial Services partners in their pursuit of PAsmart Grant renewal opportunities for their best-practice "Rebuilding Re-entrants & Reading" pre-apprenticeship construction trades program.

Fortunately, for our local employers, the PA CareerLink® Berks County *"one-stop" staff increasing and effectively utilize social media platforms. For example,* local one-stop staff utilize social media platforms to perform additional outreach to the community regarding one-stop services, openings with regional employers, and training opportunities with eligible providers. These forums are an excellent means of connecting with individuals that have not been previously with one-stop services as well as reconnecting with those that have not participated in services for an extended period. The strongest of these platforms has proven to be Facebook, where the PA CareerLink® Berks County page's following of 4,500 profiles is the strongest of any one-stop in the Commonwealth.

- *Better coordinate regional workforce and economic development strategy, messaging, engagement and programs; and*

The Berks County WDB has a proven track record of coordinating workforce development programs with regional economic development partners.

With the rollout of the Next Generation Industry Partnership (NGIP) model in 2018, the Berks County WDB quickly recognized that this innovative revamped IP model provided an opportunity to expand our highly-successful Advanced Manufacturing IP beyond the previous primary focus of incumbent worker training. The fundamental goal of the new model is business-owner-centric, allowing business owners to be at the very core of the discussion on what their needs will be, and creating actionable ways to present solutions, championed by the businesses themselves. Through this process, employers will identify needs that may not be on the community's current radar and longstanding, recurring issues can be addressed with *new* perspective and creative problem solving. The Berks County WDB determined that the most effective way to accomplish these goals with one voice is to utilize the Next Generation model and allow it to be housed under the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance (GRCA). The Berks County WDB's ongoing guidance, support of and involvement in this Greater Berks Advanced Manufacturing NGIP reflects its confidence that GRCA is uniquely positioned and staffed to build capacity and strengthen the partnership's ultimate reach.

As the benefits of this movement to the new "Next Gen" Industry Partnership (NGIP) model have become even more evident statewide over time, the Berks WDB continues to explore additional opportunities for similar NGIP development in its other priority industry sectors (see Section 1.5). The WDB now also focuses its attention on the rapidly increasing workforce needs of the Construction industry sector. For example, the Berks WDB has entered into an active partnership with its neighboring Lancaster WDB in support of a regional Construction Sector NGIP that engages employers located in either workforce development area. With the Berks WDB's assistance and partnership, the Lancaster WDB successfully launched the newly formed "Lancaster Berks Construction Connection" Next Generation IP in 2019 which has quickly established itself as a valuable, employer-driven regional partnership actively addressing priority issues and opportunities in this important industry sector. The NGIP has now moved on to the next phase of engaging community and education partners in its career pathway awareness and talent pipeline development initiatives. The NGIP leadership is focused on deliverable outcomes regarding intensifying leadership roles, growing business membership commitment, recruiting materials donations to partnering schools, investing in and developing expanded marketing and social media outreach, and connecting with agencies such as Tec Centro and the Berks Latino Workforce Development Board to tap into the Hispanic population in both counties as a means to attract this significant demographic into employment opportunities and career pathways. The NGIP has connected with the Career Ready Lancaster to provide career awareness exploration links to member employers and is also in the process of doing the same with the Career Ready Berks alliance for student/teacher activities.

- *Strengthen linkages between the PA CareerLink® service delivery system and unemployment insurance (UI) programs.*

The local area complies with the Commonwealth's Register for Work and Work Search law by helping unemployed individuals register on the PA CareerLink® system. It also provides telephones in the PA CareerLink® Berks County so that Unemployment Compensation (UC) Claimants can call the statewide toll-free UC number regarding any benefits questions they may have. The resource room computers are available for UC Claimants to access the state UC website. Additionally, individuals who are likely to exhaust their benefits are identified by the State through the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program. These individuals are directed to come to the PA CareerLink® Berks County for job search assistance.

At the PA CareerLink® Berks County, customers (including UC claimants) are provided with an orientation of services and are given an initial assessment to determine their specific workforce needs. Based on their unique circumstances, they may be referred to additional services and resources, such as job search workshops, staff-assisted job search activities, partner programs, supportive services, and/or training activities to help them secure a new job or begin a new career.

Any potential UC eligibility issues identified during RESEA, or any other UC Claimant interaction are referred to the State's Unemployment Insurance department for resolution.

Moreover, the UC Workforce Development Representative conducts several seminars throughout the year at the PA CareerLink® Berks County for employers to learn more about UC Programs. Typical seminars include: UC 101; Separation Issues; UC Appeals and Hearings; Suitable Work; Relief from Charges. A best practice of receiving preapproval from the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) for HR recertification credits is also in place.

During the pandemic, in partnership with the state, the WDB has supported all attempts to assist UC Claimants including offering space at the PA CareerLink® Berks County for UC call center staff to work. More successful has been the effort to assist UC Claimants through accepting their issues (on a form) in person or via phone call to the PA CareerLink®. The forms are forwarded to state staff assigned to the PA CareerLink® Berks County who work to remedy the claimant's issues.

The WDB will continue to work with the Commonwealth to ensure our mutual UC customers receive meaningful access to this required one-stop partner.

3.5. *How will the local board coordinate local area workforce investment activities with regional economic development activities that are specific to a local area? How will the local board promote entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services?*

Since 2016, the Berks County WDB has been an active participant in the Southeast PA Partners for Regional Economic Performance (PREP), working with and often leading on regional economic development opportunities that support the local occupations on the High Priority Occupation list. As a result of this collaboration, the region coordinates workforce services with our economic development partners through the regular Southeast regional PREP meetings as well as in special initiatives. For example, the region's Small Business Development Centers present their services in information session with the areas Industry Partnerships. The Delaware Valley Industrial Resource Center (DVIRC) and Manufacturing Resource Center (MRC) are critical partners in supporting the diversification of employers' manufacturing production and succession planning. These partnerships with economic development agencies provide a broader set of services to employers across the region. The six local workforce development boards comprising the SE PA planning region include Berks, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia will continue to emphasize and respond to the demands of regional employers. To implement and sustain this regional planning and collaboration, the seven local WDB directors will continue to meet monthly and convene with their WDB Chairpersons quarterly. These meetings will focus on improving the services to employers, industry clusters and skills sets necessary and in demand to complement and support local county-based efforts.

The Board has also built partnerships with local economic development organizations/groups (discussed in section 3.4) to better coordinate ongoing economic development and workforce activities.

For example, the PA CareerLink® Business Services Team members and economic development personnel work together at the regional level to discuss employer expansion plans, new business markets, and equipment purchase options that support growth. The BST performance goals for PY2020 including Overall Market Penetration and Manufacturing Sector specific Market Penetration and the intelligence gathered through employer follow-up to the Employer Best Practices survey support our regional workforce development efforts.

Entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services should provide the basics of starting and operating a small business. Some examples of such skill development include, but are not limited to, the following abilities:

- Taking initiative;
- Creatively seeking out and identifying business opportunities;
- Developing budgets and forecasting resource needs;
- Developing a customer-centered environment;
- Understanding various options for acquiring capital and the tradeoffs associated with each option; and
- Communicating effectively and marketing oneself and one's ideas.

Although the WDB provides a variety of workshops each week that include many employment-related topics, the Board has not identified a specific career track for entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services. Rather, individuals who are interested in self-employment are referred to our community partners, such as the Kutztown University's Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC) and its associated Jump Start Incubator located in the City of Reading, to receive specialized assistance that includes:

- Entrepreneurship education that provides an introduction to the values and basics of starting and running a business. These programs often guide individuals through the development of a business plan and may also include simulations of business start-up and operation.
- Enterprise development which provides support and services that incubate and help individuals develop their own businesses. Enterprise development programs go beyond entrepreneurship education by helping individuals access small loans or grants that are needed to begin business operation and by providing more individualized attention to assist in the development of viable business ideas.

The strategic priorities of the WDB are reflected in the allocation of limited funds via the annual program year budget. While entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services are important economic development strategies, they are not necessarily a major workforce need in the Berks County WDA as compared to the needs of existing enterprises in our key industry sectors for which the WDB prioritizes funding (see above).

4. OPERATIONAL PLANNING QUESTIONS: Local Area Workforce Delivery System

4.1. *Provide a descriptive overview of the local area workforce delivery system, including key stakeholders and entities in the local area.*

PA CareerLink® Operator
The Operator provides guidance and oversight to the PA CareerLink® Berks County Administrator.

The PA CareerLink® Administrator manages the center's day-to-day operations with the assistance of a management team which is comprised of the various functional Team Managers.

When fulfilling services for the PA CareerLink® Berks County service delivery system, all Partners are under the functional direction of the PA CareerLink® Berks County Administrator. Those Partners who may be co-located but not providing services through the PA CareerLink® Berks County service delivery system are not under the functional supervision of the PA CareerLink® Administrator. At the time that a co-located Partner begins to provide such services, co-located staff fall under the functional direction of the PA CareerLink® Berks County Administrator, in accordance with the formal PA CareerLink® Administrator Job Description.

Management of the PA CareerLink® Berks County shall be the responsibility of the Operator, acting through the PA CareerLink® Berks County Administrator who reports to the Operator. The one-stop operator, through the PA CareerLink® Administrator, will, at a minimum:

- Manage **daily operations**, including but not limited to:
  - Managing and coordinating Partner responsibilities, as defined in this MOU,
  - Managing hours of operation,
  - Coordinating daily work schedules and work flow based upon operational needs, and
  - Coordinating staff vacations/unscheduled absences with the formal leader to ensure service coverage by center staff.
- Assist the WDB in establishing and maintaining the PA CareerLink® Berks County. This includes but is not limited to:
  - Ensuring that State requirements for center certification are met and maintained,
  - Ensuring that career services such as the ones outlined in WIOA sec. 134(c)(2) are available and accessible,
  - Ensuring that WDB policies are implemented and adhered to,
  - Adhering to the provisions outlined in the contract with the WDB
  - Reinforcing strategic objectives of the WDB to Partners, and
  - Ensuring staff are properly trained by their formal leadership organizations and provided technical assistance, as needed.
- Integrate systems and coordinate services for the center and its Partners, placing priority on customer service.
- Integrated Workforce Service Delivery, as defined by WIOA, means organizing and implementing services by function (rather than by program), when permitted by a program's authorizing statute and as appropriate, and by coordinating policies, staff communication, capacity building, and training efforts.
- Service integration focuses on serving all customers seamlessly (including targeted populations) by providing a full range of services staffed by cross-functional teams, consistent with the purpose, scope, and requirements of each program.

- The services are seamless to the customer, meaning the services are free of cumbersome transitions or duplicative registrations from one program service to another, when avoidable, and there is a smooth customer flow to access the array of services available in the workforce center.
- Oversee and coordinate partner, program, and PA CareerLink® Berks County performance. This includes but is not limited to:
    - Providing and/or contributing to reports of center activities, as requested by the WDB,
    - Providing input to the formal leader (partner program official) on the work performance of staff under their purview,
    - Notifying the formal leader immediately of any staff leave requests or unexcused absences, disciplinary needs, or changes in employee status,
    - Identifying and facilitating the timely resolution of complaints, problems, and other issues,
    - Collaborating with the WDB on efforts designed to ensure the meeting of program performance measures, including data sharing procedures to ensure effective data matching, timely data entry into the case management systems, and coordinated data batch downloads (while ensuring the confidentiality requirements of FERPA, 34 CFR 361.38, and 20 CFR part 603),
    - Ensuring open communication with the formal leader(s) in order to facilitate efficient and effective center operations,
    - Evaluating customer satisfaction data and propose service strategy changes to the WDB based on findings.
- Assist the WDB with cost allocations and the maintenance and reconciliation of one-stop center operation budgets.
- Coordinate pandemic and other emergency response at the PA CareerLink® Berks County. This includes public announcements of closings and openings, coordination of virtual/remote services as necessary, communication with one-stop and community partners, and disease mitigation efforts and plans.

The functional direction of the PA CareerLink® Berks County Administrator does not supersede a Partner organization's personnel or labor relations policy. For example, all pay and benefits will remain as dictated by those organizational policies. All discipline, performance appraisal and similar issues will be handled by an employee's organizational manager or supervisor. All requests for leave will be handled by an employee's organizational manager or supervisor, in coordination with the functional Team Manager. All Partners retain exclusive authority to supervise and manage their employees, conduct any investigation and administer any discipline to its employees.

Educational Data Systems, Inc. (EDSI) was chosen to be the one-stop operator and provider of Title I adult and dislocated worker services effective July 1, 2017 though a competitive process beginning February 3, 2017 with the release of a Request for Proposal for the PA CareerLink® Berks County One Stop Operator & Provider of WIOA Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker Services. A pre-proposal conference was held February 10, 2017 with a number of interested entities attending in person or via conference call. Two proposals were submitted by the submission deadline of March 13, 2017. These proposals were reviewed by an ad hoc committee of the WDB One-Stop Oversight Committee made up of three WDB staff members and three board members. After initial scoring was complete the two bidding agencies were interviewed by the ad hoc committee on April 7, 2017. Based on the interview responses the ad hoc committee recommended to the board that EDSI be awarded the

contracts for the one-stop operator and provider of adult and dislocated worker services. The award letter was issued May 12, 2017. A contract for the operation of the one-stop (PC-574808-17) was executed with EDSI to begin July 1, 2017. A separate contract for the operation of Title I adult and dislocated worker services (PC-574809-17) was executed with EDSI to also begin July 1, 2017. Both contracts, after two one-year renewals, will expire June 30, 2021. The WDB is currently in process to issue separate Requests for Proposals to procure a program operator for WIOA Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker Services and a One-Stop Operator to begin services on July 1, 2021.

WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Programs

"Pre-COVID", program designs were created almost exclusively for in person service delivery. As the world suddenly became virtual with the arrival of the pandemic in mid-March 2020 and working remotely was strongly encouraged, our Title I Adult, Dislocated and Youth programs quickly transitioned their services online. In order to do so, program managers had to equip their team members with the necessary tools and technology that would allow them to work remotely. PC's, monitors, laptops, and other technology tools were ordered and distributed to staff. Many programs reached out to community agencies to identify additional supportive services on behalf of their customers on a more frequent basis in response to the unanticipated reality of newly realized homelessness, unemployment, domestic violence, and mental health challenges. Moving instructional content online was a fairly easy task for programs. There were a few hurdles when it came to connecting new customers to services due to ensuring PII would remain confidential when determining eligibility. However, these challenges were quickly resolved with the usage of Adobe and NeoCertified.

There were many changes to the general operations of the building, as well. The PA CareerLink® Berks County Administrator coordinated a variety of building and service maintenance items at the start and through the duration of the pandemic. Phone calls to the front desk needed to be redirected. A new digital phone system that offered the ability to transfer calls to staff cell phones was put into place. The PA CareerLink® and PA CareerLink® Berks County websites were updated with messages of office closure.

Regular communication with partners helped to share information and ideas. The One Stop partners had agreed that the PA CareerLink® Berks County should close if it needed to. As the Governor's guidance changed, staffing levels were adjusted. The PA CareerLink® Berks County Administrator and the Assistant Director of the Berks WDB sent emails to the One Stop partners to explain the changes that were occurring to operations. Full staff meetings occurred throughout the pandemic and continued to offer training to staff, answer questions, and provide a sense of "normalcy" during the trying times.

Reopening of the PA CareerLink® Berks County to the public for in-person services by appointment only in mid-July 2020 was a multi-phased, strategic approach to services and operations. This method took into account that, in a pandemic, it may be necessary to ease and/or reinforce measures at any given time. The Assistant Director of the WDB, the PA CareerLink® Berks County Administrator, and the Team Managers established a Reopening meeting that occurred once a week to discuss what operations and service delivery would look like during the pandemic. This plan took into account CDC guidance and messaging that the Governor was sharing. The building hours were expanded to accommodate additional appointment times for customers. The result of the collaborative meetings were a development of the following: a multi phased reopening plan was created, a pandemic safety

team was established, Pandemic Safety Procedures were established, health screening and capacity control duties were created, a Return to Work guide was developed, and a team schedule that divided staff into two teams was created. The team schedule was critical for helping to mitigate the spread of the virus. Appointment times and sanitization schedules were coordinated amongst all management team members. Signage for "appointment only" messaging was created and phone system messages, website messages, and social media messages were changed to reflect in appointment only services. The reopening plan, pandemic safety procedures, and return to work guide were shared during full staff meetings. All the new security guards were trained on duties and opening/closing procedures.

Unfortunately, the local resurgence of the COVID-19 virus in late November 2020 necessitated the suspension of in-person appointments with all PA CareerLink® Berks County program services being offered virtually once again into the first calendar quarter of 2021.

Despite the disruptions, there were many valuable lessons already learned during the pandemic that will be helpful regarding our next reopening for public appointments and the eventual return to more open public access when public safety considerations permit:

- A measured, multi phased reopening plan works very well.
- A team schedule broken out into two teams helps to mitigate the spread of the virus.
- The Pandemic Safety Procedures have also helped to mitigate the spread of the virus.
- The building required regular attention during the length of the pandemic.
- Community Outreach and collaboration, though a theme pre-COVID, is essential now in terms of engaging new participants and attracting them to virtual services.
- It seems safe to say that we will always have some type of virtual services available to customers when the "new normal" comes full circle.

Virtual/Remote Services

Due to the pandemic most services have moved toa virtual/remote platform. These services are listed below. It is expected that the majority of these services will continue to be offered on a virtual/remote platform even after the pandemic is no longer an issue:

- <u>WIOA Services:</u>
  - PA CareerLink® Berks County Welcome Orientation
  - WIOA Eligibility Meetings
  - Initial Program Assessments
  - Case Management Services
  - Success Starts Here
  - WIN Assessments
  - Individual Training Application Processing
  - Public Workshops
  - Career Exploration and Networking
  - Resume Success
  - Ace the Interview
  - Success in the First 90 Days
  - Job Seeking in Today's Environment – A Guide for the 40 Plus Community
  - Assessment and Personality Tests
  - Tips for Before and After an Interview
  - Business Communication
  - Marketing Yourself – Creating a Professional Brand

  - Job Search Assistance
  - Mock Interviews
  - Resume Writing Assistance
  - PA CareerLink® website technical assistance
  - Software utilized to provide remote services:
    - YouTube (Recorded version of welcome orientation)
    - Microsoft Teams (Staff Interaction)
    - Microsoft OneDrive (Sharing of Documents)
    - GoTo Meeting (Classroom sessions and customer interaction)
    - Adobe Pro DC (For Electronic Signatures)
    - Neo-Certified (Sending of Documents containing PII)
- BST Services:
  - Virtual Employer Meetings
  - Virtual Recruitments
  - Virtual Interviews
  - OJT Application Processing
  - Employer Seminars
  - Software utilized to provide remote services:
    - Adobe Pro DC [For Electronic Signatures (OJT)]
    - Microsoft Teams (Staff & Employer Interaction)
    - GoTo Meeting (virtual recruitments/interviews/seminars and customer interaction)
- Youth Services:
  - Virtual High School Equivalency Classes
  - Tutoring
  - Mentoring
  - Counseling Sessions
  - Orientation
  - Assessments
  - Virtual Employability Workshops
  - Case Management Sessions
  - Job Prep,
  - Resume Writing
  - Financial Literacy
  - Virtual Work Experience Opportunities
  - Software utilized to provide remote services:
    - Google Classroom
    - Zoom
    - Neo-Certified
    - Adobe

Adult and Dislocated Worker

EDSI provides the following job seeker services as the provider of Title I adult and dislocated worker services at the PA CareerLink® Berks County (the competitive process for this contract is described above):

Basic Career Services

- Outreach, intake and orientation to the information, services, programs, tools and resources available through the Local workforce system
- Initial assessments of skill level(s), aptitudes, abilities and supportive service needs
- In- and out-of-area job search and placement assistance (including provision of information on in-demand industry sectors and occupations and non-traditional employment)
- Access to employment opportunities and labor market information
- Performance information and program costs for eligible providers of training, education, and workforce services
- Information on performance of the local workforce system
- Information on the availability of supportive services and referral to such, as appropriate
- Information and meaningful assistance on Unemployment Insurance claim filing
- Determination of potential eligibility for workforce Partner services, programs, and referral(s)
- Information and assistance in applying for financial aid for training and education programs not provided under WIOA

Individualized Career Services

- Comprehensive and specialized assessments of skills levels and service needs
- Development of an individual employability development plan to identify employment goals, appropriate achievement objectives, and appropriate combination of services for the customer to achieve the employment goals
- Referral to training services
- Group counseling
- Individual counseling and career planning
- Case management for customers seeking training services; individual in- and out- of-area job search, referral and placement assistance
- Workforce preparation services (e.g., development of learning skills, punctuality, communication skills, interviewing skills, personal maintenance, literacy skills, financial literacy skills, and professional conduct) to prepare individuals for unsubsidized employment or training
- Post-employment follow-up services and support (*This is not an individualized career service but listed here for completeness*.)

Training

- Access to occupational skills training through Individual Training Accounts (ITA)
- Access to On-the-Job Training (OJT) and Transitional Employment (TE)

Youth

ResCare Workforce Services is the provider of youth services at the PA CareerLink® Berks County. These services can be broken down to four broad activities: case management, GED instruction, work experience and job placement, and access to occupational skills training through ITA and access to OJT and TE. The following youth elements are available either directly through the youth services provider or other one-stop partner or through referral to community agencies (The bullets under each element detail how these services are accessed):

1. Tutoring, study skills training, instruction, and evidence-based dropout prevention and recovery strategies that lead to completion of the requirements for a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent or for a recognized post-secondary credential.

- Daily tutoring and small group instruction are available on site and virtually at the PA CareerLink® Berks County.
- The program provides GED instruction and attachment to post-secondary education/training as appropriate for the individual.

2. Alternative secondary school services or dropout recovery services.

- Referrals to alternate secondary schools if the participant's needs cannot be met in the program

3. Paid and unpaid work experiences that have as a component academic and occupational education.

- Paid work experience is offered to GED participants. Work experience exposes youth to various aspects of industry and entrepreneurship while providing hands-on skills instruction and "on-the-job experience."
- Transitional employment is offered as an available option to individuals.
- Job shadowing is accomplished via group field trips and one on one field visits based upon students' career goals.

4. Occupational skill training.

- Youth are exposed to post-secondary environments, including opportunities for advanced training. Visits to college campuses and other post-secondary training institutions are accomplished. Assistance in completing entry applications and financial aid applications is also provided.
- Youth ITA's are available.

5. Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster.

- Workforce and career readiness are offered as part of the GED curriculum. Small group instruction is provided for those individuals who have a GED/high school diploma.

6. Leadership development opportunities.

- Leadership skills are developed through workshops including decision making, conflict resolution and community service skills. Civic leadership is enhanced through the paid work experience, community service projects, voter registration and community awareness projects i.e. current events.

7. Supportive services.

- Supportive services in the form of bus passes, uniforms etc. are available to youth enrolled in the program. Staff coordinate with other youth service organization to facilitate a two-way referral network for youth in need of services beyond those offered in-house.

8. Adult mentoring for duration of at least twelve months.

- Adult mentoring in an on-going activity of program staff, employers and takes place concurrently with other program activities. Examples include but are not limited to guest speakers, worksite supervisors and program staff.

9. Follow up services.

- The program facilitates a combination of counseling, and workshops to motivate and engage exited youth. The Follow-Up Coordinator offers post-secondary guidance, and job searches for youth who have been exited with placement. In addition to contacting youth via mail and phone calls; a variety of other methods are used to contact youth such as Facebook, e-mail, and text messages to follow up with students. Incentives to youth that continue to stay in post-secondary education and/ or retain a job to ensure progress towards retaining a year (plus) employment and/ or educational goals.

10. Comprehensive guidance and counseling.

- Individual and group counseling is provided throughout program participation to discuss personal and career goals. Problems identified are addressed by staff immediately. If specialized counseling is required i.e. health, drug etc. referrals to the appropriate agencies is provided.

11. Financial literacy education.

- Financial literacy is incorporated using the FDIC Money Smart program and is provided by a representative of Sun Federal Credit Union.

12. Entrepreneurial skill training.

- Entrepreneurial skill training is incorporated in the GED curriculum. Examples include a mock “Shark Tank” activity in which youth create a product and market it to program staff and an activity in which youth create a business and must develop a business plan.

13. Labor market information.

- Labor market information is provided to program participants during individual and group counseling when personal and career goals are discussed.

- Such information is brought back to the program through staff participation on the Employer Outreach Team (EOT) and through WDB provided information.

14. Activities that help youth prepare for and transition to post-secondary education and training.

- These are also incorporated in the regular individual and group counseling sessions and include topics associated with financial literacy, building support networks and ensuring secondary and tertiary back-ups for issues such as transportation and child-care.
- College tours and assistance in completing the FASFA.

ResCare Workforce Services (ResCare) was chosen to be the provider of Title I youth services though a competitive process beginning January 20, 2019 with the release of a Request for Proposal for WIOA Youth Education and Workforce Services Program. A pre-proposal conference was held February 15, 2019 with a number of interested entities attending in person or via conference call. One proposal was submitted by the submission deadline of March 11, 2019. The proposal was reviewed by an ad hoc committee of the WDB Youth Committee made up of three WDB staff members and two board members. Based on review of the proposal the ad hoc committee recommended to the board that ResCare be awarded the contract for provider of youth services. The award letter was issued June 2, 2019.

WIOA Title II Adult Education and Literacy Programs
Reading Area Community College (RACC) is the Title II contractor with the PA Dept. of Education. RACC subcontracts with the Literacy Council of Reading-Berks for adult literacy services.

The Literacy Council's CASAS competency-based assessment is held the first Friday of the month and is a 3-hour assessment. Welcome Orientation is now able to directly refer to the CASAS competency-based assessment. The participants who are assessed through CASAS will then be referred to the Literacy Council's English as a Second Language Class at the PA CareerLink® office. This class will run two days a week (Tues. & Thurs.) for a total of four hours a week.

The TABE 11/12 is very staff intensive. The Young Adult team will provide 3 – 4 staff to assist. The Literacy Council's TABE Reading & Reading locator are held once a month on Thursdays and are open to partner referrals. The TABE Math & Math locator are held once a month on Fridays and are open to partner referrals. Career Services Team customers need only the Reading assessment for referral to training providers. EARN Team customers will need both the Reading and Math for referral for GED services.

The Literacy Council will hold a two-days a week, 2-hour a day (Mon. & Wed.) class at the PA CareerLink® office covering basic math and basic reading (ABE). This will be an open entry, open exit class. The target audience is young adults who do not assess at a level enabling them to enroll in our Young Adult program's GED class as well as adults from the general population. The curriculum will run on a 4-week rotation. The instruction will enable attendees to move on to a GED class or pass an employer's pre-employment assessment. Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes are not currently in session due to the pandemic. When a referral is made to ABE, contact will be made to the Literacy Council to begin classes again.

WIOA Title III Wagner-Peyser Programs
The Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry is the provider of Wagner-Peyser services at the PA CareerLink®.

Job search and placement assistance is done by conducting matching within PA CareerLink®, either from within a job seeker's folder or within an employer's job posting. It is also done through the advertising of employer recruitments and completion of employer job applications located in the Resource Room. Career advising is accomplished through staff discussions of job seeker qualifications against job posting requirements. Welcome Orientation and the Career Decision Making / Hidden Job Market workshop include information on in-demand industry sectors and occupations. Nontraditional employment opportunities are available through postings on PA CareerLink®. Information on specific employer worker needs, recruitment activities at our facility, and recruitment activities outside of our office are widely shared via flyers and emails to individuals as well as community agencies.

This team also manages the RESEA orientation.

WIOA Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation Programs
The Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation is the provider of Vocational Rehabilitation services at the PA CareerLink® Berks County.

Eligible OVR customers receive multiple services from qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors that may include but not be limited to; diagnostic, vocational counseling and guidance, vocational evaluation, restoration, training, job placement and pre-employment training services for eligible and potentially eligible high school students with disabilities. OVR also provides multiple services to the business community designed to assist businesses with onboarding pre-screened qualified employees with disabilities. OVR on-boarding supports for a qualified new hire can include: reasonable accommodation consultation, initial probationary period wage reimbursement (On-the Job Training-OJT), referral on tax credits or deductions. OVR also offers no-cost consultation on the Americans with Disability Act (ADA), accessibility standards and helping a business to retain current employees following an accident, injury or disability.

Equal Employment Opportunity and Civil Rights Protection
John W. Moser, Assistant Director – Performance and Policy, Equal Opportunity Officer for the WDB ensures equal opportunity and civil rights protections are provided to customers of the PA CareerLink® Berks County. This is ensured through program monitoring for these specific requirements. He also works directly with the Office of Equal Opportunity as the need arises as an investigator in the Equal Opportunity complaint hearing process.

Advocacy Groups
The WDB includes advocacy groups in the workforce delivery system through active outreach to these groups.

An example is the board's long-standing relationship with the community of individuals with disabilities in Berks County. The WDB, since nearly the implementation of the Workforce Investment Act has partnered with the Berks County Transition Coordinating Council to offer summer work

experience for youth with disabilities (recently expanded to a partnership with OVR). As discussed earlier in Section 3.1 the WDB has established a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) standing committee to focus on increasing opportunities for individuals with disabilities with membership including representatives from this community.

Other Key Stakeholders
Other key stakeholders in the local workforce delivery system include economic development agencies (GRCA, MRC, BCIDA, SBDC, etc.) discussed in detail in section 3.4 and the county education system (especially RACC and the two Career and Technology Centers) and community development (United Way of Berks County, Olivet Boys and Girls Clubs, Threshold Rehabilitation Services, Inc.) discussed in section 1.4.

4.2. *Identify the one-stop partners (required and other) authorized to provide required and other programs within the local area. Describe briefly the role(s) of the one-stop partners (required and other).*

Required Partners

- PA Department of Labor & Industry, Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations
    - Wagner-Peyser, Trade Act, Rapid Response, Jobs for Veterans State Grant, Foreign Labor Certification
        - Programmatic
- PA Department of Labor & Industry, Office of UC Centers
    - State Unemployment Compensation Programs
        - Programmatic
- County of Berks
    - WIOA Title I
    - TANF/EARN
        - Programmatic
- PA Department of Human Services
    - TANF
        - Programmatic
- PA Department of Labor & Industry, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)
    - Rehabilitation Act Title I parts A and B programs
        - Programmatic
- Reading Area Community College (RACC)
    - Title II – Adult Education and Family Literacy Act
    - Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act
        - Programmatic
- United Community Services (UCS)
    - YouthBuild
        - Programmatic
- AARP Foundation
    - Senior Community Service Employment Program, Title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965
        - Programmatic
- PathStone Corporation
    - Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Program

        - Programmatic
- PA Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED)
    - Community Services Block Grant Employment and Training Activities
        - Programmatic
- Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center, Inc.
    - Native Americans Programs
        - Programmatic
- ResCare Workforce Services
    - Job Corps
        - Programmatic
- Keystone Job Corps Center
    - Job Corps
        - Programmatic

Additional Partners

- Berks Connections/Pretrial Services
    - Programmatic
- PA Department of Labor & Industry, Apprenticeship Office
    - Programmatic

4.3. *How will the local board facilitate access to services provided through the one-stop service delivery system?*

Access to Services

As a tightly organized and integrated single county workforce development area, Berks County has no remote areas without ready access to one-stop services delivery. In fact, Berks County has a well-developed internal system of public and private transportation services with available public transportation connecting the core with the surrounding suburban communities. The PA CareerLink® Berks County is located within the central urban area with a bus stop directly in front of the building and free ample parking. Many Berks job seekers take advantage of regular public bus route service provided by the Berks Area Regional Transportation Authority (BARTA) during their job search and once placed in new employment. BARTA also offers one-way trips via Special Services (Para transit).

The PA CareerLink® Berks County recently partnered with the Berks County Library System to provide remote, in person access to workshops and job search at county libraries. This partnership was made possible through a philanthropic grant awarded by the Berks County Community Foundation to the Berks County Library System.

As discussed in Section 3.1 the board has established a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee focused on increasing opportunities for individuals with disabilities. One of the DEI Committee's areas of focus is improving access to services by this community.

Also, as discussed in Section 4.4 the PA CareerLink® Berks County is certified in Office of Equal Opportunity, PA Department of Labor (OEO) compliance through 12/31/21.

Services, activities, and program resources provided to participants with a barrier to employment are fully discussed in section 4.13.

PA CareerLink® Berks County, at no cost to Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals or families, provides interpreter services to all LEP individuals or families applying for, participating in programs or receiving services/benefits through the PA CareerLink® Berks County the following means:

- Bi-lingual staff capable of translation and interpretation responsibilities.
- Telephone interpreting services.
- Translation services.
- TTY and sign language interpreters.

The interpreter services are provided in an efficient and timely manner so as not to delay a determination of eligibility for an individual or family, receipt of eligible services/benefits or participation in a Department run program beyond that of an English speaking individual or family. The PA CareerLink® Berks County makes this policy known to the LEP through the following methods (e.g. posters in other languages, Babel cards, etc.).

- Voicemail selections on the main office phone number
- the PA CareerLink® Berks County local website, www.careerlinkberks.com
- brochures and notices
- presentations at schools and community organizations
- presentations at dislocated worker meetings
- orientations for various PA CareerLink® programs
- outreach with Berks County Justice System agencies
- tag lines on materials, handouts, brochures

PA CareerLink® Berks County addresses phone calls and voice mail by LEP individuals in the following manner: The greeting on our main phone number directs customers to English or Spanish greetings. All Spanish speaking bilingual staff have English/Spanish voicemail greetings. Messages left in Spanish on non-bilingual staff voicemails are transferred to bilingual staff for interpreting. All non-Spanish non-English calls are interpreted through Propio Language Services or Language Services Associates.

PA CareerLink® Berks County addresses walk-ins to the one-stop who are LEP individuals in the following manner: The receptionist is bilingual Spanish/English and can direct Spanish speaking customers. Non-Spanish speaking limited English proficient visitors are directed to the language assistance poster in the reception area and a staff member call Propio Language Services or Language Services Associates for over-the-phone interpreting services using a dual-handset phone in room 301.

PA CareerLink® Berks County does not require, suggest or encourage LEP individuals or families to use friends, family members or minor children as interpreters. If an LEP individual or family insists that a friend or family member serve as interpreter, PA CareerLink® Berks County will document that choice. PA CareerLink® Berks County will then, on a case by case basis, consider factors such as: competence of the family or friend used as the interpreter; the appropriateness of the use in light of the circumstances and ability to provide quality and accurate information, especially if the interview could result in a negative effect on the individual or family's eligibility for benefits/services; potential or actual conflicts of interest; and confidentiality of the information being interpreted to determine whether PA CareerLink® Berks County should provide its own independent interpreter for itself.

The PA CareerLink® Berks County provides direct workforce services for public assistance recipients through its relationship with EARN. The EARN program provides comprehensive case management, remediation, education with special emphasis on individuals with limited English proficiency, skills training, work activities, job placement and retention activities, as well as providing supportive services, including payment for childcare. Services especially designed to meet the needs of out-of-school pregnant and parenting youth between the ages of 18 to 22, as well as non-assistance custodial or non-custodial fathers are provided by the Berks County Intermediate Unit through the Education Leading to Employment and Career Training (ELECT) Program. Work activities in EARN include unsubsidized employment, subsidized employment, paid work experience, and community service. EARN staff are co-located in the PA CareerLink® Berks County and they are also active members of the PA CareerLink® Berks County Business Services Team. If it is determined that an EARN participant can benefit from education or training programs offered under WIOA, then co-case management occurs. The WIOA Title I case manager determines eligibility and both WIOA and EARN case managers work together with the client to make sure they receive all services for which they are determined eligible.

To ensure that individuals participating in basic education and English learning programs have direct connections to career pathways leading to high-quality jobs, the Board works with its Adult Education partners, including RACC, to identify strategies that improve access. For example, RACC is the local operator of the KEYS Program which is designed to assist students who receive benefits through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF/Cash) and/or Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP/Food Stamps) attend, and succeed, in community college. The WDB ~~it~~ will explore the creation of a cross-referral process among one-stop partners and other community entities to direct customers to the right service at the right time as well as the development of coordinated outreach efforts in the upcoming year. Additional information regarding coordination with Title II services and activities is included in the response to 3.3, 4.10, and 4.12.

The career pathways model was introduced with the NEG Sector Strategies funding for ITAs and OJTs. Based on the initial enrollment in an ITA training program or OJT occupation, customers are provided with a comprehensive career pathway for that career, showing the occupation where they started on the pathway through to significantly higher positions that could be obtained with additional training and/or experience. This is incorporated into their Individual Employment Plan/Individual Service Strategy. Customers benefit from understanding how they can progress in their career areas beyond the initial training they receive. Pathways were created by WDB staff or Business Services Team members. Current career pathways include career areas such as Auto Diesel Technician, Building Property Maintenance, CDL-Transportation, Health Services, Industrial Maintenance Technician, Manufacturing Production Operations, and Information Technology.

It is important to note that access is also provided to Unemployment Insurance Programs via the PA CareerLink® Berks County. As discussed in the response to 3.4, UC courtesy phones and UC PCs are available for those customers who need access to such services. (In the interests of public health and safety the UC phones are expected to not be available for the duration of the pandemic.)

Management Information Systems

PA CareerLink® is the system of record for WIOA Title I programs. WIOA Title II uses a separate system of record. Partner and program provider staff enter customer data into PA CareerLink® as necessary

and required to track program activity, case notes, individual employment plans, etc. Under all circumstances data is entered within thirty days of occurrence as required by commonwealth protocol. Monitoring is conducted by the board to ensure this time frame is met. OVR utilizes a module of PA CareerLink® that is not accessible by other program staff.

WIOA Title I case managers have the ability to utilize the workforce program enhancements in PA CareerLink® to refer customers to services within the PA CareerLink® office (internally) and to outside community agencies (externally).

- Internal referrals
  Each PA CareerLink® office is able to designate which staff members will receive internal program referrals from within their office as well as other PA CareerLink® offices. These staff members are managed in the system by an individual with the "Program referral POC manager" role (ES Team Supervisor). Staff members who are designated to receive referrals for their program will see their names in a drop down under "Referral POC List". When a case manager would like to refer a customer to an internal staff member for services, the case manager navigates to the appropriate customer within PA CareerLink® and presses the plus (+) button on the "Program Referrals" tile. A screen with several fields will open. This is where the case manager will fill in the reason for referral, the agency that the customer is being referred to, and any additional comments. At the completion of the fields in the "Program Referrals" screen, the case manager presses "Send Referral". A green banner will appear to indicate that the referral has been sent. This referral will now appear on the internal staff member's PA CareerLink® dashboard as a "New Referral". The internal staff member who received the referral is able to change the status of the referral to "Active" to acknowledge the receipt of the referral. Staff are able to communicate back and forth through the referral. When services are complete, referrals are assigned an outcome of "successful" or "unsuccessful" and are closed out.

  Referral to the WIOA Title II provider (RACC) is accomplished directly through communication between the WIOA Title I program case manager and the WIOA Title II program support specialist.

- External referrals
  Each PA CareerLink® office is able to designate external agencies that will receive external program referrals. These external agencies are managed in the system by an individual with the "Program referral POC manager" role (ES Team Supervisor). External agencies must first fill in a form agreeing to be added to the external agency point of contact list. This form is retained by the individual with the "Program referral POC manager" role (ES Team Supervisor). Individuals from the external agency who are designated to receive referrals for their agency will be identified in a drop down under "Referral POC List". When a case manager would like to refer a customer to an external agency for services, the case manager navigates to the appropriate customer within PA CareerLink® and presses the plus (+) button on the "Program Referrals" tile. A screen with several fields will open. This is where the case manager will fill in the reason for referral, the agency that the customer is being referred to, and any additional comments. At the completion of the fields in the "Program Referrals" screen, the case manager presses "Send Referral". A green banner will appear to indicate that the referral has been sent. This referral will now be emailed to the external agency's point of

contact. This email will ask that the point of contact press a button found within the email to acknowledge the receipt of the email. PA CareerLink® staff and point of contacts from the external agencies are able to communicate back and forth through the referral. When services are complete, referrals are assigned an outcome of "successful" or "unsuccessful" and are closed out.

To assist in determining contractor performance the board utilizes an additional system, PrimeWorks Plus, to track customers through WIOA Title I services and non-WIOA grants. Minimal customer information is entered into this system (name, date of birth and gender). PA CareerLink® is relied upon for case notes, services plans, etc.) Data related to contractor performance is entered by WDB staff off of a tracking sheet completed by program provider staff. Such data for customers in WIOA Title I services ~~are~~ is reconciled with PA CareerLink® on a quarterly basis. As this is a reconciliation to determine internal data is accurate it does not impact data being entered into PA CareerLink® within thirty days of occurrence as required by commonwealth protocol.

4.4. *How will entities within the one-stop service delivery system, including one-stop operators and the one-stop partners, comply with WIOA Sec. 188 (as applicable), and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101, et seq.) regarding the physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs and services, technology, and materials for individuals with disabilities?*

Adaptive Equipment available at the PA CareerLink® Berks County:

- Adjustable height table for PC
- Adjustable height chair with adjustable height arm rests
- Alternate mini keyboard
- Alternate track ball mouse
- Foam wrist rest
- Large print/braille keypad stickers
- Monitor arm
- ZoomText
- JAWS Speech output software
- Closed circuit TV
- Assistive listening devices with disposable covers
- Dedicated telephone line for TTY
- Readers and writers
- Optical wheel mice
- Signature guide
- Sign language interpreting
- Footstool
- AT&T Telecommunications Relay Service
- Automatic doors
- Request for accommodation

Accessibility to the services provided by the PA CareerLink® Berks County and all Partner agencies is essential to meeting the requirements and goals of the PA CareerLink® Berks County. Job seekers and businesses must be able to access all information relevant to them via visits to physical locations as well as in virtual spaces, regardless of gender, age, race, religion, national origin, disability, veteran's status, or on the basis of any other classification protected under state or federal law.

The one-stop will maintain a culture of inclusiveness and the physical characteristics of the facility, both indoor and outdoor, meet the latest standards of accessible design. Services are available in a convenient, high traffic, and accessible location, taking into account reasonable distance from public transportation and adequate parking (including parking clearly marked for individuals with disabilities). Indoor space is designed in an "equal and meaningful" manner providing access for individuals with disabilities.

The WDB will work with the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry to ensure that job seekers and businesses have access to the same information online as they do in the physical facility.

All Partners agree that they will not discriminate in their employment practices or services on the basis of gender, gender identity and/or expression, age, race, religion, national origin, disability, veteran's status, or on the basis of any other classification protected under state or federal law. Partners must assure that they have policies and procedures in place to address these issues, and that such policies and procedures have been disseminated to their employees and otherwise posted as required by law. Partners further assure that they are currently in compliance with all applicable state and federal laws and regulations regarding these issues. Additionally, staff members are trained to provide services to all, regardless of range of abilities, mobility, age, language, learning style, or comprehension or education level. An interpreter will be provided in real time or, if not available, within a reasonable timeframe to any customer with a language barrier. Assistive devices, such as screen-reading software programs (e.g., JAWS and DRAGON) and assistive listening devices are available to ensure physical and programmatic accessibility within the PA CareerLink® Berks County.

The PA CareerLink® Berks County is certified in OEO compliance through 12/31/21. The WDB was notified of this certification on March 12, 2021. OEO's notification included a final report commending the Berks County WDB on a number of promising practices including one-stop adaptive technologies and disability assistance technologies and the WDB Employer Symposium discussed in section 1.4. The PA CareerLink® centers and any affiliated sites are no longer certified every three years for compliance with EO/ADA requirements. Rather, the EO compliance reviews are to be completed annually.

The WDB also reviews compliance with Equal Opportunity and Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility requirements each year during the PA CareerLink® Berks County quality assurance review. All programs operating out of the PA CareerLink® Berks County are part of this review.

To ensure compliance with WIOA Sec. 188 is maintained the PA CareerLink® Berks County provides twice per year training in Equal Opportunity and Americans with Disabilities Act requirements including the accommodations available at the PA CareerLink® Berks County, types of discrimination, civil rights, the local Language Assistance Plan, the Equal Opportunity complaint policy and process, and information privacy guidelines. Periodically the PA CareerLink® Berks County also provides diversity training. Past training has included sexual orientation and gender diversity and generational diversity. All on-site partners participate in this training. OVR has and will continue to provide no-cost

consultation on the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) and accessibility standards, as does the Office of Equal Opportunity. OEO also provides training to the WDB (staff and members) and conducts a yearly compliance review and provides technical assistance as necessary.

Efforts related to Individuals with limited English proficiency are discussed under the Access to Services heading of Section 4.3.

Efforts related to affirmative outreach can be found in section 4.13.

4.5. *Describe how the local board will ensure the continuous improvement of eligible providers through the system and that such providers will meet the employment needs of local area employers, workers, and job seekers.*

The Berks County WDB verifies the relevance of the training activities associated with the targeted occupations through outreach to employers. The WDB develops a detailed understanding of the skills and experience related to current and future employment projections by utilizing print and on-line job ad analysis, employer surveys, employer feedback via in-person, phone and email interviews, and by active WDB participation in educational provider Occupational Advisory Committees (OACs) and Next Generation Industry Partnerships (IPs). Active partnership with economic development agencies is solicited to promote the growth of a competent workforce in support of economic development initiatives.

The Berks WDB Training & Industry Partnership Committee meets quarterly to review opportunities for occupational growth and outcomes of in-force training initiatives. The committee membership is made up of industry sector employers, educators, and labor representatives. WDB staff with industry sector expertise is assigned to support the work of the committee.

Active engagement of our economic development partners in identifying in-demand occupations that will support economic growth is continuously solicited.

All training activity, including WIOA Title I eligible Incumbent Worker and Registered Apprenticeship, Individual Training Account, New-Hire OJT and Transitional Work Experience, and Apprenticeships are linked to High Priority Occupations (HPOs), and their relevant wage and educational attainment levels, within the priority Industry Sectors as defined by the full board. Requisite credentials are industry-recognized and are in great demand.

The WDB's Training & Industry Partnership Committee reviews each new annual draft HPO list for relevance to local labor needs. Petitions with supporting rationale are submitted for occupations that may have dropped off the new list but that, due to a variety of factors (board business relationships, the number of past training completion and training related employment, other business intelligence), the board is confident are still in demand locally. Petitions are also submitted during the same Center for Workforce Information & Analysis (CWIA) nomination period for in-demand occupations that are newly brought to the attention of the board and which comply with the CWIA consideration criteria.

The WDB effectively manages the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) process by reviewing training submissions for adequate content description, alignment with the current Berks Workforce

Development Area HPO List, and acceptable performance prior to approval. It is the policy of the Berks County Workforce Development Board to concentrate its training resources on key industry sectors (see section 1.5) and on training which prepares people to enter high priority occupations and/or which provides recognized and portable certifications or credentials for higher wage, higher skill jobs offering real opportunities for self-sufficiency. Only after new ETPL applicants have satisfied the WDB review criteria, including ascertained job openings and credentialing needs, will new programs be approved by the WDB for the ETPL and posted on the PA CareerLink® website. All ETPL training providers, local and/or statewide, must enter into a written and binding Master Agreement with the PA CareerLink® Berks County services provider for program delivery prior to the start of any training to be funded with Berks WDB WIOA funds.

Recent approved agreements have included new providers of high-priority occupational training in our priority Healthcare (Massage Therapist) and Transportation & Warehousing (Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers-CDL) industry sectors.

Customer satisfaction surveys of individuals in training are reviewed for satisfaction with the training experience, case manager, etc. These surveys are compiled by the PA CareerLink® Administrator and shared with the WDB and WDB staff. Program with sub-par satisfaction are provided technical assistance by the WDB.

4.6. *Provide a description and assessment of the type and availability of adult and dislocated worker employment and training activities in the local area.*

WIOA defines the types of employment and training activities to be offered in local workforce development areas. These include basic and individualized career services and training services. The board uses a competitive process to procure the basic and individualized career services. Training services consist of ITA, OJT and other work-based learning including incumbent worker training. The board currently does not see any discrepancies between adult and dislocated worker activities offered and what job seekers/employers require. The WDB currently has one provider of Title I adult and dislocated worker services.

The WDB partners with the County of Berks Purchasing Department to manage the RFP/contract process. This process is detailed in the County of Berks Procurement Policy as well as in the WDB's written policy.

While the Purchasing Department manages this process for the WDB, the WDB dictates conditions under which the process begins and makes the final decision on the award of contracts.

The following general process is used for the procurement of program services:

1. Board committee identifies a procurement need.
2. Board staff (staff) develops a statement of work (SOW) including summary, type of procurement, method of payment, services to be performed, expected outcomes, administrative requirements, and proposer response items.
3. Board committee reviews and approves SOW.
4. Staff forwards SOW to County Purchasing Department (purchasing) for insertion into RFP boiler plate.

5. Staff and purchasing develop a timeline for RFP issue, bidder's conference, review, and award.
6. Purchasing issues RFP and all subsequent addendums as necessary.
7. Purchasing runs bidder's conference. Staff is present at conference to answer/clarify questions.
8. Proposals are submitted to purchasing.
9. Purchasing conducts technical review.
10. Purchasing forwards proposals passing technical review to review committee (staff and members of board committee identifying the contracting need).
11. Review committee members conduct reviews and submit evaluations to purchasing.
12. Budgets are reviewed by review committee and changes made to evaluations as necessary.
13. Proposer interviews are conducted if the review committee decides this is a necessity.
14. Review committee submits final evaluations.
15. Recommendation to award contract is made to full board.
16. Board approves recommendation.
17. Purchasing executes contract.

Proposers provide a response which becomes the main criteria for evaluation of the proposal. Beyond a general introduction to the agency detailing its capacity to provide services (including financial stability, past performance, etc.) and justification of cost the following specific questions were asked in the most recent procurement for adult and dislocated worker services:

1. Detail your organization's staffing plan for the proposed services. Please include the following:
    a. Staffing table including number of staff, status (full or part time), location, job function, and case load ratio.
    b. Job descriptions that include job titles, job duties, and minimum qualifications.
    c. Resumes for key staff designated to oversee the proposed service delivery model. At a minimum resume should include education, work history, and any specialized training or certifications relevant to proposed job function. If staff will need to be hired as a result of contract award please outline the plan and timeline to hire qualified staff to deliver proposed services.
    d. Describe diversity and inclusion plan to ensure staff reflects the composition of the target population and the broader community.
2. Describe how the Resource Room will be managed including anticipated staffing levels and hours of operation.
3. Describe how staff will work with job seekers to overcome barriers to employment. Provide a detailed overview of plans to address any or all of the following:
    - Literacy/education
    - Disability
    - Criminal history
    - Housing
    - Basic needs
    - Limited English Proficiency
    - Other barriers not mentioned above
4. Describe how Rapid Response activities will be coordinated with other PA CareerLink® Berks County staff and state-wide efforts.

WIOA identifies four priority groups for service within the Title I Adult funding stream. Priority of service means those individuals in the priority groups are given priority over other individuals for receipt of individualized career services and training services. Priority of service does not guarantee that by virtue of his/her status an individual will always receive services. The individual must be eligible and able to benefit from the services. Once another participant is enrolled in a WIOA individualized career or training service, that participant may not be displaced by an individual who qualifies for priority of service.

The four priority groups are (within each group a veteran or eligible spouse of a veteran takes priority over a non-veteran):

- Recipients of public assistance
- Low income
- Basic skills deficient
- Underemployed

Priority is provided in the following order:

- *First,* to veterans and eligible spouses who meet the requirements for inclusion in one of the four priority groups.
- *Second,* non-veterans who meet the requirements for inclusion in one of the four priority groups.
- *Third,* to veterans and eligible spouses who **do not** meet the requirements for inclusion in one of the four priority groups.
- *Fourth,* non-veterans who **do not** meet the requirements for inclusion in one of the four priority groups.

Priority will be determined at eligibility for all individuals enrolled under the Title I Adult funding stream. Copies of all documentation used to verify priority must be included in the customer's file. See the WDB "Program Eligibility Policy" for further details.

The WDB has elected not to include additional local priority requirements. As such, no local requirements are included or inferred.

The WDB expects that at least 60% of all individuals served with Title I Adult funds will meet one of the priority target groups. Monitoring of progress toward and maintenance of goal will be conducted primarily through monthly reports generated from the local management information system.

While WIOA has expanded the definition of youth to include individuals through age 24 and many in the older age range meet the requirements for priority of service it is the general practice to refer meeting that age demographic to the youth program which is better designed to meet a youth's (young adult) needs.

The decision to transfer funds between adult and dislocated worker is based on training and capacity requirements being faced by the one-stop. Such transfers are approved by the board.

Career Pathways have become an integral part of the occupational and work-based training individuals receive through the one-stop and are discussed under the Access to Services heading of Section 4.3.

4.7. *How will training services be provided using individual training accounts, or ITA's, that fund programs of study, or through the use of contracts for training services that fund work-based trainings.*

The maximum obligation of funds under any individual ITA shall be $6,000, which may be applied to those costs included in the "service cost details" section of the Eligible Provider List and the costs of obtaining certifications, permits, and licensures necessary to obtain and/or retain employment in the field for which training was conducted. In the event that testing is involved in the awarding of a certification, permit, or license, the cost of one "retest" may also be covered if the first attempt was unsuccessful. The "retest" is also subject to the maximum limitation. All training must be completed in twelve months of start of WIOA funding.

It is the policy of the Berks County Workforce Development Board to concentrate its training resources on key industry sectors and on training which prepares people to enter high priority occupations and/or which provides recognized and portable certifications or credentials for higher wage, higher skill jobs offering real opportunities for self-sufficiency. The cap is determined by a review of the cost/length of the most effective and utilized training available through training providers that provide services in the county.

Training that has been approved by the WDB and other locals in the Commonwealth are posted on the ETPL on PA CareerLink®. Training must be chosen from this list. Customers interested in occupational skills training must conduct market research (job availability after training, salary, etc.) prior to approval of training. Locally gathered data on the training provider and specific occupational skills training is also provided to customers.

Work-based training, including On-the-Job Training (OJT) and Transitional Employment (TE), has a maximum level tied to the maximum ITA level (currently $6,000). OJT and TE will be available to participants of the PA CareerLink® Berks County who are eligible under the Adult, Dislocated Worker, or Youth WIOA funding streams and the Employment, Retention and Advancement Network (EARN) Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. OJT agreements will only be executed for full time positions. Full time is considered 30 hours per week or more. Individuals whose training is paid with Trade Act funds will follow the wage and hour limits set by the PA Department of Labor and Industry. OJT for EARN and all TE have a maximum training length of 520 hours (OJT) and 500 hours (TE) while OJT funded through WIOA (or discretionary grants as permitted) have a maximum length of 6 months with a unit price equal to 50% to 75% based on employer size or participant skill gap.

ITA, OJT, and TE maximums are subject to extension provisions as detailed in the appropriate Berks WDB policy.

4.8. *Provide a description and assessment of the type and availability of youth workforce investment activities in the local area.*

The Youth Committee is chaired by a Board member and is composed of both members of the Board who have special interest or expertise in youth policy (such as educators, employers, and representatives of human service agencies) and non-board members having the same interest or expertise.

The Youth Committee assists in the development of those portions of the Board's plan which pertain to youth and young adults; recommends to the Board priorities for the expenditure of Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act Title I Youth funding and TANF Youth Development funding; recommends selection of youth and young adult service providers; and provides coordination and oversight of youth and young adult workforce development activities. In addition, the Youth Committee serves as a convening and coordinating body for larger community partnerships for youth and young adult workforce development.

The Youth Committee recognizes that support of programs designed to keep youth in school and to assist those that, unfortunately, decide to drop-out is critical but, realistically, our limited funding needs to be fixed on the following:

- WIOA funding will be used to provide programs designed to support youth who are either high school drop-outs or are high school graduates who find themselves underemployed/unemployed due to barriers they find in their life (out-of-school youth).
- TANF Youth Development funding (and any funds used to supplement these funds) will primarily be used to support programs to in-school youth (high school and post-secondary) designed to provide work experience and exposure to careers.

At their November 19, 2020 quarterly meeting the committee approved a Statement of Work (SOW) for a new "Connecting Young Adults with Employment" Grant to be included in Request for Proposals (RFP) for a Program Year 2020/Program Year 2021 TANF Youth contract. The SOW includes elements that reflect the changes made to TANF programs as a result of the new "Career Pathway" focused model, In-School/Out-of-School year-round activities, and COVID-related virtual learning requirements. The SOW also includes continuing 2021/2022 management of the ***Berks Service Corp***, a PA CareerLink® Berks County/United Way of Berks County collaborative piloted in 2020 for the outreach and recruitment of young adults who are interested serving the needs of our local community during and after the pandemic. The SOW also provides for expanded young adult experiences in support of non-profit career choices and the development of an ***updated Disconnected Youth Study***. The RFP solicitation process began in the first quarter of calendar year 2021 with the grant period of performance to commence April 1, 2021 and continue through December 31, 2022 with an additional one-year renewal option.

Carole Homolash, District Administrator of OVR is a WDB member. Through her efforts a partnership is in place between OVR and the board around the summer youth employment program that is targeted to youth with disabilities. This is directly related to the WIOA Title IV requirement for pre-employment transition services.

TANF Youth Development Funding

A. Planned Use of PY2020 TANF Youth Development Funds

a. The WDB currently has sub-contracts with Goodwill Keystone Area to operate a special needs summer/year-round youth employment program and with ResCare Workforce Services to operate a general population year-round youth employment program. Typical TANF YDF permits approximately 250 youth to be employed in the work experience program.

B. Recruitment

a. Youth
    i. Goodwill recruits all youth directly with school Transition Coordinators. The work experience is built into participating youth IEP's.
    ii. ResCare recruits youth in multiple ways. The Berks County Intermediate Unit assists in identifying a point of contact within each school district. These contacts, normally Guidance Counselors and Transition Coordinators, are provided program information and services and help staff to identify undecided seniors and at-risk youth. CAO caseworkers and EARN staff provide information on TANF Youth Development and WIOA funds, including our Summer and Year-round Youth Employment Program, to TANF families with potentially eligible youth and directly refer to the program. The program is strengthening and developing partnerships within the local community college and universities to provide services to college students who are in need of work experience, internship opportunities, or supportive services. Partnering with work-study programs to help provide additional work-study opportunities on campus where funds might not be available to help students continue to stay engaged/enrolled. To ensure county-wide coverage, case managers are assigned to geographical areas for targeted recruitment and placement of disconnected young adults. In an attempt to reach youth and parents staff participate in community events, local recruitment events, and distribute program information to community agencies, partners, and local food pantries. Utilization of social media platforms, radio, newspaper advertisement and flyers are also used to meet recruitment goals.

b. Worksites
    i. Both contractors are responsible for worksite recruitment. Both of these programs have operated for many years and have developed close connections to the employers they work with. The contractors do coordinate recruitment of worksite to ensure employers are not "fatigued" by multiple "asks".
    ii. New employers are recruited as necessary to match youth career pathways. This would primarily be accomplished through contacts Business Services or the Employer Outreach Team has made but cold calling has also been used successfully.
    iii. Partnering with United Way of Berks County has provided additional outreach to serve non-profits during a time of need, allowing young adults to give back to their community while developing work skills.

C. Priority of TANF Youth

a. The contractors accept and encourage direct referrals from the CAO and EARN operators.
b. Many youth, especially those attending the Reading and Muhlenberg Area School Districts, live in high poverty areas. Many of their families receive some level of public assistance.

D. Leveraging

a. All business partners (worksites) will provide supervision of youth at no additional cost to the program.

E. Partners

a. Past business partners include:

Boyertown JHE
Hamburg HS
Reading HS
Tulpehocken HS
Wilson HS
Morgantown Goodwill Store
Rodale Institute
Eby's Store
Misco Products
Berks Encore
City of Reading
Conrad Weiser School District
Double Tree
Exeter School District
Fraser Advanced Information System
Hope Outlet (Rescue Mission)
Humane Society of Berks County
Muhlenberg School District
Muhlenberg Township Office
Muhlenberg Township Parks
Muhlenberg Township Water Authority
Olivet Boys & Girls Club
Penn State Health St. Joseph
Reading Library
Reading Museum
Reading Recreation Commission
Reading Soda Works
Riverview ELC
Rudden Foundation
Tower Health
Tropical Bakery
Vanity Fair Outlets
Washington Martial Arts
Yocum Institute

F. **Incentives**

a. There is no plan to offer incentives.

G. **Retention/Follow-up**

a. Long term retention is achieved by ensuring different types of placement opportunities are available. Entry-Level: learning basic work skills, these are used for

participants that have never worked before or have very limited work experience. Mid-Level: continuing to learn basic skills, these worksites are geared toward participants who have worked for the program prior, have some work experience, and an interest in a specific career. Career Pathway: continuing to learn work skills, these worksites are geared toward Career and Technology Center students who have an identified career path or seniors who are attending college in a specific field. By gearing the work experience towards the interest and skill level of the youth they are more likely to continue to participate in the program. There is weekly contact with program case managers and/or on-site job coaches (dependent on the program) which provides the youth an opportunity to discuss issues affecting their work performance. Feedback is provided to the youth by work-site supervisors informally and formally. Wages are also a strong incentive to stay in the program.

b. When a participant completes the program they are placed into follow-up services for a duration of six months, remaining with the same case manager. Follow- up will provide monthly contact to provide basic case management services.

H. **Program Monitoring**

a. Programs/contractors are monitored for the following:
   i. All contractors receive a yearly fiscal review conducted by the Fiscal Officer.
   ii. Programmatic reviews are conducted by the Assistant Director and include:
      1. Review of all payroll
      2. Youth eligibility review
      3. Worksite visits to ensure compliance with applicable Federal and State labor laws and compliance with the worksite agreement.

I. Berks County Contacts

a. Implementation, Tracking, Reporting, Qualification Spreadsheet Submission
   John Moser, Assistant Director
   610-988-1358
   jwmoser@countyofberks.com

b. Fiscal Reporting
   Megan Noll, Fiscal Officer
   610-988-1351
   mnnoll@countyofberks.com

c. Goodwill Keystone Area
   Jennifer Perez
   3001 St. Lawrence Ave., Reading, PA 19606
   717-603-0513
   jperez@yourgoodwill.org

d. ResCare Workforce Services
   Amber Columbo
   PA CareerLink® Berks County
   1920 Kutztown Rd., Suite F, Reading, PA 19604
   610-988-1387

acolumbo@bccl.org

WIOA Title I Funding

The process for general Title I eligibility is detailed in Section 3.3. The Board has made the determination to focus all WIOA Title I Youth funds on Out-of-School Youth (OSY). The WDB has determined that an OSY who requires additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment is documented as follows:

- Degree/Diploma/GED/Certificate Completers: A demonstrated inability to maintain full-time employment (30 hours per week) during the six-month period after the award of a high school diploma/GED or the award of a post-secondary degree/certification, or
- Degree/Certificate Non-completers: Youth with a high school diploma/GED who enroll but do not complete a full-time post-secondary education and are unemployed for a period of six-months following the withdrawal from the education program.

A detailed description of WIOA Title I Youth OSY services offered at the PA CareerLink® Berks County can be found in section 4.1. Outreach efforts and plans, including those for youth, can be found in section 4.13.

ResCare also has Job Corps placement staff on site at the one-stop. They are listed as a required partner.

4.9. *How will the local board coordinate workforce investment activities and ensure they are carried out in the local area with statewide rapid response?*

The Berks WDB's Rapid Response Team is made up of experienced PA CareerLink® Title I and Wagner-Peyser staff, a local community-based organization with strong labor connections (UCS), and the state-assigned regional Rapid Response coordinator. The Berks WDB Rapid Response Team is especially competent and assertive in meeting the needs of dislocated workers impacted by layoffs and plant closings. One example would be the October 2020 response to the Sun Rich plant closing. Due to COVID-19 safety protocols the rapid response sessions were held outdoors in a tent. This full day included three sessions in Spanish (103 attendees total) and one in English (7 attendees) with technical logistics to ensure UC was available remotely. The team also coordinates efforts with the regional Strategic Early Warning Network (SEWN) Coordinator and to assist with this coordination, the COO of the Berks WDB serves on the SE PA Regional SEWN Advisory Council. The Berks WDB will continue to support such effective local and regional coordination going forward.

However, there is room for local improvement by placing a greater focus on layoff aversion strategies such as incumbent worker training. The painful experience of the Berks County WDB has been that dislocated workers often lack the 21st century skills to give them confidence that they can navigate the economic, social and even psychological challenges associated with job loss. We have found this to be especially true among long-tenured manufacturing production workers who often entered employment in the sector decades ago in a very different world. Through experience, seniority, and consistent contributions with their employers, these workers over time often earned their way to top pay rates, excellent benefits including maximum vacation and leave, and attractive work schedules (e.g. day shift positions.) Unfortunately, too often the job skills and process knowledge these workers acquired with a single employer is often firm-specific and not valued by other potential employers, even within the manufacturing sector. By contrast, higher-skilled manufacturing workers such as

machinists, industrial electricians, and mechanics often develop and retain transferable skills that are in demand and can more quickly make the transition to jobs that approximate what they had with the previous employer. By placing a greater emphasis on WIOA's permissible use of adult and dislocated worker funds to support targeted incumbent worker training as described in Section 2.1, the Berks WDB looks to assist local employers expand and leverage their investments in word-class technology and processes in order to avert layoffs. When layoffs do occur, employees who took advantage of such training should more quickly make the transition back to family-sustaining employment.

4.10. *How will the local board coordinate relevant secondary and postsecondary education programs and activities with workforce investment activities to support strategies, enhance services, and avoid duplication of service(s).*

The Berks County WDB closely collaborates with both local Career and Technical Centers (BCTC and RMCTC) and Reading Area Community College (RACC) to ensure that training programs align with industry needs and high priority occupations. In addition, the Berks County WDB COO serves on Executive Advisory Boards for both BCTC and RMCTC and reviews requests for state equipment grants, providing letters of support as appropriate. The Berks WDB COO also serves on annual Perkins review committees for all three schools.

With the U.S. Department of Education implementation of the Perkins V legislation now in place, the Berks County WDB has taken steps to ensure that the CTC and RACC Career and Technology Education programs are fully aligned with the WDB local plan priorities. The Berks County WDB participated in a joint meeting with our local Perkins V partners in October 2019, during which WDB staff along with the chairman of the WDB Training & Industry Partnership Committee shared the details of our industry sector and occupational priorities with the Perkins V Stakeholders Committee and reviewed how these relevant elements will be incorporated into BCTC, RMCTC and RACC comprehensive local needs assessments. As an initiative to guarantee this alignment and to assure compliance with Perkins V legislative requirements, the Berks County Workforce Development Board (WDB) developed and led a process to concurrently analyze area needs and evaluate technical education programs for all three local institutions receiving Perkins V funding (see section 1.3) and WDB staff participated in individual stakeholder meetings throughout the course of the 2019-2020 school year to review each institution's proposed budget and grant objectives as outlined under Perkins V in advance of their June 2020 submission.

As a result this intensive Program Year 2019 WDB/CTC/RACC interaction, a mutual commitment has been made to have WDB staff meet individually with appropriate BCTC, RMCTC and RACC representatives on an annual basis to review each institution's program Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) crosswalks to Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes and determine how their program focus can be enhanced, positioning them to better align with the Berks Workforce Development Area High Priority Occupation List (HPO) and the Pennsylvania In-Demand Occupations List (IDOL).

Additionally, representatives of both CTCs and RACC are sitting members on our WDB Training & Industry Partnership and Youth Committees providing valuable insight into continuous improvement of WDB Work-Based Training and Young Adult program policies and discretionary job training/workplace experience grant considerations.

The Berks County WDB, along with economic and business-education partners, support and promote an innovative 2+2+2 pathway from technical high school, to community college to 4-year institutions – *The Berks Technical Academy.* RACC has partnered with the County's two high school career and technical centers - Berks Career and Technology Center (BCTC) and Reading Muhlenberg Career and Technology Center (RMCTC) - to build comprehensive Technical Academy career pathways and the associated articulation agreements for high school CTE students to earn college credit for high-end technical coursework. In effect, the Technical Academy serves as an *honors program* for qualified CTC students, allowing them to acquire up to 27 college credits at no cost prior to high school graduation. Such focused and talented students are highly sought after by local employers for paid internships during the school year, while on summer break and again upon high school graduation. Once hired, Technical Academy graduates may receive financial support from their employers while they complete their Associates degree programs at RACC. RACC has been particularly effective in assisting qualifying students to access federal Pell grants to cover tuition costs. If the students wish to continue their technical training and education beyond RACC, they may do so at aligned 4-year institutions (e.g. Penn State – Berks) through additional articulation agreements that are part of the Technical Academy pathway.

Clearly, the WDB's long-standing commitment to supporting our local CTE partners has led to ever-increasing growth opportunities for students, families and employers alike. More recently, our comprehensive support of our K-12 schools in Berks County has expanded to include helping educators build greater focus on Career Pathway exploration in key industry sectors such as manufacturing, healthcare and construction. For example, our local school districts have leveraged the WDB's labor market expertise in developing and implementing their career education and work preparation (Section 339) plans.

As detailed above (see Section 1.2), Berks County's economic prosperity is threatened by relatively low levels of adult literacy and especially numeracy that lag the Commonwealth as a whole and which prevent many adult customers from taking advantage of quality training programs leading to family-sustaining careers. However, we are fortunate to have great partners in addressing this challenge.

RACC is the Commonwealth's local *WIOA Title II Adult Educational and Literacy* program contractor for ~~the~~ Berks County and is an active partner in the PA CareerLink® Berks County. All partners including our Title I program providers refer adult customers in need of education and literacy support to RACC. The system for such referrals is reviewed at quarterly partner meetings of the PA CareerLink® Berks County. Further reflecting the primary importance of coordinating WIOA Title I and Title II program services and strategies to avoid duplication and maximize our limited local resources, RACC's Director of Career Training, Community Education & Professional Development (who leads RACC's Title II program services) was appointed to the WDB where she serves on the WDB's One Stop Oversight Committee. The Executive Director of RACC's key Title II sub-contractor, the *Literacy Council of Reading-Berks* also is a non-Board member of the Berks County WDB's *One-Stop Oversight Committee*. He also is a former President of the Pennsylvania Association for Continuing Education (PAACE) and is recognized as a statewide expert on adult education and literacy and how to coordinate Title I and Title II programs. Accordingly, the WDB's One Stop Oversight Committee is well-positioned to help us coordinate local Title I and Title II services and strategies with all PA CareerLink® Berks County partners.

The Berks WDB also works closely with the Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU) which coordinates additional educational services for Berks County's eighteen public school services within Berks County and is also represented on the Berks County WD Board's Youth Committee. The Berks Business Education Coalition (BBEC) is chaired by a local business leader and the BBEC's membership includes the County's five colleges and the eighteen public school districts as well as business leaders. The BBEC is an active partner with the Berks County WD Board on programs to facilitate employer-educator collaboration and to provide local students with valuable work-based learning opportunities throughout the County. The BBEC's Executive Director is a member of the Board's Youth Committee.

Both the BCIU and the BBEC partner with the Berks County WDB and our 18 local school districts to promote career awareness and preparation programs with a focus on equitable access for all 70,000 K-12 students regardless of which school district their families might reside in. The Berks WDB, BCIU and BBEC together champion the **Career Ready Berks (CRB)** alliance to promote and sustain wide-scale cooperation between educators, business partners, and workforce and economic development. The strategy of the CRB alliance is not to dictate a "one-size-fits-all" county-wide career pathways model but, rather, to offer well-researched recommendations and supports to enhance and expand K-12 career education. Through an innovative and well-strategized model of oversight, the CRB alliance brings diverse stakeholders and their collective expertise to the table to coordinate the development and delivery of distinct but complementary career exploration activities under one universal "enterprise umbrella." Since forming in 2016, this alliance of local stakeholders meets regularly with the intention of strengthening and expanding collaboration among all 18 Berks County school districts, career and technical centers, postsecondary institutions, employers, workforce agencies, and other community stakeholders. From our mutual commitments and respective talents, we have created a countywide, self-sustaining framework that builds and supports rigorous career pathways for all learners; leverages and aligns resources; coordinates and expands communication among stakeholders; and supports regional workforce needs.

Finally, the Berks County WDB maintains a close working relationship with the Higher Education Council of Berks County (HECBC) whose membership includes the presidents of the County's five non-profit and public institutions for higher education. The HECBC also serves as the nominating entity for education sector representatives appointed the WDB. The Berks WDB COO serves on the Kutztown University Business Advisory Council where he provides timely and practical guidance on programs and local labor market information (LMI).

4.11. *Describe the plans, assurances, and strategies for maximizing coordination, improving service delivery, and avoiding duplication of Wagner-Peyser Act (29 U.S.C. 49 et seq.) services and other services provided through the one-stop service delivery system.*

Since 1999, the PA CareerLink® Berks County has shown the way in how to maximize staff coordination and services to the job seeker/employer customer through the functional alignment of staff. Integration at PA CareerLink® Berks County happens at both the staff and team manager levels. Some teams have mixed staff from multiple partners. Some teams have staff from a single partner organization. All teams have a dedicated manager/supervisor. Integration occurs through twice-monthly full staff meetings, twice-monthly team manager meetings and various staff development activities. Partners whose employees participate as integrated team members are: PA Department of Labor and Industry - Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operation (PA L&I BWPO), EDSI Adult and Dislocated Worker, ResCare Youth Services, EDSI Business Services Team, and EDSI EARN program.

Functional supervisors/managers are individuals who make work assignments and supervise the work of individuals regardless of payroll attachment. Agency managers serve as liaisons for employer-specific information and issues. Responsibilities are kept separate by making all staff aware of the distinction, setting the expectation that everyone understands and implements the distinction, and enforcing it.

As detailed previously, the one-stop operator provides functional supervision of the PA CareerLink® Administrator who acts as a functional leader within the one-stop. As such, they have the authority to organize and supervise Partner staff, in order to optimize and streamline service delivery efforts. Key functions include:

- Integrate systems and coordinate services for the center and its Partners, placing priority on customer service.
- Integrated Workforce Service Delivery, as defined by WIOA, means organizing and implementing services by function (rather than by program), when permitted by a program's authorizing statute and as appropriate, and by coordinating policies, staff communication, capacity building, and training efforts.
- Service integration focusing on serving all customers seamlessly (including targeted populations) by providing a full range of services staffed by cross-functional teams, consistent with the purpose, scope, and requirements of each program.
- Ensuring services are seamless to the customer, meaning the services are free of cumbersome transitions or duplicative registrations from one program service to another, when avoidable, and there is a smooth customer flow to access the array of services available in the workforce center.
- Oversee and coordinate partner, program, and PA CareerLink® Berks County performance.

Two examples of the integration of staff and programs currently taking place at the PA CareerLink® Berks County are the Welcome Function and Employer Outreach Team.
The Welcome Function consists of two components: a Welcome Orientation and an Initial Assessment. The following descriptions have been updated for COVID-19 to include a video for Welcome Orientation that is available remotely and a virtual individual Initial Assessment.

- The Welcome Orientation is a group activity offered three times a week on a drop-in basis, alternating between morning and afternoon sessions for the convenience of customers' schedules. A PA CareerLink® staff member facilitates the orientation and uses a PowerPoint presentation to reinforce the information presented verbally. Information is presented about a wide range of independent, expanded and comprehensive career services, including Resource Room services, explanations of PA CareerLink® registration and use, career exploration and labor market information resources, workshops, assessment tools, case management and career advising, training opportunities, pre-training/pre-employment workshops, structured soft skills preparation, structured job search preparation, self-assisted job search, Career Center for Young Adults, WIOA eligibility and PA CareerLink® events. All new PA CareerLink® Berks County customers are encouraged to attend a Welcome Orientation. Customers who choose not to attend a Welcome Orientation are offered a handout of independent career cervices they may participate in at any time, along with a schedule of Welcome Orientation events they may attend in the future.
- Immediately following the Welcome Orientation, each customer participates in an individual Initial Assessment with a PA CareerLink® Berks County staff member. Utilizing a specially-designed assessment form, staff members guide customers through an assessment of their

labor force, Unemployment Compensation, Veteran and disability statuses, their career/employment goals, and their concerns about any factors that may impact their ability to achieve their goals. Considering the next type of service a customer may select, independent, expanded or comprehensive Career Services, the staff member guides them to participate in appropriate services. These may include PA CareerLink® registration, workshops, resume writing assistance, assessments, job referrals, case management and application for WIOA eligibility and services. Staff members may also arrange for referrals to community agencies to assist customers with concerns beyond the scope of services delivered at the PA CareerLink® Berks County services, including childcare, housing, health care and legal/financial issues.

With so much activity underway, it is critical that employer outreach activities are coordinated and communicated among the various teams. This is accomplished through a structured Employer Outreach Team (EOT) that was established in 2016. The EOT is comprised of individuals from Business Services, EARN, Young Adult, OVR, the WDB, and other community agencies who come together monthly to discuss and share business/employer intelligence. The goals of the team are to ensure employers receive a consistent message from the team members, that employer visits are coordinated to maximize outreach efforts and diminish employer program fatigue, and to maximize job seeker placements through the sharing of hiring information.

Each Partner commits to cross-training of staff, as appropriate, and to providing other professional learning opportunities that promote continuous quality improvement.
Partners will further promote system integration to the maximum extent feasible through:

- Effective communication, information sharing, and collaboration with the one-stop operator,
- Joint planning, policy development, and system design processes,
- Commitment to the joint mission, vision, goals, strategies, and performance measures,
- The design and use of intake, assessment, referral, and case management processes,
- The use of common and/or linked data management systems and data sharing methods, as appropriate,
- Leveraging of resources, including other public agency and non-profit organization services,
- Participation in a continuous improvement process designed to boost outcomes and increase customer satisfaction, and
- Participation in regularly scheduled Partner meetings to exchange information in support of the above and encourage program and staff integration.

The primary principle of the referral system is to provide integrated and seamless delivery of services to workers, job seekers, and employers. In order to facilitate such a system, Partners agree to:

- Familiarize themselves with the basic eligibility and participation requirements, as well as with the available services and benefits offered, for each of the Partners' programs represented in the PA CareerLink® Berks County,
- Develop materials summarizing their program requirements and making them available for Partners and customers,
- Develop and utilize intake, eligibility determination, assessment, and registration processes,
- Provide substantive referrals to customers who are eligible for supplemental and complementary services and benefits under partner programs,

- Regularly evaluate ways to improve the referral process, including the use of customer satisfaction surveys,
- Commit to robust and ongoing communication required for an effective referral process, and
- Commit to actively follow up on the results of referrals.

Staff training occurs on a regular basis at the PA CareerLink® Berks County, encompassing training provider and community-based organizations providing overviews of their available services, team updates, regular EO/ADA/LEP training, and other training specific to the provision of services (case note training, case management, etc.). These trainings usually occur at the twice monthly full staff meetings. Additionally, "fun days" are also scheduled through-out the year (Holiday Luncheon, Cultural Food Day, Chocolate Fest, Staff Egg Hunt) to encourage staff cooperation and cohesion.

4.12. *How will the local board coordinate WIOA Title I workforce investment activities with adult education literacy activities under WIOA Title II?*

The state plan, consistent with federal WIOA guidelines, requires that as part of the WIOA Title II adult basic education application process, the local board receive opportunity to review applications for alignment with the local plan. Local boards are not directly involved in WIOA title II solicitation and procurement; the title II competition is run solely by PDE, and all funding decisions are made solely by PDE. The local boards will review applications submitted to PDE for WIOA title II funds for alignment with the goals and strategies of the local area plan, and then provide recommendations to PDE on ways to improve alignment, if applicable.

Federal regulations require PDE to establish the process by which the local boards will review the WIOA title II applications for alignment with the local area plan and submit recommendations to PDE for improvement of alignment. PDE will receive the applications for title II funds and then distribute applications to the appropriate LWDB for review. PDE will develop related review documents and rubrics and provide them to the local boards along with training on how to conduct the review and return the documents to PDE. All local boards must use the review documents and rubrics provided by PDE. Local boards have flexibility in determining which members of the local board participate in the review of applications. The review work can be led by local board staff but cannot be limited to local board staff. Board members connected to entities that submit applications for WIOA title II funds or who have other conflicts of interest cannot participate in the review.

In Spring of 2018 the WDB reviewed the only proposal for ABE Direct Services and the only proposal for Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education received for Berks County. The review team consisted of one board member and three board staff. The section reviewed in each was the "Alignment with Workforce" section. The review rubric was submitted to PDE on April 27, 2018. Award to RACC was announced via a press release on June 11, 2018.

Through the One-stop Memorandum of Understanding process the WDB is currently working with the local WIOA Title II service provider to design how local Title I and Title II activities will be coordinated. As mentioned in Section 4.10, reflecting the primary importance of coordinating WIOA Title I and Title II program services and strategies to avoid duplication and maximize our limited local resources, RACC's Director of Career Training, Community Education & Professional Development (who leads RACC's Title II program services) is an active member of WDB and has been an active participant in developing and approving this current plan. In addition, since her retirement in June 2018 RACC's

former President (a long-time WDB member) has continued as a non-Board member of the WDB's Policy, Planning & Priorities Committee. In this capacity, the WDB has had valuable direct access to her widely-acknowledged expertise in strategic planning and effective program coordination in the areas of workforce development and adult education.

4.13. *What services, activities, and program resources will be provided to participants, including those outlined at WIOA Sec. 3(24), Individuals with a Barrier to Employment, in the local area?*

The Welcome Orientation and Initial Assessment process was detailed under Section 4.11.

The Operator and its Partners will develop and implement a strategic affirmative outreach plan that may include:

- Specific steps to be taken by each partner,
- An affirmative outreach plan to the region's human resources professionals,
- An affirmative outreach and recruitment plan to the region's job seekers, including targeted efforts for populations most at-risk or most in need,
- An affirmative outreach and recruitment plan for out-of-school youth,
- Sector strategies and career pathways,
- Connections to registered apprenticeship,
- A plan for messaging to internal audiences,
- An affirmative outreach tool kit for Partners,
- Regular use of social media,
- Clear objectives and expected outcomes, and
- Leveraging of any statewide affirmative outreach materials relevant to the region.

Current affirmative outreach efforts include:

- All new applicants for unemployment compensation are directed to register on PA CareerLink® and told they can come to the PA CareerLink® office to accomplish this task. Claimants who are placed on PDLI's RESEA list are sent letters inviting them to an Orientation. From 07/01/19-03/15/20 1,749 letters were sent out and 1,026 attended orientation. RESEA, suspended since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, began virtually again in January 2021.
- Job seekers are invited to sign up for email notifications at orientation, at workshops, and with signage in the reception area and the resource room. Those who sign up receive information about job fairs and employer recruitment activities. On January 1st, 2021 there are 1,353 contacts on the list. 40% or 542 contacts are currently active. The average email open rate for January is 31%. Stats from mailings show that 31% of the emails are opened on mobile devices, 2% are opened on tablets, and 67% are opened on computers. The PA CareerLink® Administrator manages the Constant Contact affirmative outreach.
- Information about job fairs and recruitment activities is shared with any community organization that requests to be part of the email group. Organizations currently on the list include all of the libraries in the Berks County Library System, Reading Public Library, County of Berks Domestic Relations Office, Child Care Information Systems, Reading Muhlenberg Career and Tech Center, Berks Connections/Pretrial Services, Abilities in Motion, PathStone, Opportunity House, Reading Area Community College, County of Berks Veterans Affairs, Friend Inc., Hope Rescue Mission, Reading Housing Authority, Berks Community Health

Center, Joseph's People, YMCA, United Way of Berks County, Berks County Intermediate Unit, Berks Community Action Program, AARP Senior Community Service Employment Program, Berks County Assistance Office, Berks Coalition to End Homelessness, Kutztown University, Berks County Jail System Community Corrections Center, New Person Ministries, and Clare of Assisi House, United Community Services, Service Access Management, OVR, UPMC Community Care, MRC, and the Hispanic Center of Reading/Berks.

- Two large job fairs are held each year and provide information to the public about PA CareerLink® Berks County services.
- Classified ads are placed in the Sunday edition of the Reading Eagle featuring selected postings on PA CareerLink®; this ad includes the PA CareerLink® logo and address.
- Staff members participate in regularly scheduled community affirmative outreach activities throughout the program year. For example: County Human Services orientations (quarterly), Veterans Expos (one or two each year), Berks Agricultural Resource Network job fair (yearly), Berks Connections/Pretrial Services Community Resource Network (quarterly), Berks Connections/Pretrial Services job fairs (twice a year), Berks Coalition to End Homelessness meetings (monthly Sept - May), Be Wise (yearly). Participation in these events is based on staff availability.
- Welcome Orientations, workshops, recruitments and job fairs are posted in PA CareerLink® "events".
- Staff participates in rapid response information sessions for dislocated workers as scheduled by Rapid Response Coordination Services in Harrisburg.
- In October 2016 a Twitter account was created to market the job fairs.
- The Business Services Team has goals for affirmative outreach and services to employers. Business Services uses various methods to perform affirmative outreach to employers including: attending regional networking events, cold calling / e-mailing points of contact, advertisement on social media, and employer visits.

A full discussion of the one-stop commitment to equal opportunity is found in Section 4.4.

As detailed earlier eligible OVR customers receive multiple services from qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors that may include but not be limited to; diagnostic, vocational counseling and guidance, vocational evaluation, restoration, training, job placement and pre-employment training services for eligible and potentially eligible high school students with disabilities. OVR also provides multiple services to the business community designed to assist businesses with onboarding pre-screened qualified employees with disabilities. OVR on-boarding supports for a qualified new hire can include: reasonable accommodation consultation, initial probationary period wage reimbursement (On-the Job Training-OJT), referral on tax credits or deductions. OVR also offers no-cost consultation on the Americans with Disability Act (ADA), accessibility standards and helping a business to retain current employees following an accident, injury or disability.

4.14. *What services, activities, and program resources will be provided to businesses and employers in the local area?*

The Business Services Team (BST) is a sub-contracted service currently provided by EDSI. The contract pays for two staff members who report to a program manager. Additionally, staff from other teams (EARN, WIOA Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker and Youth, Veteran's program) also work cooperatively with this team.

The specific requirements of the Business Services Team in the PA CareerLink® Berks County are:

- Serve as a single point of contact for businesses, responding to all requests in a timely manner
- Provide information and services related to Unemployment Insurance taxes and claims
- Assist with disability and communication accommodations, including job coaches
- Conduct outreach regarding local workforce system's services and products
- Conduct on-site Rapid Response activities regarding closures and downsizings
- Develop On-the-Job Training (OJT) and Transitional Employment (TE) contracts
- Provide access to labor market information
- Provide customized recruitment and job applicant screening, assessment and referral services
- Provide employer and industry cluster-driven Occupational Skills Training through Individual Training Accounts with eligible training providers
- Assist with the interpretation of labor market information
- Conduct job fairs
- Develop customized training opportunities to meet specific employer and/or industry cluster needs
- Use of one-stop center facilities for recruiting and interviewing job applicants
- Consult on human resources issues
- Coordinate with employers to develop and implement layoff aversion strategies
- Post job vacancies in the state labor exchange system and take and fill job postings
- Provide information regarding disability awareness issues
- Provide incumbent worker upgrade training through various modalities
- Provide information regarding workforce development initiatives and programs
- Provide information regarding assistive technology and communication accommodations

- Develop, convene, or implement industry or sector partnerships

As discussed earlier the Employer Outreach Team (EOT) was established in 2016. The EOT is comprised of individuals from Business Services, EARN, Young Adult, OVR, the WDB, BCPS and other community agencies that meet monthly to discuss and share business/employer intelligence. The goals of the team are to ensure employers receive a consistent message from the team members, that employer visits are coordinated to maximize outreach efforts and diminish employer program fatigue, and to maximize job seeker placements through the sharing of hiring information.

Much of the BST performance requirements is based on employer engagement and is measured through the following:

- Overall market penetration
- Manufacturing sector market penetration
- Follow-up with one to one discussion with employers that completed the Employer Best Practice survey. These discussions will present targeted support as appropriate based on the results to the survey.
- Due to COVID-19 in-person job fairs are not currently possible. The BST will research best practices to offer alternatives to job seekers and employers with the target of

implementation during the 2nd Half of PY2020.A requirement to maintain at least one active WorkKeys profiler certification

- The production of a bi-monthly Market Intelligence Report providing "intelligence" gained through employer and other contacts This report will have two parts:
    - A written activity report which will include any reports from the Employer Best Practices Report Follow-up.
    - A live discussion with WDB staff and board members and other interested community partners. Direction on sectors to emphasize each month will be provided by the WDB.

WDB staff administers the WIOA Title I "Employment Retention/Layoff Aversion Strategy" incumbent worker training funds budget, employer request for funds application and approval process, and applicable matching funds reimbursement. BST and WDB staff cooperatively participate in new employer recruitment and often jointly participate in tours of employer facilities. After these initial joint efforts, the relationship is "handed-off" to the logical staff (BST, WDB) to maintain based on employer level of engagement in the workforce system.

The Berks County WDB has a well-established and ongoing best practice of working closely with our education and economic development partners to recognize the needs of local employers (see sections 1.2 and 1.3) as a first step leading to effective collaboration with these partners on the planning and delivery of multiple events and initiatives to further and more completely understand those needs. Such Business/Education community events include the annual *Berks Manufacturing Summit*, the annual "*What's So Cool About Manufacturing?"* video contest for middle school students (now in its fifth year in Berks County with the largest audience response of any of the regional contests statewide for two years running), and an annual *Career Ready Berks Symposium* every school year.

Inaugurated in 2017, the *Berks Manufacturing Summit* is held annually and is designed to celebrate the region's robust manufacturing footprint by providing information on industry trends and peer to peer conversation. Summit partners has included the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance (GRCA) under the auspices of the Greater Reading Advanced Manufacturing Next Generation Industry Partnership, the Berks County WDB, Reading Area Community College (RACC), Manufacturers Resource Center (MRC), Penn State Berks, and the Berks County Industrial Development Authority. Manufacturing business leaders are provided an interactive forum to share insights, concerns, and recommendations for practical solutions to varied workforce and commerce issues, both current and future, impacting the sector's continued sustainability and growth in the Greater Berks County region.

The Career Ready Berks (CRB) Symposium annually highlights the enhancement and innovation of the CRB Pathways Framework. This framework is based on the Pennsylvania Department of Education career education and capital equipment, workforce standards which include career awareness, work-based and post-secondary learning opportunities, and employability skills and financial literacy. This framework was developed by the Career Ready Berks Alliance which includes the following partners: Berks Business Education Coalition (BBEC), Berks Career & Technology Center (BCTC), Reading Muhlenberg Career & Technology Center (RMCTC), Berks County WDB, 18 Berks County School Districts, GRCA, Northeast Berks Chamber of Commerce, National Center for College & Career Transitions (NC3T), RACC, and the Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU). Attended by professionals representing businesses and organizations from industry sectors that employ career paths in Business Information Technology, Science and Health, Arts and Communication and Engineering and Industrial

Technology disciplines, the summit typically includes presentations from national experts on K-14 career readiness initiatives and real-life testimonials on the career exploration benefits of the Career Ready Berks framework.

Through pursuit, acquisition and utilization of PADOL&I Business Education Partnership Grants, the Berks County WDB partners with and financially subsidizes funding for:

- The Manufacturers Resource Center (MRC) to support the successful Berks/Schuylkill regional annual "*What's So Cool About Manufacturing?"* video contest. The annual contest has grown to include all twenty-three Berks County middle schools and has become the largest contest in terms of participation of all statewide regional contests. This career awareness program is designed in collaboration with employers and educators to help improve the image of manufacturing as a career choice and to recruit more young people to vocational and technical schools and community colleges that feed talent to the manufacturing industry. Student-produced short videos profile local companies and the career opportunities that they offer. These videos are then judged by an expert panel and online public voting to determine the best in multiple categories followed by an awards ceremony, attended by students, parents, and the business-education community, to recognize and celebrate each student team's achievement.
- Also under development of the MRC, The PA Dream Team Berks County program introduces 5-12 grade students to the value of technical training and STEM education, and to the many career opportunities available in modern manufacturing. PA Dream Team is comprised of young adult professionals in STEM careers at area manufacturers who are trained to tell their personal career stories in the classroom and other venues throughout the school year, to educate and excite students about manufacturing careers and the STEM curriculum and technical education opportunities available. Due to pandemic-related delays, delivery rollout will commence virtually in Spring 2021.
- The Berks (BCTC) and Reading-Muhlenberg (RMCTC) Career & Technology Centers to deliver Career Exploration Camps. At the conclusion of the 6th, 7th or 8th grades, students will have the opportunity to participate in a week-long Career Exploration Camp to take place at the career and technology center serving the students' sending school district – BCTC or RMCTC. The camp is a five-day program, offered after the school year ends in June, designed to engage youth in pathways through career specific hands-on activities and projects with a goal of generating interest among this group to attend the career and technology center. As defined by the PA Department of Education (PDE) and in alignment with the Career Ready Berks Alliance framework, Engineering/Industrial Technology and Health/Science Career Cluster pathways, including crossovers to Computer Systems/Information Technology, are considered primary clusters providing STEM related career advancement and will be the priority focal points of the camps.

  Ongoing uncertainty regarding allowable pandemic-era 2020-21 school year activities has led the Berks WDB, acting as fiscal agent and on behalf of RMCT and BCTC, to garner L&I approval for the repurposing of grant funds for Oculus "virtual reality" readers and related technology for each center's Outreach Program as a hybrid learning alternative to in-person career camps for virtual career education exploration. With the increasing movement toward incorporating virtual technology modes of discovery into a student's learning environment, hybrid learning methodologies utilizing such tools as Oculus Virtual Reality equipment will afford the CTCs the capability to expand the student participation footprint that traditional

face-to-face camps must limit by their nature, by bringing the awareness of career and related education opportunities directly into their home school classrooms. Additionally, this virtual technology could guarantee greater equity in access to student-parent aware-ness of career-oriented education thus providing foundational career and educational attainment understanding to upcoming Berks County student populations for years to come.

- The BCIU for the placement of a Business-Education Career Pathways Partnership Liaison as part of the Career Ready Berks Alliance initiative. To build active partnerships, a business-education liaison will communicate needs and current initiatives among employers, educators and apprenticeship sponsors and facilitate active collaboration of with all stakeholders through meetings and events. A primary focus of the implementation liaison is the development of Pathway Advisory Groups in the five career clusters defined by the PDE. These Pathway Advisory Groups serve to advise educational organizations on workforce needs, skill needs, and suggested curriculum development. Additionally, the liaison will be responsible for identifying, recruiting and promoting business and educator contributions linking students, parents, and educators in all 18 Berks County school districts to hands on experiences and career awareness opportunities available through the application of an on-line "clearing house" platform known as Career Ready Berks. This project component implements elements of strategic planning that has been taking place under the collaboration of the Career Ready Berks Alliance, a group of regional stakeholders partnering to strengthen and enhance collaboration among school districts, career and technical centers, postsecondary institutions, employers, workforce agencies, and other community stakeholders to create a county-wide, self-sustaining framework that builds and supports rigorous career pathway exploration for all learners; leverages and aligns resources; coordinates and expands communication among stakeholders; supports regional workforce needs and strengthens our economy.
- The annual Career Ready Berks Symposium held every school year to grow and sustain the Career Ready Berks Career Pathways Framework. While the state-mandated COVID-19 large-gathering precautions caused an interruption in the timing of the summit in 2020, the Berks County WDB maintains its presence on the CRB steering committee and fully expects this event to return on an annual basis in the foreseeable future.

Through utilization of Teacher in the Workplace Grants, the Berks County WDB has partnered with BCIU to provide an innovative approach to the coordination and expansion of experiential programs designed to increase Berks County K-12 educator exposure to diverse internship opportunities in the greater Berks County region in workplace experiences during school year professional development/in-service days and a summer five-day format. These experiences serve as a perception-building exercise that will benefit a better understanding of how career-related curriculum development can positively impact the fundamental student knowledge, skills, and abilities that employers consider essential for successful employment. Unfortunately, due to pandemic-driven state budget shortfalls, funding for these grants has been suspended and their future availability unsure. However, the Berks County WDB will continue to assist BCIU with the ongoing expansion of the Career Ready Berks website which includes current labor market information provided by the WDB, other career planning resources, and an innovative web-based matching platform to help connect local businesses interested in providing a broad range of career development opportunities for teachers with our 18 local school districts as well as private schools in the area.

4.15. *How will the local board coordinate WIOA Title I workforce investment activities with the provision of transportation and other appropriate supportive services in the local area?*

PA CareerLink® Berks County WIOA employment planners are responsible for coordinating services and providing referrals to other state and local agencies offering supportive services such as:

- Linkages to community services,
- Assistance with transportation (normally through the provision of bus passes or gas cards),
- Childcare and dependent care,
- Assistance with housing,
- Needs-related payments,
- Assistance with educational testing,
- Reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities,
- Legal aid services,
- Referrals to health care,
- Assistance with uniforms or other appropriate work attire and work-related tools,
- Assistance with books, fees, school supplies, and other necessary items for students enrolled in postsecondary education,
- Payments and fees for employment and training-related applications, tests, and certifications.

Providers of WIOA Title I services in the PA CareerLink® Berks County must develop a resource network insuring that the availability of supportive services in Berks County is made available to participants in the one-stop delivery system.

The PA CareerLink® Berks County WIOA employment planner will meet with each participant to assess the need for supportive services. The following are supportive service requirements:

- Participant must be a WIOA Title I eligible individual.
- Participant must be participating in WIOA Title I Adult/Dislocated worker training services or Title I Youth services.
- Participant must be unable to obtain supportive services through other programs providing such services.

Each participant will be given individualized case management services and plan development in order to eliminate possible dependency on supportive services. Supportive services award should be based on individual participant needs, plan development, and in compliance with this policy and WIOA and any subsequent Federal and/or Commonwealth of Pennsylvania clarifications.

WIOA Title I Youth

The provision of support services is one of the fourteen youth elements in WIOA. It is the policy of the WDB that the provider of WIOA youth services in the PA CareerLink® Berks County will budget an appropriate amount of funds to provide those supportive services that may not be readily available from community resources.

WIOA Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker

It is the policy of the Berks County WDB to provide funds for supportive services that may not be readily available from community resources in the following cases:

- When funds have been specifically budgeted for supportive services.

- As a requirement of specific funding:
  - From time to time non-WIOA formula funding may be acquired by the WDB. If supportive services are to be offered as a requirement of such funding the WDB will ensure such services are offered and provided.

5. COMPLIANCE

5.1. *Describe the cooperative agreements that define how all local area service providers will carry out the requirements for integration of and access to the entire set of services available in the local area one-stop delivery system.*

In general, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is executed between the Berks County Workforce Development Board (WDB), PA CareerLink® Berks County One-Stop Partners (Partners), and the Chief Elected Official (CEO), of the County of Berks. They are collectively referred to as the "Parties" in the MOU.

This MOU is developed to confirm the understanding of the Parties regarding the operation and management of the PA CareerLink® Berks County. The WDB provides local oversight of workforce programming in Berks County.

The WDB, with the agreement of the CEO, has, through a competitive process in accordance with the Uniform Guidance, WIOA and its implementing regulations, and Local procurement laws and regulations, selected Educational Data Systems, Inc. as the one-stop operator for the PA CareerLink® Berks County.

The One-Stop Operating Budget and Infrastructure Funding Agreement establish a financial plan, including terms and conditions, to fund the services and operating costs of the PA CareerLink® Berks County. The Parties to the MOU agree that joint funding is an essential foundation for an integrated service delivery system and necessary to maintain the PA CareerLink® Berks County.

The Vision, Mission, System Structure, Terms and Conditions, One-Stop Operating Budget, and Infrastructure Funding Agreement outlined in the MOU reflect the commitment of the Parties to their job seeker and business customers, as well as to the overall success of the PA CareerLink® Berks County.

OVR will be signatory on the WDB/One-Stop Partners Memorandum of Understanding. This agreement encourages cooperation and collaboration among all partners in the effort to make the PA CareerLink® Berks County a seamless operation with regard to customer flow, service delivery and customer referral.

Two examples of the effort towards integration include:

- The OVR Job Developer in Berks County is a member of the Employer Outreach Team in the PA CareerLink® Berks County. This team is comprised of individuals from Business Services, EARN, Young Adult, BCPS, OVR and the WDB who come together monthly to discuss and share business/employer intelligence. The goals of the team are to ensure employers receive a consistent message from the team members, that employer visits are coordinated to maximize outreach efforts and diminish employer program fatigue, and to maximize job seeker placements through the sharing of hiring information.

- OVR continues to be an active partner in the Summer Work Employment and Assessment Program (SWEAP) targeted to youth with disabilities through funding approximately 50% of the youth in the program.

The *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee* is a standing committee of the board consisting of board members (including the District Administrator for the **Berks-Schuylkill District Office of Pennsylvania's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)** who co-chaired the group) and off-board members with expertise in human resources or serving/advocating for the community of individuals with disabilities**.** While respecting all aspects of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, the focus of this committee is to increase the percentage of individuals with a disability in the workforce by offering meaningful employment opportunities through strong partnerships with businesses in greater Reading and Berks County. The committee began meeting in program year 2017 and has held two Employer Symposia (September of 2018 and 2019) designed to provide useful information to employers concerning the recruitment and employment of individuals with disabilities. September was chosen as a lead-in to National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). Due to COVID-19 in October 2020 the committee issued an electronic newsletter with links to information and agencies that can assist employers in the recruitment and employment of individuals with disabilities. The committee (through the WDB) is in the process of issuing a Request For Proposal for a study to (a.) better understand the reasons working age adults with disabilities in Berks County are disproportionately not employed or are under-employed, both from the individual's perspective and the potential employer's perspective; (b.) to understand how COVID-19 has affected employer's willingness to hire this population and the individual's ability/desire to obtain employment; and (c.) to provide a context for the Board concerning the development of strategies to promote the recruitment, hiring and retention of individuals with disabilities.

5.2. *What is the process the local board uses to ensure the collection of the debts of lower-tier sub-recipients, because of audits?*

The Berks WDB requires all subrecipients subject to the Single Audit provisions of t**he OMB Uniform Administrative requirements to submit a copy of the audit report and correctiv**e action plan to the board. The WDB will review the audit report and corrective action plan for any findings related to WIOA or state funds provided to the subcontractor to determine if it contains any questioned cost.

The WDB will issue, in writing, the results of its review, giving the audited entity 30 days from issuance of the letter to submit an appeal of any findings. That appeal will be a request for a formal review of the final determination before an impartial hearing officer of the Berks WDB. The debt collection process will be stayed pending a decision regarding the appeal. However, the debt becomes delinquent on the first day following issuance of the letter, whether or not an appeal has been filed.

Interest on the delinquent debt will begin to accrue at that time according to the prevailing rate determined by the U.S. Treasury and will accrue during the entire time of the appeal process. This interest is waived if the debt is paid before the 31st day following issuance of the final determination. If the appeal is upheld, all interest will also be waived. However, if the appeal results in any disallowed costs, interest will be assessed on the amount disallowed.

If no appeal of the final determination is filed, a lump-sum repayment from non-federal funds is due to WDB within 30 days after issuance of the final determination. The board, with approval from the PA Department of Labor & Industry, Bureau of Workforce Development Administration (BWDA), may negotiate short-term installment agreements in lieu of lump-sum payment as long as the disallowed cost were not a result of:

- Willful disregard of the requirements of WIOA, gross negligence, or failure to observe accepted standards of administration;
- Incidents of fraud, malfeasance, or misfeasance; and
- Illegal actions or irregularities that must be reported under OMB Uniform Guidance.

Upon full repayment of the outstanding debt, the Berks WDB will issue a satisfactory resolution letter acknowledging receipt of repayment, closing the audit process. However, the board reserves the right to reopen the audit in the event the BWDA disagrees with the final resolution. Should repayment not be received within the 30-day period, a second notice will be sent by certified mail. This notice will state that repayment must be submitted within 30 days of issuance of the letter. It will also state that interest on the outstanding debt began to accrue on the first day following issuance of the final determination.

If repayment of the outstanding debt is not received within 30 days after issuance of the second notice, a final notice will be sent by certified mail. The final notice will state that the board must receive repayment within 10 days of issuance. It will also list the amount of accrued interest due on the debt. The notice will also state that should repayment of the debt and interest not be received, appropriate legal and/or programmatic sanctions may be instituted. Any legal action will be initiated by the County of Berks Solicitor's office.

5.3. *What action(s) is the local board taking (or will take) towards becoming or remaining a high-performing board?*

The WDB will implement the actions necessary to become or remain a high-performing board once the Commonwealth has released guidance related to high-performing local boards.

The Board is currently functioning as a high-performing Board in that it consistently achieves the following:

- Attains the Governor's goals as described in the PA Combined Plan;
- Meets the local area negotiated federal performance goals;
- Sustains fiscal integrity;
- Receives successful monitoring reports and other evaluations by federal and Commonwealth oversight staff;
- Researches new and/or improved methods to assist individuals with barriers to employment;
- Achieves training expenditure targets; and
- Develops sector initiatives

The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, Training and Industry Partnership Committee, and PA CareerLink® Berks County Employer Outreach Team have been recognized by OEO as Best Practices.

In the future, it will implement the actions necessary to remain a high-performing Board in accordance with any guidance that may be issued by the Commonwealth. In the meantime, it is researching the following types of activities for action:

- Expanding its collaboration with the other local workforce boards that are contiguous to it, including those in the Northeast, South Central, and Lehigh Valley Regions, to implement broader-based regional workforce initiatives; and
- Increasing the use of technology to further improve access for customers, including returning citizens, those with disabilities, and others with barriers to employment.

5.4. *What is the process the local board uses to provide an opportunity to have input into the development of the local plan, particularly for representatives of business, education, labor organizations, program partners, public agencies, and community stakeholders?*

The WDB and its *Policy, Planning, & Priorities Committee* which is responsible for developing this plan includes experienced and engaged membership from a number of private employers representing various industry sectors, economic development, higher education, labor, community-based organizations (CBOs) and public service agencies. A 30-day public comment period (beginning February 5, 2021) and a public meeting (February 19, 2021) will provide ample opportunity for those entities not represented on the Policy, Planning, & Priorities Committee to provide input to the plan.

In addition, the Berks County WDB's current Local Area Plan has been publicly posted since the modification became effective on January 1, 2020 (and continues to be posted as this plan was being developed). This has proven to be a quite useful practice in generating informal dialogue with and input from numerous interested parties over the past year. Much of this dialogue has informed the WDB's *Policy, Planning, & Priorities Committee* development of this local plan.

5.5. *What is the process the local board uses to provide a 30-day public comment period prior to plan submission?*

The Berks WDB posted the proposed local plan on the County of Berks website – Berks WDB page for public review and comment from February 5, 2021 to March 7, 2021. The posting of the plan was advertised by official public notice published in The Reading Eagle on February 5, 2021. The public notice also advertised the public meeting for comment held virtually on February 19, 2021 at 8:00 a.m.

The plan was additionally made available for public comment as part of the South East PA regional plan comment period to begin February 24, 2021.

The public notice of the plan specified that public comments be submitted to the designated WDB staff member at jwmoser@countyofberks.com. These comments will be reviewed by Berks County WDB staff as they are received and a summary of the comments and any changes to the plan as a result of this comment will be posted on the County of Berks website on the Berks WDB page.

Any comments that represent disagreement to the plan are to be summarized and included as an attachment to the Berks WDB local plan to be submitted to the state as part of the required South East PA regional plan no later than April 2, 2021.

Public comments to be added after the public comment period.

One public comment was received:

Section 1.4: *"The report mentions the very positive partnership between OVR and the Berks CTC. As you noted, an interagency agreement between BCTC and OVR was created prior to WIOA changes in 2014, and the program continued successfully for over six years. I wanted to point out that the interagency agreement was converted to a more standard Provider Agreement between BCTC and OVR in 2019. OVR converted to Provider Agreements to achieve consistency on a statewide basis and to ensure compliance with WIOA (and on-going technical assistance).*

Bottom line: although there continues to be a very positive relationship between OVR and BCTC, the type of agreement and the provision of services have been updated to be more line with WIOA requirements based on a monitoring assessment of the interagency agreement. BCTC is now operating as a PETS provider, similar to other organizations like AHEDD, Goodwill and AIM."

For received public comments and responses regarding the regional plan, refer to the Fiscal Years 2021-2024 WIOA Regional Plan – Southeast PA Attachment 1 – Regional Plan Public Comment.

ATTESTATIONS

By checking the box adjacent to each line item, the local board attests to ensuring the compliance components and documents listed are (or will be) in place and effective prior to June 30, 2021.

The following components and documents, including local workforce system policies, must be reviewed and revised as to be aligned with WIOA for the current planning cycle. Each item must be available to L&I at any time during the planning process and monitoring or auditing processes. L&I is not requiring copies of such documents to be attached to regional or local area plans at this time.

X The Berks County Local Workforce Development Area attests that each of the below referenced policies contain any required language or content and were last revised, if necessary, by this plan's effective date.

NA Agreement between all counties and other local governments, if applicable, establishing the consortium of local and chief elected officials.

NA Agreement between the chief elected official(s) and the fiscal agent, if a fiscal agent is designated.

X Agreement between the local area elected official(s) and the LWDB.

X LWDB policy and process that provides for nomination, appointment and removal of board members; resolutions; bylaws; code of conduct; and conflict of interest.

X Financial management policy and process including cost allocation plan; internal controls; cash management; receipts of goods; cost reimbursement; inventory and equipment; program income; travel reimbursement; audit requirements and resolution; annual report; property management; debt collection; and allowable costs.

X Local area procurement policy that must describe formal procurement procedures.

X Local area MOU.

X Program management policies and processes addressing, at a minimum, layoff assistance; equal opportunity for customers; complaints and grievances; supportive services; needs related payments; incentives; file management; eligibility determination and verification; self-sufficiency criteria; self-attestation and certification random sampling; priority of service; stipends and incentives; training verification/refunds; individual training accounts; contracts for training services; statewide training providers list and eligibility verification; local area training provider list and eligibility criteria and process; "additional assistance" definition; transitional jobs thresholds; work-based training policies including incumbent worker training, OJT, CT, and apprenticeship.

X Risk management policy and process including records retention and public access; public records requests; monitoring, grievance; incident; and disaster recovery plan.

X Human resources policy and process including employee classification; benefits; holidays and PTO; recruitment and selection; employee development; discipline; layoffs, terminations and severance; sexual harassment; and equal opportunity and non-discrimination.

NA Professional services contract(s) for administrative services such as staffing and payroll, if applicable.

Attachment 1

WIOA Title I Programs

The Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry, or L&I, negotiates WIOA Title I programs performance goals with the U. S. Department of Labor on a two-year program cycle, which aligns with the WIOA planning requirement of reviewing WIOA Local Plans every two years. In an effort designed to meet or exceed the state WIOA performance goals, PA negotiates these same goals with PA's local workforce development areas, or LWDA, to optimally set each local area's WIOA Title I performance goal levels so that, collectively, the state negotiated performance goals are met or exceeded.

The *WIOA Title I Programs Performance Accountability Table* is for the benefit of the public and must be updated accordingly. Local boards must edit the table's two columns with the appropriate program year(s) to correctly match the **most recent*** LWDA-negotiated performance goals and attained performance results. This completed table must be publicly posted with the local plan. The LWDB does not need to perform a WIOA plan modification as this table is revised; an email notification to local area workforce development stakeholders will suffice.

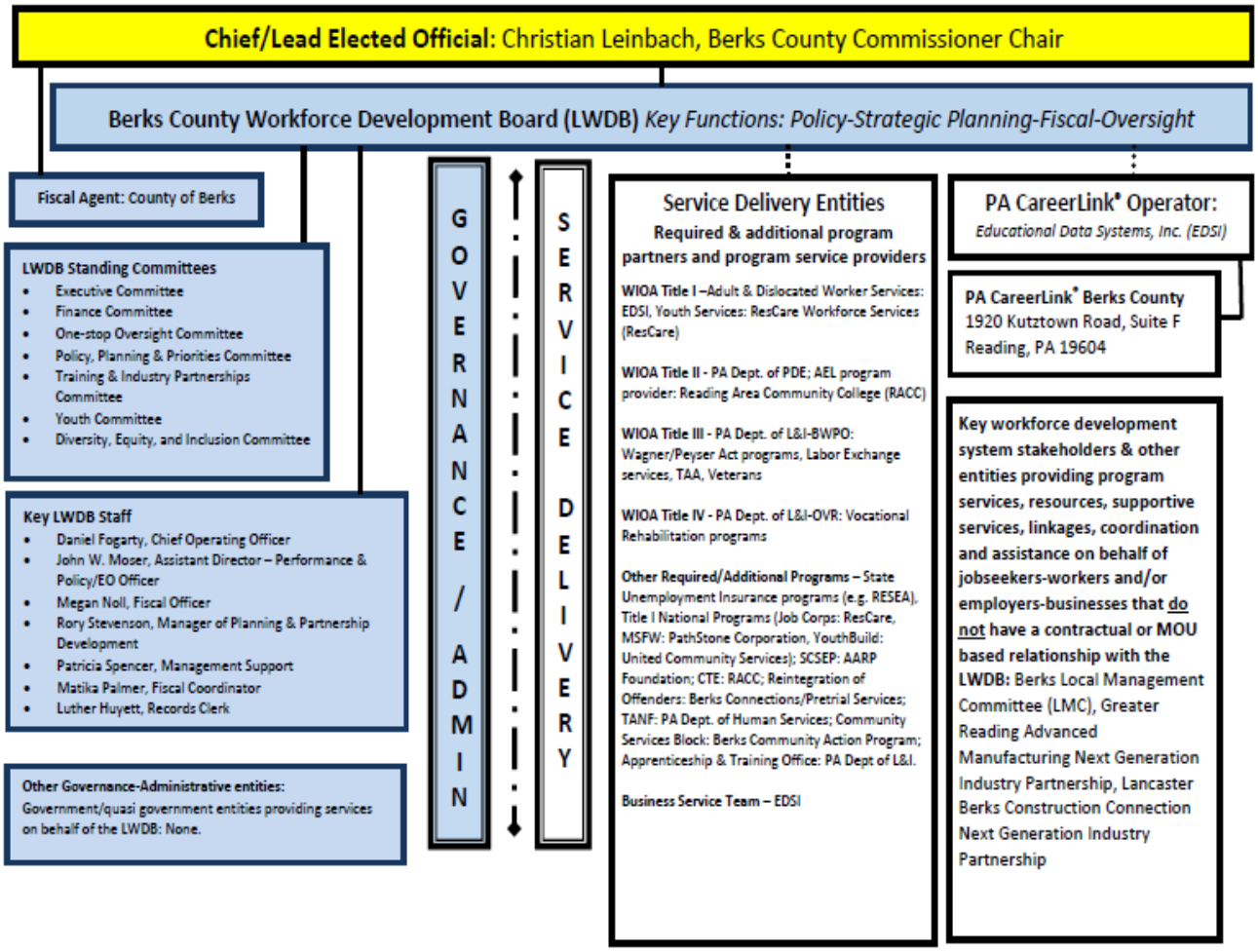
LWDA Name: Berks County Workforce Development Board		
WIOA Title I Programs (Adult-Dislocated Worker-Youth) Performance Measures	**LWDA's WIOA Title I Programs Negotiated Performance Goals - *Program Year(s): 2020 – 2021***	**LWDA's WIOA Title I Programs Attained Performance Results - *Program Year: 2019***
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	**Negotiated Goals**	**Attained Performance**
Adult	**80%**	**84.3%**
Dislocated Worker	**80%**	**87.0%**
Youth	**73%**	**74.6%**
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	**Negotiated Goals**	**Attained Performance**
Adult	**75%**	**75.4%**
Dislocated Worker	**78%**	**77.5%**
Youth	**77%**	**77.0%**
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	**Negotiated Goals**	**Attained Performance**
Adult	**$6,500**	**$6,274**
Dislocated Worker	**$8,100**	**$8,682**
Youth	**$3,900**	**$3,884**
Credential Attainment Rate	**Negotiated Goals**	**Attained Performance**
Adult	**74%**	**73.7%**
Dislocated Worker	**83%**	**83.3%**
Youth	**72%**	**72.2%**
Measurable Skill Gains	**Negotiated Goals**	**Attained Performance**
Adult	**65%**	**65.5%**
Dislocated Worker	**67%**	**67.4%**
Youth	**40%**	**40.0%**

Attachment 2

Organizational Chart

WIOA Berks County Workforce Development System Organizational Chart

The organizational chart is for the benefit of the public and must be used to describe the attributes of the local workforce development system. This chart should be reviewed annually for revisions. The local board may supplement this model with clarifying charts. If multiple pages are needed to represent the local system ensure that "Governance/Administrative" and "Service Delivery" information is displayed on separate pages respectfully. Use of model sub-titles is required. Publicly post the organizational chart with the local plan. A WIOA plan modification is not required when revision occurs with this document.



Attachment 3

Program Partner/Provider List Effective 2/1/21

Local Workforce Development Boards, or LWDBs, are requested to publicly post the PA CareerLink® Workforce Service Delivery System Program Partner/Provider List to address the public's need for access to service as mandated by the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act, or WIOA. The LWDB should ensure that the Program Partner/Provider List reflects the current PA CareerLink® Memoranda of Understanding(s). Local area plan modifications concerning this subject matter are not required to be submitted to the Department if the list is posted on the LWDB public website.

Program Name	**Program Authorization**	**Local Area Partner/Provider**
POC address	**POC telephone**	**POC website/email**
Wagner-Peyser, Trade, Rapid Response, Jobs for Veterans, Foreign Labor Certification	Wagner-Peyser Act, Trade Act, Rapid Response, Jobs for Veterans State Grant, Foreign Labor Certification	PA Department of Labor & Industry
1920 Kutztown Road, Suite F, Reading, PA 19604	610-988-1378	jnichols@pa.gov
Unemployment Compensation	State Unemployment Compensation Programs	PA Department of Labor & Industry
1920 Kutztown Road, Suite F, Reading, PA 19604	717-783-7107	karencam@pa.gov
WIOA Title I Adult/Dislocated Worker	WIOA Title I	County of Berks/EDSI
1920 Kutztown Road, Suite F, Reading, PA 19604	610-988-1305	aames@bccl.org
WIOA Title I Youth	WIOA Title I	County of Berks/EDSI
1920 Kutztown Road, Suite F, Reading, PA 19604	610-988-1387	acolumbo@bccl.org
EARN	TANF	County of Berks/EDSI
1920 Kutztown Road, Suite F, Reading, PA 19604	610-898-6846	ereadinger@bccl.org
Berks County Assistance Office	TANF	PA Department of Human Services
1920 Kutztown Road, Suite F, Reading, PA 19604	610-736-4252	alreid@pa.gov
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation	Rehabilitation Act Title I parts A and B programs	PA Department of Labor & Industry

1920 Kutztown Road, Suite F, Reading, PA 19604	610-621-5800	cahomolash@pa.gov
Adult Education and Family Literacy	Title II-Adult Education and Family Literacy Act	Reading Area Community College
1920 Kutztown Road, Suite F, Reading, PA 19604	610-372-4271	cline@racc.edu
Vocational Education	Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act	Reading Area Community College
10 S. 2nd Street, Reading, PA 19602	610-372-4721	mmitchell@racc.edu
YouthBuild	WIOA Title I	United Community Services
1251 N. Front Street, Reading, PA 19601	484-755-5003	rbradley@ucswf.org
Senior Community Service Employment Program	Title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965	AARP Foundation
147 N. 5th Street, 2nd Floor, Reading, PA 19601	484-949-8716	vbrown@aarp.org
Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Program	WIOA Title I	PathStone Corporation
1920 Kutztown Road, Suite F, Reading, PA 19604	610-925-5600	ndagostino@pathstone.org
Employment & Training Activities	Community Services Block Grant	Berks Community Action Program, Inc.
645 Penn Street, Reading, PA 19601	610-376-6571	lberringer@bcapberks.org
Native Americans Programs	WIOA Title I	Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center, Inc.
1855 New Hope Street Norristown, PA 19401	800-341-3577	lgarrett@cotraic.org
Job Corp Transition	WOA Title I	ResCare Workforce Services
1920 Kutztown Road, Suite F, Reading, PA 19604	216-570-0390	Andre.King@rescare.com
Job Corp Outreach/Admissions	WOA Title I	Keystone Job Corp Center
1920 Kutztown Road, Suite F, Reading, PA 19604	570-788-1164x161	kking@adamsaai.com

Rebuilding Reentrants and Reading (R3)		Berks Connections/Pretrial Services
19 N. 6th Street, 4th Floor, Reading, PA 19601	484-260-3860	pkershner@bcpsreentry.org
Apprenticeship and Training Office		PA Department of Labor & Industry
651 Boas Street, Harrisburg, PA 17121	717-787-6997	tloew@pa.gov

Attachment 4

Supporting Data

Local area plans have multiple sections requiring various data methodologies needed to support narrative. When documenting data methodologies, plan drafters are encouraged to reference the data location in the local area plan prompt narrative and move referenced data to this attachment. The *Supporting Data* attachment must be submitted with the local area plan and publicly posted with all other supporting documentation as referenced in the WIOA Regional and Local Area Plan Guide.

Local boards must enter the prerequisite information (i.e. LWDA name, section number with prompt, input data referenced in the plan's prompt narrative and cite data source) if using this form.

If a local board does not use this form, the LWDB must make note on this attachment that "all data is cited in the local plan narrative."

Section 1.2 How are skills gaps defined in the local area? Provide a description of the skills that are required to meet the needs of employers in region/local area?

2019 PSSA Grade 8 - Berks Middle School Level Math Proficiency Results*

* Proficiency summary data do not include students who were enrolled in the school after October 1, home schooled, excluded from school aggregation, EL students who were enrolled for less than one year in a school, or
* Information is not displayed for student populations of fewer than 11.

High-Low Rank	District Name	School Name	Subject	Group	Grade	Number Scored	Percent Advanced	Percent Proficient	Percent Basic	Percent Below Basic	Percent Cumulative Adv/Proficient
1	BOYERTOWN AREA SD	BOYERTOWN AREA MS-EAST	Math	All Students	8	269	22.7	36.4	24.2	16.7	59.1
2	BOYERTOWN AREA SD	BOYERTOWN AREA MS-WEST	Math	All Students	8	248	18.5	31.5	28.6	21.4	50.0
3	WYOMISSING AREA SD	WYOMISSING AREA JSHS	Math	All Students	8	131	23.7	22.9	26.7	26.7	46.6
4	WILSON SD	WILSON WEST MS	Math	All Students	8	225	16.4	28.4	30.7	24.4	44.8
5	OLEY VALLEY SD	OLEY VALLEY MS	Math	All Students	8	128	23.4	20.3	29.7	26.6	43.7
6	SCHUYLKILL VALLEY SD	SCHUYLKILL VALLEY MS	Math	All Students	8	152	10.5	30.9	38.8	19.7	41.4
7	KUTZTOWN AREA SD	KUTZTOWN AREA MS	Math	All Students	8	90	6.7	34.4	37.8	21.1	41.1
8	BRANDYWINE HEIGHTS AREA SD	BRANDYWINE HEIGHTS INTRMD/MS	Math	All Students	8	114	11.4	28.9	33.3	26.3	40.3
9	TWIN VALLEY SD	TWIN VALLEY MS	Math	All Students	8	214	11.7	28.5	33.6	26.2	40.2
10	TULPEHOCKEN AREA SD	TULPEHOCKEN JSHS	Math	All Students	8	96	8.3	31.3	36.5	24.0	39.6
11	FLEETWOOD AREA SD	FLEETWOOD MS	Math	All Students	8	201	15.9	22.9	33.8	27.4	38.8
12	WILSON SD	WILSON SOUTHERN MS	Math	All Students	8	220	12.3	25.9	28.6	33.2	38.2
13	CONRAD WEISER AREA SD	CONRAD WEISER MS	Math	All Students	8	176	6.8	29.5	35.2	28.4	36.3
14	EXETER TOWNSHIP SD	EXETER TWP JHS	Math	All Students	8	274	8.8	25.5	32.5	33.2	34.3
	Pennsylvania Statewide Results	2019 8th Grade PSSA Mathematics					9.9	22.3	28.2	39.6	32.2
15	DANIEL BOONE AREA SD	DANIEL BOONE AREA MS	Math	All Students	8	243	12.3	19.8	38.3	29.6	32.1
16	GOVERNOR MIFFLIN SD	GOVERNOR MIFFLIN MS	Math	All Students	8	330	6.4	19.4	27.6	46.7	25.8
17	MUHLENBERG SD	MUHLENBERG MS	Math	All Students	8	299	4.0	18.7	24.4	52.8	22.7
18	ANTIETAM SD	ANTIETAM MS/HS	Math	All Students	8	82	4.9	15.9	36.6	42.7	20.8
19	HAMBURG AREA SD	HAMBURG AREA MIDDLE SCHOOL	Math	All Students	8	150	2.7	18.0	35.3	44.0	20.7
20	READING SD	READING INTERMEDIATE HS	Math	All Students	8	1272	0.2	2.7	12.9	84.2	2.9

Source: https://www.education.pa.gov/DataAndReporting/Assessments/Pages/PSSA-Results.aspx

Study Links:

- *Berks County Disconnected Young Adult Study (2017)*
- *Berks County Employer Retention and Development Best Practices Study (2020)*
- *Greater Berks Advanced Manufacturing Skills Gap Study (2020-2021)* (This link will become active after WDB approval of the final study report. Tentative date for approval is March 19, 2021.)