

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Regional Plan

Region Workforce Development Area Name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

## *1.1. Identification of the region.*

The Southern Alleghenies Planning Region includes the counties of Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Fulton, Huntingdon and Somerset. The Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Area and Planning Region are one in the same and only includes the Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Board (SAWDB).

The Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Board (SAWDB) has a long and solid history of developing solid, strategic regional and local plans. Formation of a planning region committee was not applicable to the Southern Alleghenies. The SAWDB utilized its established planning process and sought input from the following stakeholders:

- The local elected officials from the six-member counties;
- The SAWDB and its committees;
- The Partnership for Regional Economic Performance (PREP) members;
- The region's employer community;
- Institutions of higher education;
- The Southern Alleghenies PA CareerLink® partners;
- The Local Management Committee;
- The users of the public workforce system including jobseekers.

Communication with these key stakeholders took place throughout the planning process. Meetings, including those publicly advertised, where the plan was discussed prior to posting, were held on November 10, 18, December 8, 17, 2020, and January 12, 20, and February 9, 2021.

The Plan's effective date is July 1, 2021.

## **1.2 Based on the analysis of the regional labor market and economic conditions, describe the region's workforce and economic development-oriented vision and goals.**

The Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Board (SAWDB) will lead initiatives designed to enhance the skills of the workforce to meet the needs of the region's employers to compete in a world economy. To accomplish this, the SAWDB is committed to supporting a data-driven, goal-oriented public workforce system that:

- Is flexible and responsive to the changing needs of jobseekers and employers;
- Embraces innovation as espoused in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA);
- Is committed to serving all those who are seeking employment or employees;
- Is integrated into a larger, coordinated network that includes other entities with a similar mission;
- Recognizes the importance of career pathways and invests in training opportunities that are tied to employer demand and result in jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage for the employee;
- Is committed to excellence and accountable to its funding agents, its customers, and its partners.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Regional Plan

The SAWDB will help to advance its vision and support attainment of the performance accountability measures through the following:

**Increased resources directed to support industry-driven training.** The SAWDB will direct its WIOA Title I resources, Rapid Response funding, special grant awards and other competitively secured resources to support training that results in industry-recognized credentials. On-the-Job Training (OJT) will continue to be heavily promoted; all positions supported through OJT will provide a wage that moves participants toward self-sufficiency and away from a reliance on public assistance. The Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) has been prioritized by the OSO and Business Services Strategy Team (BSST) with development of PA CareerLink® team member training focused on promoting the development of Registered Apprenticeships for employers. This training will incorporate newly created materials from the Apprenticeship Training Office (ATO) to enable Business Service Team (BST) members to effectively educate employers on the benefits of RAP, allowing the program to sell itself. (Detailed strategy can be found at R1.4). Current labor market conditions resulting from the pandemic, notably the struggle to hire and retain workers, has resulted in a workforce paradigm that has created the ideal time for employers to investigate RAPs. For those looking to change their corporate culture post-pandemic, RAPs position these employers to hire and retain a skilled workforce. The region's PA CareerLink® sites will continue to sponsor apprenticeship fairs, in conjunction with employers and organized labor, and the SAWDB will utilize its WIOA Title I funds to support training costs associated with apprenticeships. The SAWDB will continue to seek flexible funding and leverage and align partner support to help raise the educational attainment level of our residents and support jobseeker and incumbent worker training needs. Efforts will be closely coordinated with the Partnership for Regional Economic Performance (PREP) partners and WEDnet PA service providers to ensure that employer needs are identified, addressed and services are not duplicated. As a member of PREP, the SAWDB will utilize the partnership opportunities with the region's economic developers to coordinate services that support business recruitment and retention, and incumbent worker skill advancement. During **ENGAGE** visits, joint business calls made by economic developers and PA CareerLink® Business Service Team member staff will have the opportunity to hear directly from employers. Invaluable information related to business challenges and current and future workforce needs is communicated directly to those in a position to help address the issues. The one-stop figures prominently in the resulting business action plans and in many cases, positions the workforce system at the center of providing targeted business assistance.

**Increased alignment with WIOA Title II (Adult Education) and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) to support greater career pathway development.** Both entities figure prominently in the region's PA CareerLink® sites and have strong connections to the SAWDB and its staff. The SAWDB staff participate in the meetings of the Adult Education Coalition and coalition members provide an annual report to the SAWDB and its stakeholders that track outcomes including the industry-recognized credential obtained by their students. The OVR is a key partner and one of its region directors serves on the SAWDB and its Executive Committee and chairs its Special Populations Committee. This close partnership has helped to ensure frequent and substantive communication, which will lead to greater program alignment.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Regional Plan

**Support for the industry sector initiatives.** Traditional industry-driven consortia had been in place in the region for more than 20 years. Efforts were made by the SAWDB, in collaboration with its economic development partners, to move its existing IPs to the Next Gen model. A health care partnership had operated, without state funding support, but changes in company leadership led to the loss of the region's champions and the dissolution of the partnership. Efforts will be made to reestablish these partnerships and the data derived from the **ENGAGE** visits can be used to identify potential participants.

**Greater analysis of the High Priority Occupation (HPO) and Eligible Training Provider (ETP) Lists to include data analysis of training investments and the effectiveness at preparing participants for employment in their fields of study.** While a cornerstone of the public workforce system is informed customer choice, when it comes to selecting training providers, the SAWDB does not believe that having a large number of available providers should supersede having a list of fewer but higher quality providers. SAWDB staff spend considerable time assisting potential providers with their applications and walking them through the ETP process. Consequently, the region's list has over 137 programs, offered by 14 providers, that support training in high priority occupations. The SAWDB dedicates considerable resources in support of classroom training, and it tracks student success, in terms of their ability to graduate and secure employment in their field of study at a self-sufficient wage. Based on the SAWDB's most recent analysis, from July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2019, 91.6% of training participants completed their training program and 73% were employed in their field of study, following graduation, at an average wage of \$30,175.

**Enhanced partner integration specifically with OVR, the Employment, Advancement, and Retention Network (EARN), and Department of Corrections with a goal of greater inclusion and seamless referral between programs.** The SAWDB's Special Populations Committee will continue to focus on service to target populations with significant barriers to employment. This standing committee will act as the conduit for information between agencies that serve WIOA target populations and the SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® sites and service providers. The SAWDB will continue to support Transitional Work Experience opportunities for those individuals with multiple barriers to employment. Successful participants have secured and retained employment, in most cases, at their initial worksite.

**Expanded and enhanced work-based opportunities for youth.** The SAWDB will continue to support and promote summer and year-round paid work experience, internship, on-the-job training, and apprenticeship opportunities. The SAWDB's emphasis on OJT opportunities for youth have resulted in this service gaining greater traction and momentum. Contracts written to date far exceed the \$11.00 per hour minimum established for youth OJT participants. The WIOA Title I providers have also incorporated 'pre-apprenticeships' into their service mix to educate youth on the benefits of this career path.

**Support for special initiatives such as YouthBuild, reSTART, and other services that address the special challenges of Out-of-School Youth with significant barriers to employment.** These initiatives will provide youth with the opportunity to receive industry-recognized credentials and paid work experience aligned to the credentials. Roughly 13% of youth currently receiving WIOA Title I services have engaged with the juvenile justice system. The SAWDB will support services especially aligned to the needs of this population, including mentoring and access to financial support for training, work

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Regional Plan

experience and supportive services.

Each year, the PA CareerLink® Management Teams, with assistance from the One-Stop Operator Consortium (OSO), develop their own measurable goals, objectives and action steps to support the SAWDB's vision and strategic objectives. The SAWDA PA CareerLink® Scorecard captures a variety of SAWDB-identified information designed to provide a 'performance snapshot' by PA CareerLink® that includes:

- Number of new UC claims filed, and the percentage of claimants served
- Foot traffic
- Unique participants
- Percentage of customers with a barrier to employment
- Total services provided
- Percentage of employers using the PA CareerLink®, including percentage of repeat customers
- Number of employer services provided
- Number of job postings
- Number of job referrals
- Number of On-the-Job (OJT) training contracts prepared
- Number of Workshops and recruitment events
- Labor force, employment and unemployment rates, and UC rates

This information is reported monthly and reviewed by the SAWDB, One-Stop Operator (OSO), and PA CareerLink® partners. It is also shared with system stakeholders. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the PA CareerLink® partners and SAWDB leadership to reassess what is measured and identify new ways to conduct outreach to target populations. Even prior to the pandemic, the region's public workforce system was working to expand its outreach and service delivery by using virtual platforms. Consequently, we anticipate that the metrics will change.

The Board will continue to work closely with the PREP partners to coordinate efforts. Through the **ENGAGE** initiative, county economic developers and PA CareerLink® Business Service Team leads call on targeted company leaders to learn about their challenges and projected needs, including those workforce related ones. The close collaboration, and with it, stronger relationships built between the workforce and economic development partners, has resulted in more effective communication with employers and improved service delivery to the region's companies. In recognition of this collaboration, the Bedford County Development Association presented the PA CareerLink® Bedford County its 2020 Economic Development Award. The Board, through its staff, will continue to participate in PREP and Startup Alleghenies, the region's entrepreneurship ecosystem, meetings to ensure that the lines of communication remain strong and opportunities for partnership are identified and acted upon.

### *1.3 Describe the collection and analysis of regional labor market data (in conjunction with the commonwealth).*

The SAWDB utilizes information from multiple sources including federal census data, state level resources, a regional data consortium, and local data gathered from PA CareerLink® partners, industry partnerships and economic developers.

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Regional Plan

## **Key Economic Conditions**

The civilian labor force across the six county Southern Alleghenies region has continued a downward trend since 2007, declining from 226,100 to 197,500 in November 2020, according to the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (CWIA) **January 2021 Southern Alleghenies WDA Profile** report. This is reflective of the decline in the available labor force across the Commonwealth, as the diminishing number of workers widens the gap between available jobs and skilled talent. These numbers reinforce all other projected trends including those spending more time in school, baby boomers continuing to retire, continued declining demand for less skilled workers that result in workers becoming discouraged about employment prospects, an aging workforce who is less likely to seek work compared to workers in the prime age category, and unemployed workers who have been unemployed for extended time periods.

As the SAWDB relentlessly works to understand and address the many intricate causes of these labor force trends, associated demographic and labor market factors will continue to exert downward pressure on the already low labor force participation rate.

The Southern Alleghenies regional economy has continued to operate below its norm by the broadest measures punctuated by consistent annual average job losses for the past eight years. According to the CWIA **November 2020 Industry Sector** reporting, there were 186,300 jobs in the six counties in the region as of 2019. This was a loss of 1,600 jobs between 2015 and 2019. During the same period, jobs grew by 3.9% in Pennsylvania and 5.8% across the country.

According to **Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages Second Quarter Comparison 2019-2020**, Preliminary, from Q2 of 2019 to Q2 of 2020, average employment in the SA region decreased by 23,482 to 145,474, a 13.9% decline, with negative impact in nearly every industry, pointing to COVID-19 as the likely culprit. Average employment projections by the CWIA indicate a positive rebound from 2018 to 2028, at 189,290, a 1.5% increase.

The region performs consistently worse than both the state and national figures. Based on the **Central Pennsylvania Workforce Development Corporation Labor Market Status Reports October 2019, October 2020**, regional economic conditions include:

- Unemployment rates consistently higher than state average
- Declining labor force participation, with rates just above the 50% level
- Aging population
- Challenge to retain and attract younger workers to the region
- Business community vitality that creates employment opportunities through a diversified business base

The pandemic of 2020 caused a severe spike in unemployment in the Southern Alleghenies region. The Center for Workforce Information and Analysis reported in April of 2019 that the region's unemployment was 9,200, with the associated unemployment rate at 4.6%. Fast forward to April of 2020, when the pandemic's effects on the labor market were at their peak, and new unemployment claims totaled 37,100 in the Southern Alleghenies region, a 303% change from April 2019. The associated regional unemployment rate stood at 18%, while statewide unemployment totaled 976,000 claims, with an accompanying rate of 15.1 percent.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Regional Plan

On the positive side, statistics reveal that if every online job posting were filled by Southern Alleghenies jobseekers, the unemployment rate in the Southern Alleghenies would drop to 0.0 percent. This statistic, based on the assumption that all online job postings are real, that they can be filled, and that only unemployed residents of the region fill those jobs, underscores a regional opportunity to respond to this growing need for a higher educated available workforce. The jobs in our region increasingly necessitate specific technical skills from an institution of higher learning. The CWIA reported in the **November 2020 Economic Outlook** report that the regional unemployment rate decreases from 7.7% to 4.2% when high school graduates attain a bachelor's degree or higher. Through the SAWDB, partnerships with additional EPL choices are flourishing.

### Unemployment

According to the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis, the region has the thirteenth highest unemployment rate among the 22 workforce development areas in the state. The unemployment rate in four of the six counties in the region is higher than the state rate and three of the counties are included with the 20 counties having the highest unemployment rates in the state.

### Labor Force

Based on **2019 5-year American Community Survey** calculations for the population 16 years and over, the labor force participation rate for 2019 stands at 56%, compared to 61.5% for the Commonwealth. The region loses nearly 18,000 workers net to other workforce regions every day and five of the six counties experience an overall net loss of workers daily. The overall population continues to age, based on the median age of 44.9 in 2019 with 24% more people aged 55-64 at 64,008 compared to the 48,816 ages 15-24. The population density of younger individuals in the region continues to be a concern. The population of the 55-64-year-old age group exceeds that of the 15-24-year-old group by more than 15,000, potentially leading to a labor shortage as older workers retire. Youth in the 15-24 age bracket are projected to decrease from 11.3% to 11% of the regional population.

### Technological and Demographic Factors

Additional conditions affecting the region that require consideration include the lack of even reliable dial-up internet service, not to mention any high-speed internet, that the pandemic have brought to the forefront. Drug abuse in the workforce has forced employers to reconsider pre-employment drug screening, according to the **Pennsylvania Department of Education September 2020**. Between 2015 to 2018, the number of high school graduates in the region declined 2.1% or 3,254 less high school graduates, while the total number of college graduates with a bachelor's degree decreased 1.8% at 682 less graduates, both negatively impacting the potential labor force supply.

Positive economic trends include industries that continue to do well, providing career opportunities for job seekers. Based on the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry statistics, the average weekly wages for all industries have risen by \$103 from January of 2016 to January of 2020. Additionally, the average wage paid for On-the-Job Training in the region has risen although occupational wages remain well below the state averages. There have been recent plant openings in manufacturing that provided new opportunities and while small initially, there is an expectation of growth that will add even more jobs.

The SAWDB board will target Manufacturing, Construction, Business Services, Healthcare, and Transportation because of the high numbers of individuals employed, high wages, or a combination of these factors. The regional High Priority Occupation (HPO) List supports this strategy with numerous

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Regional Plan

occupations covering all the targeted clusters. The pandemic of 2020 has placed Healthcare employment in the spotlight, as worker shortages place both healthcare workers and residents in a life-threatening situation. The Board has initiated short-term solutions that reach across international boundaries, working with Pennsylvania and Danish leadership to explore tools for healthcare staff recruitment. The pandemic has also accelerated the demand for transportation expertise.

Existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors include:

- Healthcare continues as the top existing in-demand industry employing 21.2% of the labor force. In the region, 35,400 healthcare workers have an average earning of \$45,124. Center for Workforce Information and Analysis project an 8.8% growth from 2018 to 2028.
- Accommodation & Food Services ranks fourth with 8.9% of the labor force.
- Business Services Industry Cluster is a broad category that covers many services provided to businesses in the region. Here we show both Professional and Technical Services coupled with Administrative and Waste Services. Combined, they contribute 6.3% of the workforce, commanding \$42,239 average annual earnings.
- Retail trade remained steady, and while the sector has significant employment numbers, wages and career opportunities exclude it from Board focus.

Existing and emerging in-demand industry sector(s) occupations include:

Healthcare positions including phlebotomists, registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and nursing assistants are in high demand across the region, numbering in the thousands. Additional health related occupations include medical and clinical technologist/technicians, radiologic technologists, and both physical and occupational therapy assistants.

Manufacturing occupations comprise a variety of jobs in the regional workforce with CNC machine tool operators, machinists, structural metal fabricators, maintenance and repair technicians, and welders, cutters, solderers and brazers being the top jobs.

Transportation and Warehousing related occupations have been a critical need in the region for several years, led primarily by both heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers, light truck drivers, while laborers and freight, stock and material movers are also in demand.

Southern Alleghenies Targeted Industry Location Quotients:

<u>Industry Cluster</u>	<u>Location Quotient</u>	<u>Employment</u>	<u>Employment %</u>
Healthcare	1.15	35,426	21.2%
Retail Trade	1.22	21,113	12.6%
Manufacturing	1.27	20,624	12.3%
Accommodation/Food Svc.	1.11	14,939	8.9%
Trans/Warehousing	1.05	9,336	5.6%
Construction	1.09	8,297	5.0%
Admin/Waste Services	0.62	5,666	3.4%
Professional/Tech Services	0.47	4,894	2.9%

Source: Center for Workforce Information and Analysis, Southern Alleghenies WDA Profile, January 2021

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Regional Plan

The region's employers require technically competent workers, capable of solving problems and capable of daily commitment to being on time every scheduled workday for the business to meet performance goals and payroll. The **Central Pennsylvania Workforce Development Corporation Top Jobs Report September 2020** indicates skill sets that employers seek include communications and interpersonal interaction, understanding and using technology, critical thinking and analysis, physical work, quality assurance and standards enforcement. The SAWDB has allocated significant resources to supporting training for adults, dislocated workers, and youth. The Board and its staff have also worked with a variety of partners to communicate the need for higher education beyond high school, including short-term technical degrees, registered apprenticeships, and four or more years at academic institutions of higher learning. Technical skills in high demand include nurses and HVAC technicians. Registered apprenticeship opportunities have expanded beyond traditional unionized jobs to business services and IT, while bachelor and master's degree programs in human resources and civil engineers are on the top jobs list as high priority occupations.

Looking forward, the impact of remote workers and their working families potentially moving to the region, now that many employers are giving workers that option permanently, will require consideration. With the lower cost of living in the Southern Alleghenies region than larger metropolitan areas in the Northeast, workers relocating here is a reasonable expectation. Pew Research Center and Harris Poll both conducted surveys in 2020 to study this trend. Results from both studies are summarized in a Hybrid Workforce Feasibility Study conducted by **Headlight Data** of Austin, Texas for SAP&DC. Pew Research found that 3% of the more than 9,000 adults surveyed moved temporarily or permanently due directly to COVID-19. Of more interest to this study are the 9% of those movers who made a permanent change of address. These two factors combined indicate that roughly 0.27% of those surveyed permanently relocated. As another indicator of this trend, the Harris Poll conducted a survey in April 2020 which found that 38% of respondents living in urban areas considered themselves likely to "move out of densely populated areas and toward rural areas." Proportions were higher among both younger and more affluent households. It is important to note that these extrapolations are based on survey data gathered over short periods of time. The actual impact could be larger or smaller than these estimates. This could bring a fresh vitality for small business while providing a positive demographic shift of younger workers. Necessary technological changes, specifically reliable internet access, are already underway in the most underserved areas of the region.

### 1.4 Describe the regional service strategies aimed at achieving the vision and goals established for the region.

The SAWDB will utilize the following strategies to achieve the vision and goals established for the region. They are classified on two levels: Administrative (SAWDB) and Programmatic (PA CareerLink® and Workforce Development Partners and stakeholders).

#### **Administrative**

- The SAWDB will regularly review its policies to ensure, where legally possible, they are employer and jobseeker customer friendly and do not create barriers to effective service provision. Agility is key to success and the public workforce system and its administrators must strive for the same.
- The SAWDB will continue to support and look for opportunities to expand Industry Partnership participation in targeted sectors. Included in this is a promotion of registered apprenticeships to those companies/industries that are well-positioned to benefit from this model and through

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Regional Plan

the promotion of pre-apprenticeship activities for youth.

- Enhancement and expansion of relationships with and between the region’s WIOA Title II Adult Basic Education providers, career and technology centers, and post-secondary education institutions. As an example, the SAWDB will continue to facilitate meetings between the Title II providers and the region’s community college, Pennsylvania Highlands. Also, through their positions on the region’s Career and Technology Centers’ Perkins Participatory Planning Committee, the SAWDB and its staff, and PA CareerLink® partner staff can assist with the completion of their required Comprehensive Needs Assessments to help ensure alignment between schools, their students, and the region’s employers.
- The SAWDB has a strong OSO group that oversees the Business Services Strategy Team (BSST). The BSST has placed training PA CareerLink® staff to effectively educate employers on the Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) opportunities that exist as a Priority. The goal is to promote a regional strategy that connects job seekers with RAPs. Promoting Apprenticeships/Pre-Apprenticeships includes the following:
  - Utilizing ATO materials to develop “RAP 101” program.
  - PowerPoint format training program including the ATO PowerPoint for Zoom platform as well as 24/7 viewing availability to offer flexibility of training schedules.
  - Utilize ATO Guide “Registering an Apprenticeship Program.”
  - Labor Market Report usage to determine the industry with the biggest need.
  - ATO one-pagers and flow diagram will be included in training materials.
  - ATO staff contact information and brief Zoom icebreaker meetings with ATO staff as they are added could be helpful for putting a face with the name.
  - PA CareerLink® staff outreach/education to potential RAP employers.
- Pre-Apprenticeship strategy closely mirrors the RAP strategy and tactics. Partnering with WIOA Title I providers, PA CareerLinks® and community-based education committees to promote the pre-apprenticeship at the middle and high school levels will bring this program into the forefront of training options. Pre-Apprenticeships will be promoted as part of the Business-Education Partnership Grant initiative and also build in pre-apprenticeship activities as part of the WIOA Title I Youth service mix.
- The SAWDB will continue to support staff involvement in and engagement with the PREP partners to ensure alignment of workforce and economic development strategies and resources. These include participation in **ENGAGE** joint business calls.
- The SAWDB and OSO will annually review the PA CareerLink® employer service mix to determine any gaps, based on local need and WIOA direction.
- SAWDB and PA CareerLink® Business Service Teams have formed a regional Strategy Team, dedicated to improving business services and outreach to employers. Their recommendations to the OSO include:
  - Enhancing the marketing message to reach employers and effectively relate the PA CareerLink® to business services and employment;
  - Place great focus on targeted industry sectors;
  - Recruit employers who offer work from home opportunities;
  - Promote and help secure registered apprenticeships in collaboration with employer and apprenticeship sponsors.
- The SAWDB and OSO will annually review employer services outreach materials and enhance and professionalize the materials utilizing the expertise of the SAP&DC Marketing and Communication Specialist.
- The SAWDB, with input from the PREP partners and IP participants, will review the High Priority

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Regional Plan

Occupation List to ensure it reflects employer hiring needs.

- The SAWDB will encourage quality education providers to submit relevant programs for inclusion on the Eligible Training Provider List to ensure customers can access training that meets employer demands. As of December 2020, the region has over 140 programs on the list, the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest in the Commonwealth.
- The SAWDB and OSO will annually review PA CareerLink® employer-centric goals to ensure alignment with Governor Wolf's and the SAWDB's strategic vision and confirm that the benchmarks are sufficiently ambitious and promote continuous improvement.

### Programmatic

- The OSO, PA CareerLink® Site Administrators and PA CareerLink® management teams will review their policies and procedures to identify and mitigate any barriers to service provision.
- The SAWDB, OSO and PA CareerLink® site administrators will work with the SAWDB's Special Populations Committee to identify and address service gaps and ensure that the public workforce system provides services to meet the workforce needs of the target populations. As referenced in Section 1.2, the SAWDB, OSO, and PA CareerLink® partners will promote engagement in special initiatives for youth such as YouthBuild (offered in Cambria County, specifically the city of Johnstown), reSTART, a special reentry program for youth in the counties of Bedford, Blair, and Cambria, continue to provide out-of-region referrals to Job Corps, Americorps, and other targeted youth programs. The SAWDB and its partners recognize the importance of these programs, which provide youth with the opportunity to earn industry-recognized credentials and receive paid work experience aligned to the credentials. As of December 1, 2020, there were 4 students enrolled in the new YouthBuild program, with a goal of 48, and 20 enrolled in the reSTART reentry program, with a goal of 50. Cross referrals between WIOA Title I and these programs will continue as a significant number of our Title I youth program participants have the personal characteristics for enrollment into these programs. Through June 30, 2020, 16% of youth receiving WIOA Title I services have a history of engagement with the juvenile justice system. Other barriers to employment for these youth participants include Low Income at 89%, Low Level of Literacy at 46%, Long-Term Unemployed at 3%, Disability at 40%, Single Parent at 19%, Homelessness at 3% and In Foster Care or Aging out of the System at 3% (CWDS WIOA Title I Eligibility, voluntarily disclosed at intake). Helping to reintegrate these young people back into the community, with marketable skills, will not only enable them to see a future for themselves, but it will also help to address the talent shortage experienced by many of the region's employers.
- The OSO and PA CareerLink® site administrators will ensure that each PA CareerLink® has an active Business Services Team made up of the 'right' representatives from partner agencies.
- The PA CareerLink® staff will gather business intelligence through employer outreach and utilization of Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (CWIA) data to ensure alignment of job seeker services with employer hiring needs.
- The PA CareerLink® site administrators and the OSO will review Business Service Team communication plans to ensure that employer outreach is coordinated among all partners.
- The PA CareerLink® staff will strengthen relationships with employer-driven organizations and associations (SHRM, Chambers of Commerce, Rotary, etc.) and use these as vehicles to educate members on available services and resources.
- The PA CareerLink® staff will work with the PREP partners to provide leveraged resources in support of business recruitment, retention, and expansion efforts.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Regional Plan

- The PA CareerLink® staff will help to identify and support employer-driven incumbent worker training opportunities.
- The PA CareerLink®, OSO and the SAWDB will promote the importance of digital literacy to all jobseekers and will utilize the Northstar® assessment as a vehicle to assess and credential one-stop customers. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic served to further highlight the importance of digital literacy.
- The OSO and PA CareerLink® staff's Operational Intelligence Team will continue its focus on 'business' intelligence to improve and communicate partner performance to the system's stakeholders.

Ensuring business and jobseeker engagement in the workforce system comes down to three things: determining customer needs, informing the customer that the system is able, willing and ready to meet their needs, and having the ability to meet those needs in a timely and effective manner. The utilization of the aforementioned strategies will ensure that our customers are engaged in a meaningful way and that the one-stops are well-positioned to meet the needs of their business jobseeker customers.

### 1.5 Describe the development and implementation of sector initiatives for in-demand industry sectors or occupations for the region.

Developing and implementing successful sector initiatives requires an understanding of the sectors and their relationship to the labor force. The board recognizes the important role up-to-date Labor Market Information plays in building the foundation and consequently takes special steps to ensure that current and accurate information guides the decision-making process. As a result, the SAWDB is well-informed and armed with accurate and current information that is used to guide the board in making strategic decisions related to training, and the identification of high priority occupations aligned to employer needs.

The SAWDB and its economic development partners will continue to explore opportunities to take the region's industry partnerships to a new level through the next-generation partnership initiative. A Health Care Next Gen Partnership had begun to gain momentum but then its three key champions accepted employment outside of the region and as a result the partnership collapsed.

With joint **ENGAGE** business calls, economic and workforce development professionals joined forces and combined resources to gain a higher level of industry intelligence to better understand the current and projected needs of employers. The importance of this link with economic development and other stakeholders cannot be overstated given the changes in business cycles where one business or industry sector declines and others open or expand. This is certainly the case now given all the instability created because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The SAWDB, its PA CareerLink® partners and varied workforce stakeholders can no longer simply rely on static labor market reports, as the pandemic has in some cases, thrown projections and other data sources 'out the window.' By way of a disclaimer, in viewing data especially as related to industry projections, one must remember that this data was developed prior to the pandemic must be viewed accordingly.

The manufacturing, construction and trade/ transportation sectors have all been especially hit hard, with each positing the highest numbers of initial unemployment compensations claims from May 2020 through September 2020, 12,470, 3,039, and 5,554 respectively, according to the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Regional Plan

For over a decade, the SAWDB has identified targeted industry clusters to further define and refine its strategic focus. Accordingly, the SAWDB targets resources in the region in support of its five clusters that represent a significant portion of the region's overall employment and provide jobs that pay family sustaining wages. A summary of each cluster is included below along with special initiatives designed to enhance the workforce in the targeted clusters. The clusters include:

- Advanced Manufacturing
- Building and Construction
- Business Services
- Healthcare
- Logistics and Transportation

### **Advanced Manufacturing**

The advanced manufacturing cluster currently represents approximately 20,410 jobs in the region, with a location quotient of 1.22, and while it was expected to decline slightly by 3.9% according to the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis *2018-2028 Long-Term Industry Projections and Southern Alleghenies WDA Profile January 2021*, at this time it is uncertain how much and how quickly the sector can rebound from the impact of the pandemic. When the order came to shutter operations for non-essential businesses, 76% of the region's manufacturers were forced to close their doors. Still, manufacturing occupations continue to be in demand and are listed on the region's High Priority Occupation List (HPOL). *CWIA Occupational Employment 2018-2028 Long-Term Projections* illustrate a continued need for CNC machine tool operators, machinists, structural metal fabricators, maintenance and repair technicians, and welders, cutters, solderers and brazers. Even though the industry is projected to be smaller in the future, employers continue to struggle to fill welding and machining positions and several local employers have developed apprenticeship models around these occupations. In response to that need the SAWDB has supported programs utilizing Business-Education Partnership grants to introduce youth to career opportunities in manufacturing. Manufacturing Days, an additional sector initiative, has included special events highlighting the industry. With the challenges of in-person meeting, there has been discussion between the PA CareerLink® staff, SAWDB Young Adult Council members, and other stakeholders on how to present career fairs highlighting manufacturing through virtual platforms. Pre-pandemic, companies provided tours, which enabled students to talk with production professionals and company management about specific products and company culture, and explore the training needed to pursue a career in manufacturing. Our goal is that this interaction will continue whether virtually, or when it is safe to do so, in person.

### **Building and Construction**

Based on the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis *2018-2028 Long-Term Industry Projections and Southern Alleghenies WDA Profile January 2021*, employment in the Building and Construction industry in the Southern Alleghenies region was projected to grow from 7,260 in 2018 to 7,620 in 2028, with a 2020 location quotient of 1.05. This represents a positive change of 5%. Job growth was anticipated to be driven by specialty trade contractors, construction of buildings and heavy civil engineering construction. As with manufacturing, construction was negatively impacted by the pandemic and the associated orders to cease operations. In the region, construction operations, employing over 8,000 workers, had to stop operations as they were not considered essential workers.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Regional Plan

***CWIA Occupational Employment 2018-2028 Long-Term Projections*** include a continued demand for carpenters, cement masons and concrete finishers, electricians, painters, plumbers, pipefitters and steamfitters, construction and building inspectors. The recognition of registered apprenticeships as a viable model for employee recruitment and retention has grown over the past several years. The SAWDB, its PA CareerLink® sites, and WIOA Title I providers have supported apprenticeship fairs, in partnership with local employers and organized labor, especially the Regional Council of Carpenters. These events have served to educate the community, especially the youth, to the value of apprenticeships. The SAWDB and Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies is also supporting the construction industry through the YouthBuild initiative that targets young adults who have significant barriers to employment such as low education levels, homelessness, low income, and criminal records. Program participants receive classroom education, workforce preparedness training and hands-on construction experience through actual building projects.

### **Business Services**

The Business Services cluster includes a broad range of support services to companies, to include but not limited to public relations services, direct marketing services, legal services, staffing services, security services, education and training services and telecommunications services. The sector employs roughly 6% of the region's workforce. Because of the nature of much of the work in this sector, when the pandemic necessitated the need to shutter operations, many employers were able to transition their employees to telework, thus reducing the need for massive layoffs. This factor should enable the sector to 'bounce back' more readily than those industries that required face to face operations. According to the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis ***2018-2028 Long-Term Industry Projections and Southern Alleghenies WDA Profile January 2021***, key industry sectors within this group that are projected to grow within the Southern Alleghenies region include Professional and Technical Services (3.3%) and Administrative and Waste Services (2.7%). Still the location quotient for both falls at .45 and .65 respectively. ***CWIA Occupational Employment 2018-2028 Long-Term Projections*** show a continued demand for marketing managers, computer, and information system managers, purchasing managers, cost estimators, management analysts, training and development specialists, software developers, computer user support specialists, human resource specialists, and market research analysts and marketing specialists.

### **Healthcare**

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Healthcare industry was anticipating continued growth and was poised to remain the largest employer of all the targeted clusters in the region, employing over 21% of the labor force. The pandemic served to shine a light on the industry's demand for skilled professionals. An analysis of the pipeline clearly indicates that the number of those graduating from local training providers will fall far short of meeting the sector's immediate needs. The pandemic has created a staffing crisis in many of the region's healthcare facilities and long-term care establishments. The SAWDB and PA CareerLink® staff will continue to work with employers to identify potential new hires. Jobseekers will also be educated to the career opportunities available to them in this sector. The SAWDB, PA CareerLink® staff and human resource leadership from University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) will build on their existing initiative to identify medical assistance recipients who may be interested in and suitable for a career in the medical field. In working with this population, we hope to move individuals off public assistance and connect them with careers in demand.

The demand for a ready skilled workforce is projected to continue as the region's population continues to age. Growth is expected to increase by the year 2028 to roughly 35,080 workers according to the ***CWIA Industry Employment 2018-2028 Long-Term Projections and Southern Alleghenies WDA Profile***

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Regional Plan

**January 2021.** The 2020 location quotient for the sector sits at 1.15. The gains will be seen in home health care services, individual and family services, social assistance, and other ambulatory health care services. The occupations with the greatest demand include registered nurse, licensed and practical nurse, nursing assistant and home health aide, physical and occupational therapy assistants, emergency medical technician and paramedic, substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors. The previously referenced targeted youth initiatives also include components to support the healthcare industry sector. Individuals interested in pursuing careers in healthcare can receive basic education, workforce preparedness, and mentoring to better position them to pursue occupations that provide a solid wage and benefits.

### **Logistics and Transportation**

Moving goods is a lifeline for many businesses and the region's access to major highways is key to keeping that lifeline, represented by the Logistics and Transportation industry cluster, healthy. This sector was considered essential, wherefore the vast majority of those employed in this industry were not laid off due to the pandemic. On-line job postings for October 2020 continue to reflect the significant demand for heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers, light truck drivers and laborers and freight, stock, and material movers. The Logistics cluster includes the analysis and coordination of an organization's supply chain. The Transportation industry can be broken down into three groups of companies: shipping, passenger transport, and equipment manufacturers. Fortunately, the Southern Alleghenies is well-positioned and served by two major east-west and two major north-south highways that provide strategic access to a significant portion of the east coast of the United States and its metropolitan centers. According to the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis' industry cluster data, Logistics and Transportation accounts for approximately 5.5% of the total employment in the region with a location quotient of 1.08. Sub-sectors that employ the most logisticians are manufacturers, federal government, professional, scientific and technical services, management of companies, and wholesale trade. Occupational demand in transportation and warehousing is projected to increase through the year 2028 according to the ***CWIA Occupational Employment 2018-2028 Long-Term Projections***, with annual employment demands for the transportation and material moving occupations to stand at roughly 1,800 and roughly 800 material moving workers. Heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers continue to lead the list of high demand occupations. Each year, the SAWDB supports a significant number of individual training requests for the driving occupations associated with this industry to meet the heavy demand; we anticipate this demand to continue.

The clusters defined above represent a significant portion of the economy. However, other industry clusters also have a large number of workers, but the occupations do not typically pay a family sustaining wage. The two such best examples are the Retail Trade, and the Hospitality, Leisure and Entertainment clusters. Collectively they account for over 36,000 workers or roughly 22% of the workforce. In both cases, these sectors were heavily impacted by pandemic-forced business closures, and it is expected that the number of establishments will never fully rebound. The SAWDB is administering a special National Dislocated Worker Economic Transition Grant designed to provide retraining to individuals dislocated from this sector. The goal is to move them from positions that were subject to seasonal dislocations and that paid low wages to higher skilled, higher paying careers. Though the numbers being served through this initiative are relatively small (19 as of December 2020) when compared to our total caseload counts, the positive impact has already been realized as those graduating from school are finding well-paying and more stable employment in healthcare, transportation and logistics and the trades.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Regional Plan

### 1.6 Describe how the region will connect employer labor force requirements and occupational demands with the region's labor force, including individuals with barriers to employment.

Labor force connections will occur at multiple levels throughout the entire workforce system and include a wide variety of system partners and stakeholders. As referenced above, the SAWDB supports numerous programs and special initiatives designed to first identify employer labor force requirements and then communicate those needs to the region's labor force, especially those who are targeted for special assistance and have multiple barriers to employment.

While vehicles like the next generation sector partnerships will help to further identify industry needs, the SAWDB recognizes that the workforce system may not be well-positioned to help those with barriers to employment prepare to compete for those job openings. The SAWDB has reinforced its commitment to providing meaningful services to target populations and has set the direction and tone for service delivery through the efforts of its Special Populations Committee. This committee includes representatives from the private sector, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Corrections, Health and Human Services, Adult Education providers, and others with a commitment to assist those who face some of the most significant barriers to employment. This committee is tasked with identifying service gaps and recommending enhancements to the public workforce system that will increase the marketability of those with barriers to employment and better connect these individuals with demand occupations. With significant input from this committee, the public workforce system will continue to develop and deploy unique strategies designed to address employer hiring demands and provide employment opportunities to those with barriers. These will include but are not limited to:

- Promotion of Apprenticeship Fairs - these events have fostered closer working relationships with companies that support apprenticeships and improved partnerships with those labor councils that provide apprenticeships. The fairs will continue to be aggressively marketed to dislocated workers, especially the long-term unemployed and those with readily transferable skills, individuals on public assistance including EARN program participants, and young adults in hopes of addressing pipeline issues.
- Career Fairs for Target Populations - building on a successful recruitment tool, the SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® sites will support events designed to enhance employment opportunities for special, target populations including individuals with disabilities, senior workers, low-income residents, and young adults.
- Enhanced Business Service Team Membership - membership has expanded to include representatives from the EARN program, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Senior Employment Service, and Corrections. Coordination between partner staff engaged in employer outreach has been enhanced and with it, increased collaboration and greater market penetration has been realized. The state-wide business services staff can also serve as a resource to help the Committee identify strategies to promote workforce diversification and inclusion.
- YouthBuild and reSTART - initiatives designed to transform the lives of young adults through education and employment. These programs target young people who have made poor choices in their past and who now face serious barriers to employment. Those targeted for assistance include high school dropouts, the homeless and/or transitioning out of foster care, and those with criminal records. Participants will earn their GED and industry-recognized credentials in healthcare and manufacturing occupations, participate in paid work experience and receive adult mentoring.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Regional Plan

- STEPS (Steps Toward Employment-Progress-Success) - this innovative program developed by the Community Action Partnership for Somerset County, the WIOA Title I provider in Somerset County, helps participants address three specific barriers to employment - criminal backgrounds, mental health issues and substance abuse. During weekly sessions, participants tackle the issues, receive support and additional referrals to relevant agencies, and ultimately graduate to a Job Club and mainstream job search services.
- Support for expungement of court records - workforce partners in Cambria County continue to support a pilot program that brings together the county court system and individuals with criminal records but without convictions. For those determined eligible, their criminal, non-conviction court records are expunged at no cost. This has significantly increased their marketability.
- Further implantation of the PA CareerLink® Stabilization Phase- A growing number of customers are entering the one-stop with significant barriers to employment, issues that must be first addressed before an effective job search can be initiated. These individuals are immediately connected, through a face-to face referral or using technology i.e., Zoom or Skype, with the local community action agency. Inherent in the mission of these partner agencies, these staff are best positioned to assist with barrier remediation. Once the barrier/s has been effectively addressed, the individual will be referred back to the one-stop and the job search work can begin.
- Increased/Enhanced Re-integration Efforts- While many employers are desperate for workers, annually some 4,900 individuals are released from the region's county and state correctional institutions. Ongoing efforts will continue to be made to provide intensive case management and workforce development services to ex-offenders and provide each with a plan that supports the highest level of success. Supportive services and transitional paid work experience opportunities will be available as will close coordination with partners in the justice system, and outreach to employers willing to provide a 'second chance' to these individuals.

As a core partner, OVR provides multiple services to the business community designed to assist businesses with onboarding pre-screen 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.

Special assistance will also be provided to those unemployed from targeted industry sectors. The SAWDB is administering, in partnership with the PA Department of Labor and Industry, a federal Economic Transition National Dislocated Worker Grant. Special assistance is being provided to dislocated workers, with priority given to those from the retail and service sectors. Resources include 100% tuition coverage and supportive service provision to help eliminate barriers to successful training completion. The overarching goal is to move these individuals into more stable employment that pays self-sustaining wages.

Through this multi-pronged approach, the public workforce system will be well-positioned to assist jobseekers, especially those with barriers to employment, gain the necessary soft skills and occupational credentials necessary to meet employer-identified workforce needs.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Regional Plan

### *1.7 Describe the coordination of transportation and other supportive services for the region.*

The Southern Alleghenies region encompasses more than 4,600 square miles, 60% of which is still forested. Consequently, much of the region is rural and public transportation is limited. Fixed route public transportation is only available in Cambria and Blair Counties, with the cities of Johnstown and Altoona as the respective hubs; 89% of the region's jobs are also found in these two counties. Van service is available on a limited basis in the four rural counties; this system is primarily utilized by senior citizens to access healthcare. This lack of public transportation, especially in the region's more rural areas, can create significant challenges for those seeking employment but without access to an automobile.

Despite the limited access to transportation resources, there are coordinated efforts underway to identify and address transportation issues. With guidance from the Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission (SAP&DC) and leadership from local elected officials, multiple partners have come together to address the challenges created from this lack of public transit. The Southern Alleghenies Rural Planning Organization (RPO) has developed its 2018-2042 Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) that outlines a vision for the region's transportation system over a minimum 25-year horizon. The plan identifies the region's transportation assets, highlights current and future transportation needs, and outlines a series of goals and objectives designed to address these needs. The plan was developed in coordination with PennDOT and with significant input from key stakeholders, including representatives from the public workforce system.

The Alleghenies RPO has adopted its Coordinated Transit-Human Service Plan (CTP). This document provides direction for the region to improve public transportation options and promote the mobility of those who are dependent on transit. Furthermore, this plan seeks to close transportation gaps in service availability, quality, and communication. The CTP has been developed with considerable input from a variety of community stakeholders including the SAWDB and PA CareerLink® sites.

Both plans are required to secure public funding, most notably support available through the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act. This act includes provisions to increase transportation options, assist in redeveloping communities, and expand employment opportunities especially for low-income residents, minorities and individuals with disabilities. The Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission (SAP&DC), the PA Department of Transportation designee to provide rural transportation planning for the region, will work to secure funding to address the issues identified within the transportation plans. As an arm of the SAP&DC and active participant in both planning initiatives, the SAWDB, and with it the public workforce system, will have input on projects that serve to connect jobseekers with employment opportunities.

To facilitate access to workforce services, the SAWDB and its workforce partners have supported the establishment of multiple PA CareerLink® affiliate sites across the region. Public libraries and community centers serve as remote locations where workforce and volunteer facility staff can provide basic services to customers who do not have personal access to the internet or in some cases, the resources to travel to one of the region's five comprehensive PA CareerLink® sites. In 2018 and 2019, the region's two largest comprehensive one-stops (Blair and Cambria counties) relocated their operations into the Cambria County and Altoona Area Public Libraries. These locations, situated downtown in Johnstown and Altoona, were selected after developing a 'heat map', a resource that geographically illustrated our customers' residences. It became quickly evident that our two largest sites were not conveniently located and not readily accessible by public transportation. The move to

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Regional Plan

the libraries has resulted in increased accessibility, and with it, customer foot-traffic, innovative programming, accomplished in partnership with the libraries, and a cost savings that has allowed for the development of additional affiliate sites in Blair and Cambria counties. Under OSO guidance, the one-stops have expanded the use of technology to help serve those who reside some distance from the nearest PA CareerLink®. As a result of this forward thinking, the Southern Alleghenies one-stops were able to transition to virtual service provision when the COVID-19 pandemic forced the closure of the 'bricks and mortar' facilities. Though the facilities have reopened, virtual service delivery will continue and expand, using technology like Zoom, Skype, SignNow, and other platforms.

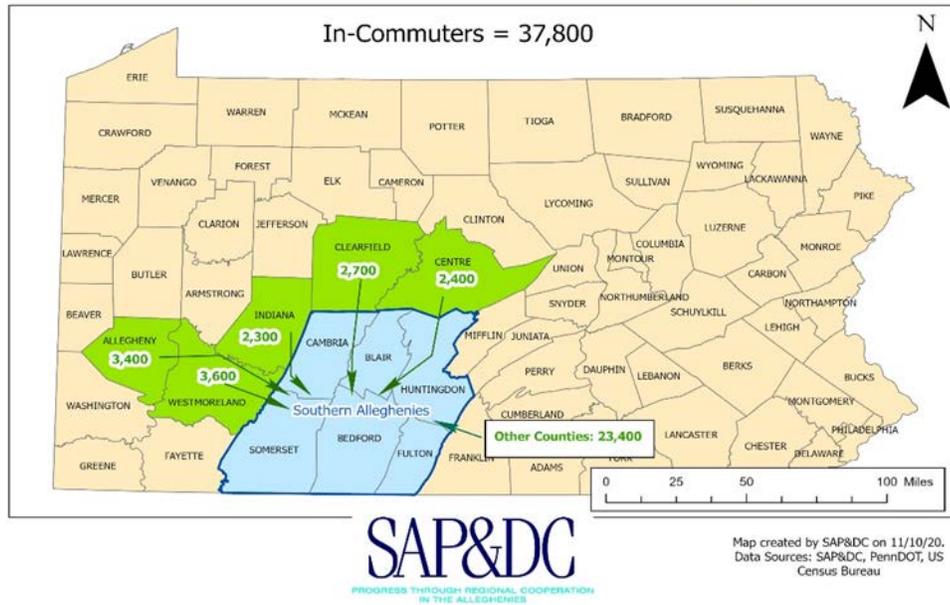
The SAWDB has a long history of providing financial support for a variety of supportive services. These include transportation assistance, childcare, and support for work-related clothing, tools, and other essentials to increase an individual's marketability or their participation in a work-based training opportunity. Transportation assistance is by far the most sought-after service, not surprisingly given the region's geography and general lack of public transportation. Financial assistance is provided to adults, dislocated workers, and youth, to offset commuting costs while an individual is pursuing post-secondary education, engaged in On-the-Job Training (OJT), or in a paid work experience opportunity. As is the case with OJT, this financial support is provided until the individual receives their first paycheck.

### Commuting Patterns:

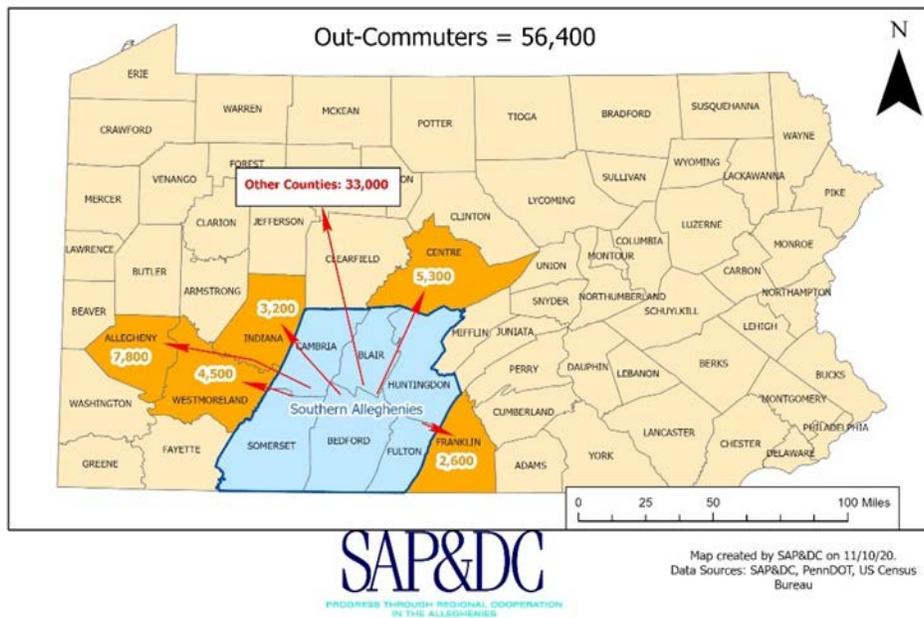
Of the 153,900 jobs in the region, more than 75% are held by residents of the six counties. The other 25% are filled by individuals who commute into the Southern Alleghenies region for employment. Conversely, roughly 56,500 residents leave the region for employment. Only in Blair County do the 'in-commuters' outnumber the 'out-commuters'; roughly 44% of those coming into the county for employment reside elsewhere in the Southern Alleghenies region. Blair is also the only county where the number of jobs exceeds the available labor force. This is no doubt a direct reflection of Blair County's strong local economy, with 35% of all jobs in the region, a pre-pandemic unemployment rate of 4.8% and the region's lowest unemployment rate for October 2020 of 7.3%. By comparison, 56% of the resident labor force in Somerset leave the county for employment; there are roughly 8,100 more workers than jobs. In the case of Huntingdon, where there are 4,100 more workers than jobs, 61% of the resident labor force leave the county for employment. The SAWDB and its workforce partners, will be watching these numbers closely as new business development increases, especially in rural Huntingdon and Somerset counties. An examination of commuting patterns may help to identify geographic areas and industries where skill gaps exist and therefore require more 'in-commuters' to meet industry workforce needs. Using ***U.S. Census Bureau. 2020. OnTheMap Application. Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program. <http://onthemap.ces.census.gov/> based on the average number of primary jobs between 2016-2018***; the maps below illustrate the region's commuting patterns.

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Regional Plan

## Southern Alleghenies In-Commuting Patterns



## Southern Alleghenies Out-Commuting Patterns



1.8 Describe the region's strategy to increase participation on the statewide eligible training provider list.

The SAWDB continues to place great importance on raising the educational attainment level of its

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Regional Plan

residents. In addition to the SAWDB's significant investments of its WIOA Title I allocations, the Board also works to secure competitive grants to support training. Key to the realization of its strategy to increase the skills of its labor force is the development and maintenance of a robust Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). Key SAWDB staff dedicate significant time in outreach to the region's post-secondary education providers. Staff provide one-on-one assistance to help educators navigate the process of completing applications for program placement on the ETPL and they are available for consult and assistance throughout the process. As a result of this personal attention, the Southern Alleghenies region boasts the third highest number of courses/programs on the ETPL. Currently 13 schools, ranging from career and technology centers to private proprietary schools and a state-sponsored community college and member of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) make up the ETPL for the region and offer 147 different programs in support of high priority occupations.

In addition to institutions of higher education, local apprenticeships are also included on the ETPL. Through SAWDB and PA CareerLink® support and recognition, the value of apprenticeships is highlighted. Technical assistance is provided to interested employers as they work through the process of apprenticeship development and ultimately recognition by the Pennsylvania Office of Apprenticeship. This assistance has resulted in the placement of new apprenticeship programs on the ETPL. In either case, whether apprenticeship or post-secondary education, the key to this region's strategy is personalized attention, knowledgeable technical assistance, and regular communication between the SAWDB and PA CareerLink® staff and the region's employers and educators.

*1.9 Describe how the region established administrative cost arrangements, including the pooling of funds for administrative costs, as appropriate, for the region.*

Not applicable to the Southern Alleghenies Region, as the region is made up of a single workforce development area.

*1.10 Describe the agreement between the local boards that describes how the planning region will collectively negotiate and reach agreement with L&I on local levels of performance for, and report on, the performance accountability measures described in section 116(c), for each of the local areas within the planning region.*

Not applicable to the Southern Alleghenies Region, as the region is made up of a single workforce development area.

**PY 2021-24 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, or WIOA, Local Plan – Attachment 1**

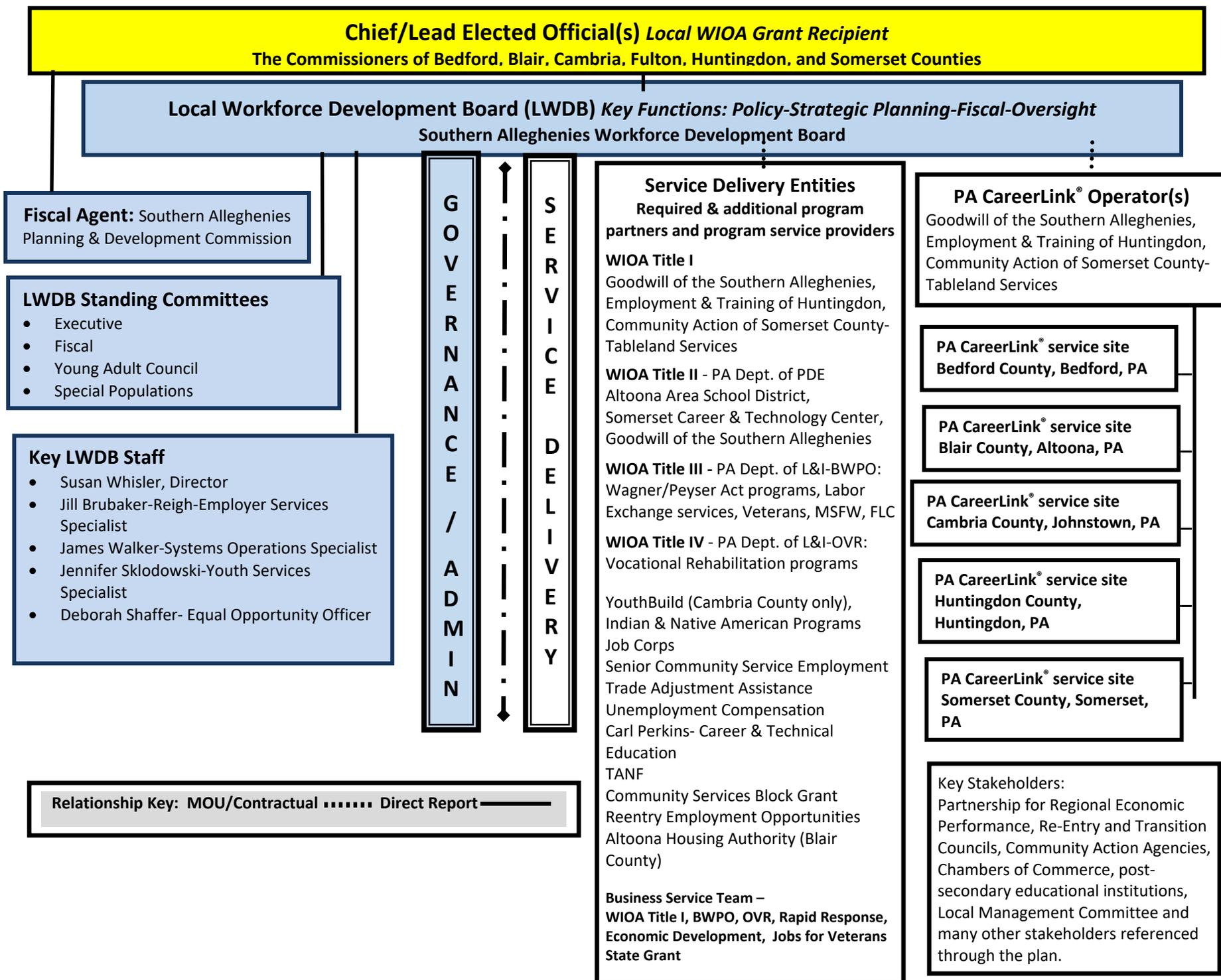
**WIOA Title I Programs Performance Accountability Table**

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.

<b>LWDA Name:</b>		
<b>WIOA Title I Programs (Adult-Dislocated Worker-Youth) Performance Measures</b>	<b>LWDA’s WIOA Title I Programs Negotiated Performance Goals - *Program Year(2020): 2020 – 2021</b>	<b>LWDA’s WIOA Title I Programs Attained Performance Results - *Program Year: 2019</b>
<b>Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)</b>		
	<b>Negotiated Goals</b>	<b>Attained Performance</b>
Adult	69%	68.8%
Dislocated Worker	81%	81.8%
Youth	68%	72.3%
<b>Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)</b>		
	<b>Negotiated Goals</b>	<b>Attained Performance</b>
Adult	68%	68.1%
Dislocated Worker	80%	80.2%
Youth	67%	66.8%
<b>Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)</b>		
	<b>Negotiated Goals</b>	<b>Attained Performance</b>
Adult	\$4,800	\$4,757
Dislocated Worker	\$6,600	\$6,694
Youth	\$3,000	\$3,232
<b>Credential Attainment Rate</b>		
	<b>Negotiated Goals</b>	<b>Attained Performance</b>
Adult	55%	55.3%
Dislocated Worker	55%	54.4%
Youth	47%	47.1%
<b>Measurable Skill Gains</b>		
	<b>Negotiated Goals</b>	<b>Attained Performance</b>
Adult	25%	13.8%
Dislocated Worker	20%	12.6%
Youth	28%	25.4%

# Attachment 2: WIOA Local Workforce Development System Organizational Chart model



### Attachment 3: WIOA Local Workforce Development Delivery System Program Partner-Provider List

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

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.

<b>Program Name</b>	<b>Program Authorization</b>	<b>Local Area Partner/Provider</b>
<b>POC address</b>	<b>POC telephone</b>	<b>POC website/email</b>
WIOA Title I, Adult, DW, Youth	WIOA Title I program	Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies
540 Central Avenue Johnstown, PA 15902	814-536-3536	bburger@gogoodwill.org
WIOA Title I, Adult, DW, Youth	WIOA Title I program	Employment & Training of Huntingdon
54 Pennsylvania Avenue Huntingdon, PA 16652	814-641-6408	bcovert@emp-trn.org
WIOA Title I, Adult, DW, Youth	WIOA Title I program	Community Action Partnership for Somerset County- Tableland Services
535 East Main Street Somerset, PA 15501	814-445-9628	dmrozowski@capfsc.org
WIOA Title II Adult Education	WIOA Title II Program	Somerset County Technology Center
281 Technology Drive Somerset, PA 15501	814-443-3651	kremick@sctc.net
WIOA Title II Adult Education	WIOA Title II Program	Altoona Area School District
2212 6 <sup>th</sup> Ave, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Floor Altoona, PA 16602	814-946-8753	tswineford@altoonaasd.com
WIOA Title II Adult Education	WIOA Title II Program	Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies
540 Central Avenue Johnstown, PA 15902	814-536-3536	bburger@gogoodwill.org
Indian & Native American Programs	WIOA Title I Native American Programs	Council of the Three Rivers American Indian Center, Inc.
120 Charles Street Dorseyville, PA 15238	1-800-985-8781	rjohn@cotraic.org
Job Corps	WIOA Title I: Job Corps	Pittsburgh Job Corps
355 5 <sup>th</sup> Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15222	570—708-0694	Weaver.edward@jobcorps.org
Senior Community Service Employment	Title V of the Older American Act of 1965	AARP Foundation
321 Main Street, Suite 4H Johnstown, PA 15901	814-241-8630	kfetsko@aarp.org

**Attachment 3: WIOA Local Workforce Development Delivery System  
Program Partner-Provider List**

Senior Community Service Employment	Title V of the Older American Act of 1965	A4TD
3900 Industrial Park Drive Altoona, PA 16602	802-524-3200	mbranagan@a4td.org
Trade Adjustment Assistance	Chapter 2, Title II of Trade Act	Pa Department of Labor & Industry
651 Boas Street, 12 <sup>th</sup> Floor Harrisburg, PA 17121	717-787-6915	stewolf@pa.gov
Unemployment Compensation	State Unemployment Compensation Social Security Act 9 of 1935	PA Department of Labor & Industry
651 Boas Street Harrisburg, PA 17121	717-787-7107	karencam@pa.gov
Wagner-Peyser Act ES	WIOA Title III	PA Department of Labor and Industry
651 Boas Street, 12 <sup>th</sup> Floor Harrisburg, PA 17121	717-787-6915	stewolf@pa.gov
Career & Technical Education	Carl D. Perkins Career & Technical Education Act of 2019	Greater Altoona Career & Technology Center
1500 4 <sup>th</sup> Avenue Altoona, PA 16602	814-505-1256	Julie.patosky@gactc.edu
Career & Technical Education	Carl D. Perkins Career & Technical Education Act of 2019	Pennsylvania Highlands Community College
101 Community College Way Johnstown, PA 15904	814-262-6425	bzabor@pennhighlands.edu
Career & Technical Education	Carl D. Perkins Career & Technical Education Act of 2019	Somerset County Technology Center
281 Technology Drive Somerset, PA	814-443-3651	Kremick@sctc.net
Vocational Rehabilitation Program	WIOA Title IV under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973	PA Department of Labor and Industry - Office of Vocational Rehabilitation-
1130 12 <sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 500 Altoona, PA 16601	814-946-7240	cwoodring@pa.gov
Vocational Rehabilitation Program	WIOA Title IV under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973	PA Department of Labor and Industry Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
727 Goucher Street, Section 10 Johnstown, PA 15905	814-255-6771	maduranko@pa.gov
Community Services Block Grant	Housing & Urban Development-employment & training activities	Center for Community Action
195 Drive In Lane Everett, PA 15537	814-623-9129	wmelius@centerforcommunityaction.org
Community Services Block Grant	Housing & Urban Development-employment & training activities	Community Action Partnership Community Service Center
2100 6 <sup>th</sup> Avenue	814-946-3651	Sergio.carmona@blaircap.org

**Attachment 3: WIOA Local Workforce Development Delivery System  
Program Partner-Provider List**

Altoona, PA 16602		
Community Services Block Grant	Housing & Urban Development-employment & training activities	Community Action Partnership of Cambria County
3133-65 New Germany Road Ebensburg, PA 15931	814-536-9013	jvaughn@capcc.us
Community Services Block Grant	Housing & Urban Development-employment & training activities	Community Action Partnership for Somerset County
535 East Main Street Somerset, PA 15501	814-445-9628	dmrozowski@capfsc.org
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families	Part A of Title IV of Social Security Act	PA Department of Human Services
1100 Green Avenue Altoona, PA 16601	814-946-7100	<a href="http://www.dhs.pa.gov">http://www.dhs.pa.gov</a>
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families	Part A of Title IV of Social Security Act	PA Department of Human Services
7591 Lake Raystown Shopping Center Huntingdon, PA 16652	814-624-4008	<a href="http://www.dhs.pa.gov">http://www.dhs.pa.gov</a>
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families	Part A of Title IV of Social Security Act	PA Department of Human Services
164 Staybrook Street Somerset, PA 15501	814-445-1109	<a href="http://www.dhs.pa.gov">http://www.dhs.pa.gov</a>
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families	Part A of Title IV of Social Security Act	PA Department of Human Services
625 Main Street Johnstown, PA 15901	814-533-2282	<a href="http://www.dhs.pa.gov">http://www.dhs.pa.gov</a>
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families	Part A of Title IV of Social Security Act	PA Department of Human Services
150 North Street Bedford, Pa 15522	814-623-6127	<a href="http://www.dhs.pa.gov">http://www.dhs.pa.gov</a>
YouthBuild	WIOA Title I- YouthBuild	Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies
540 Central Avenue Johnstown, PA 15902	814-536-3536	bburger@gogoodwill.org
Family Self-Sufficiency Program	Housing & Urban Development-employment & training activities	Altoona Housing Authority
2700 Pleasant Valley Blvd. Altoona, PA 16602	814-949-2026	Cheryl.johns@altoonahousing.org

## Attachment 4: Local Workforce Development System 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.

Local boards must enter the prerequisite information. The completed *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.

**Note-** The Southern Alleghenies Regional and Local Plans include a significant amount of related data. For reader ease, the data sources are incorporated into the narrative and therefore not referenced in Attachment 4.

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

## INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Board and its many workforce partners and stakeholders, we are pleased to share the Local Plan with the region. It was written during a medical pandemic and a severe economic downturn unlike anything experienced in most of our lifetimes. At the time of its drafting, all the PA CareerLink® sites are open for in-person services; virtual service delivery is also available. As with any plan, it looks to the future and includes current data as well as projections. It speaks to current service delivery models as well as opportunities for enhanced service provision. But, if we have learned anything since March 2020, it is that flexibility, agility, innovation, and a willingness to try new a new approach, even at the risk of failure, must be the compass by which we set our course. With those watchwords in mind, we present the 2021 Southern Alleghenies Local Plan.

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

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

According to Economic Modeling Specialist, International 2020.4 database, the 2020 population of the region stands at 430,351, down 3.2% over the past five years and representing just 3.4% of the total population of the Commonwealth. Estimates project an additional 2.3% decline in the Southern Alleghenies population by 2025, while the state is expected to gain 0.3% in that same timeframe. Looking ahead to 2025, 20.2% equating to 4,993 of the younger working population ages 20-29 are projected to decrease from the Southern Alleghenies workforce. The trend in this area is a continuing decline in the population overall with the younger age groups declining the quickest.

AGE	POPULATION	PERCENTAGE
0-19	92,289	21.4%
20-24	23,593	5.5%
25-34	49,444	11.5%
35-44	47,914	11.1%
45-54	54,571	12.7%
55-64	64,008	14.9%
65-74	55,073	12.8%
75+	43,459	10.1%

The population is reasonably well educated, evidenced by the 92% graduation rate among all persons

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

18 and older. Additionally, 41.4% have some college or a degree. With the exception of a charter school averaging 45%, all other high school graduation rates have been consistent at over 91% from 2015-2019. WIOA Title I training dollars from Plan Years 16-19 provided 225 adult and dislocated workers with employment related training in High Priority Occupations. Of those WIOA participants, 150 completed employment related training, earning an average \$30,174.88 annually.

One of the biggest challenges for the counselors is to find those individuals and get them connected to and engaged with the resources that might help them get their diploma and successfully become part of the workforce. School administrators express rising concern with increasing rates of defection from the public school system as the pandemic has forced brick and mortar learning to cease. Partnering with their local PA CareerLink® counselors, school administrators are working diligently to reconnect with these youth.

AGE GROUP	PERCENTAGE
Less than 9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	3.5%
9 <sup>th</sup> to 12 <sup>th</sup> Grade, No Diploma	7.3%
High School Graduate (Includes Equivalency)	47.7%
Some College, No Degree	14.8%
Associates Degree	8.5%
Bachelor's Degree	11.7%
Graduate or Professional Degree	6.4%

(Source: Economic Modeling Specialists, International Labor Market Information by Region & County prepared by Central Pennsylvania Workforce Development Corporation)

Individuals with barriers to employment is a broad group given the 13 different populations targeted for service by WIOA. However, the impact of poor educational attainment and lack of skills may be clearly seen in those individuals with barriers to employment such as poverty, disability, citizenship, and language. Included in those groups are Displaced Homemakers, Indians, Alaska Natives and native Hawaiians, Low Income Individuals, Individuals with Disabilities, Older Individuals (age 55 and older), Ex-Offenders, Homeless Individuals, Youth who are in or have aged out of the foster care system, Individuals who are English language learners, have low literacy levels, or face substantial cultural barriers, Eligible Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers, Individuals within two years of exhausting lifetime eligibility under TANF, Single Parents (including pregnant women, and Long-Term Unemployed Individuals. These groups represent the most vulnerable in our system and significant efforts and resources will be directed to identifying and serving these individuals. PA CareerLink® staff

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

recognize that unique strategies will need to be developed and deployed to reach many of the targeted populations including utilizing flexible operating hours and potentially meeting customers at locations other than the PA CareerLink® office. The SAWDB will encourage and support professional development to ensure that staff are comfortable and confident that they are well-positioned to identify and address the needs of these target populations. The SAWDB's Special Populations Committee is working with the site administrators to identify service gaps and outreach strategies. Recent data from the CWIA has shed some light on barriers to help us determine the volume and characteristics of these target groups.

A meaningful level of detail related to the education and skill levels of the target populations in the local area is currently unavailable. What can be shared is as follows:

- 12.3% of those sixteen years of age and older (42,335 individuals) have an income that places them below the poverty level, 27% of this group are employed, 9% are unemployed and 64.7% are not attached to the workforce.
- 14.25% of the working population age 16-64 report some type of disability. The unemployment rate for that group runs from 8.8% to 14.9% in the counties included in the region while the unemployment rate for those without disabilities is 3.7% to 5.1%. Additionally, of the 36,715 individuals in the disability group, the percentage of individuals not in the labor force varies between 39.4% and 42.6% in the counties in the region.
- With individuals 5 years and older, less than 1% or 3,650 individuals are reported as not speaking English "very well."
- Single parent households with children under age 18 represent 52% of all households in the region with children.

(Source: 2015-2019 5-Year American Community Surveys)

The subject of employment status, like barriers to employment, is a multi-faceted issue that starts with population and workforce participation rates. Fortunately, there is plenty of data to use for analysis. Defined as a measure of the number of people in the labor force as a percentage of the population 16 and over, this figure has been consistently hovering close to fifty percent while having a significant impact on both the unemployment statistics as well as the declining labor force participants.

Based on the Workforce Development Area Profile from the Center for Workforce Information & Analysis reporting January 2021 data, the Southern Alleghenies Labor Force Participation Rate stands at 56%. Given that both population and labor force numbers have dropped consistently since 2008, declination of the labor force that we have been tracking is confirmed. From May of 2019 when the regional labor force stood at 203,200 until January of 2021, when the labor force declined to 197,500, there were three percent fewer workers. In this same time span, employed declined by 10,000, while the unemployed increased by 4,200 since May of 2019. With markets rebounding from the decimation of the pandemic in April of 2020, this time span was used purposely to bridge that crisis period, though persistent unemployment is still reflected in these statistics.

Taking the deeper dive for relevant labor market indicators, several factors contributing to the declining labor force participation problem include the weak state of the labor markets, an aging and declining population, retirements, discouraged workers and the absence of employability skills. The Workforce

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

Development Area Profile from the Center for Workforce Information & Analysis reported the unemployment rate for November 2020, in the Southern Alleghenies region at 6.4%, down from 7.5% in October, and below the November state average of 6.6%, an unusual occurrence. These figures may be a somewhat misleading economic indicator, falling not because of a rising employed population but rather because workers have been dropping out of the labor force. If these workers were still attached to the labor force, the unemployment rate would be significantly higher. That trend creates a similar situation to the non-high school graduate problem of identification of and engagement with the public workforce system.

Under the leadership of the SAWDB, the PA CareerLink® staff will be expected to expand outreach to these target groups. Through community resource mapping, we will identify those program providers who routinely serve these individuals and establish a coordinated method for referral to and case management with the public workforce system. The PA CareerLink® staff will conduct greater outreach to the agencies below and measure customer referrals:

- Veterans Organizations including the US Department of Veterans Affairs
- Family Counseling Services including homeless and women's shelters and related community and faith-based organizations, food pantries, public libraries, EARN providers
- County Bar Associations, MH/MR Community Services and Addiction/Recovery providers, and Transitional Re-entry Advisory Councils
- Senior Community Employment Program providers and County Area Agencies on Aging
- Community Action Agencies; Chamber of Commerce committees
- County Children and Youth services, free medical clinics, and community family counseling service providers

The PA CareerLink® staff have significant experience in serving individuals with barriers to employment; they will utilize their combined expertise and a variety of assessment tools to help customers develop their individual employment plans. These 'roadmaps to success' will include not only those services provided through the public workforce system but also identify appropriate referrals to partner programs that can further support attainment of the individual's vocational goal. Close communication and collaboration will be expected between the PA CareerLink® and supporting partner agencies and will be essential to meet, in many cases, the special needs of those in the target populations.

## *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?*

It is Board policy to continuously solicit input from a broad range of organizations and groups that are involved in workforce development. It has and will continue to provide enhanced support for On-the-Job Training and Apprenticeship programs by placing significant resources at the disposal of the PA CareerLink® centers and their employer partners to supply employers with the right employees offering the correct skill sets.

The Board and Board partners depend upon and thrive on the quality of collaboration and communication between all parties impacting the workforce. Regular meetings of local and regional

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

committees, sub-committees, industry partnerships, economic development forums and senior business and political leader working groups all help to inform the Board about what is happening at various levels in the workforce. That information is combined with information gathered by counselors at the local level in the PA CareerLink® to form a picture of the workforce. Additionally, workforce and educational attainment data is gathered from multiple sources to provide a basis for comparison to local data. The information is then presented to the full Board for discussion and policy action if necessary.

Regular monthly meetings of the one-stop operator occur immediately following the monthly executive committee Board meeting and quarterly SAWDB meeting. Those one-stop meetings have proven to be crucial to the effective flow of information pertaining to Board intentions regarding skill gaps as well as a place to gather immediate feedback from the operator. It also facilitates a parallel planning process for new initiatives because the information is fresh, and the key leadership is in attendance.

Formal data analysis from multiple sources such as Help Wanted On-Line, local newspaper ads, and information pulled from state data sets is routinely used to keep the partners informed about the workforce. It is also important to watch local developments closely, as these provide current relevant input to the analysis.

In the past year, Cleveland Brothers, a new employer to the region, built a state-of-the-art gas engine rebuild facility. Our regional economy was based on the railroad for over a century. With this mainstay industry in significant decline, workers who historically were accustomed to temporary seasonal layoffs now receive permanent pink slips. Six pink-slipped rail engine diesel mechanics, who sought the expertise of their local PA CareerLink® office, are now learning how to work on a natural gas engine. Through the On-the-Job (OJT) training program, these workers are overcoming a huge skill gap while providing their new employer with reliable, competent workers.

Skills gap training within the PA CareerLink® is vital to a myriad of workers, from miners to older workers in the manufacturing sector who were found to be basic skills deficient upon initial testing and therefore unable to access training programs until remediation was completed. These were highly compensated workers who had been very successful yet now found themselves delayed in looking for a new position until they brushed up on their reading and math skills. Additionally, those without a high school diploma found that they could not even apply for many positions until they completed the equivalency testing. Given the higher density of older workers in the region, the one-stops should expect to continue to see customers in that situation. The region is fortunate to have an outstanding group of committed Adult Basic Education providers; this workforce partner will continue to play a vital role in preparing many of our customers to effectively reenter the workforce.

The SAWDB is currently administering a National Dislocated Worker Economic Transition grant that is aimed at assisting those with limited skills, who have lost their jobs in the retail and service sectors. Many of these individuals have spent much of their working lives earning less than a family sustaining wage and subjected to regular and frequent layoffs. The goal of this initiative, which funds retaining in high priority occupations at 100%, is to provide the participants with marketable skills that will enable them to obtain more stable and family-sustaining employment. To date 23 individuals have participated in this initiative, with the majority pursuing training for healthcare-related positions. As of

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

January 2021, 100% of training completers are working in their field of study at an average wage of \$15.58 per hour.

Below are the current and relevant skills that cluster employers in the region seek in current employees.

- **Advanced Manufacturing** – The advanced manufacturing cluster has long been a solid part of the local economy that requires constantly changing technology to remain competitive. Manufacturing positions from supervisors and inspectors to skilled craftsmen, production workers and maintenance mechanics are strong in the following skill areas:
  - Making Decisions and Solving Problems
  - Active listening with Supervisors, Peers, or Subordinates
  - Inspecting Equipment, Structures, or Material
  - Mechanical aptitude
  - Oral expression and oral, written, and reading comprehension
  - Performing General Physical Activities
- **Building and Construction** – Technicians such as drafters and skilled craftsmen like carpenters, masons, plumbers, and electricians have a wide range of skills including:
  - Ability to listen to the wants and needs of the customer and translate that to a product that can be forwarded to a craftsman for actual development.
  - Mathematical skills to provide the proper instructions to the field resulting in fewer mistakes and less need for modification of plans.
  - Handling and Moving Objects
  - Organizing, Planning, and Prioritizing Work
  - Choice and implementation of the correct material and accepted construction practice.
- **Business Services** – The workforce involved in the business services cluster tends to be more educated and their skills more complex. The financial managers, accountants, information management professionals, and customer service representatives have skills that are technical, personal, and analytical in nature. Included in those categories are:
  - Complex problem solving
  - Interacting with Computers
  - Reading comprehension
  - Performing for or Working Directly with the Public
  - Communicating with Persons Outside Organization
  - Evaluating Information to Determine Compliance with Standards
- **Healthcare** – As the largest cluster in the region, healthcare encompasses a wide variety of occupations that range from individuals providing direct patient care to the administration required in a highly-regulated industry. Those employees possess very diversified skill sets such as:
  - Assisting and Caring for Others
  - Accurately translating written orders into action

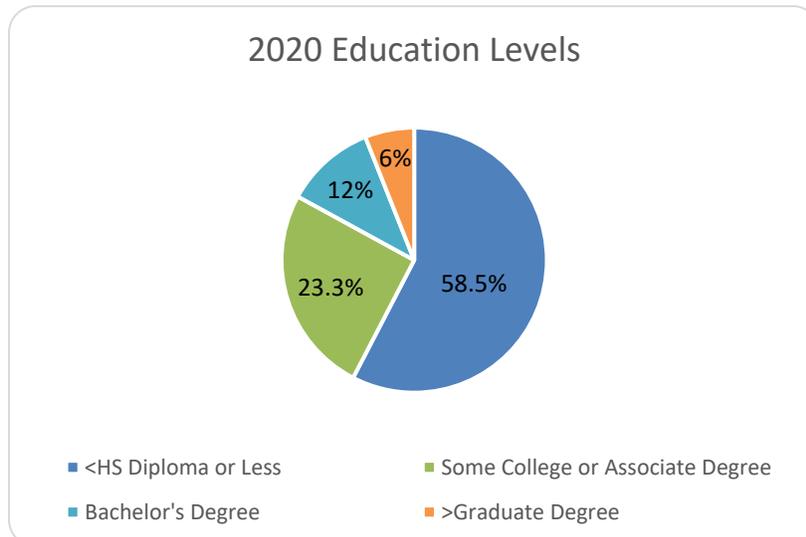
# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

- Documenting/Recording Information
  - Oral expression and comprehension
  - Inductive reasoning, judgment and decision-making
  - Processing information
  - Monitoring processes, materials, or surroundings
  - Establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships
  - Updating and using relevant knowledge
- **Logistics and Transportation** – Employees in the logistics and transportation cluster include those involved in the actual movement of cargo to those involved in processing and accounting for inventory and managing the flow of cargo to final destination. Workers in the cluster have skills such as:
- Vision, spatial orientation, and reaction time to safely operate equipment
  - Material Handling
  - Operating equipment safely
  - Evaluating Information to Determine Compliance with Standards
  - Thinking Creatively
  - Identifying Objects, Actions, and Events
  - Communicating with Persons Outside Organization

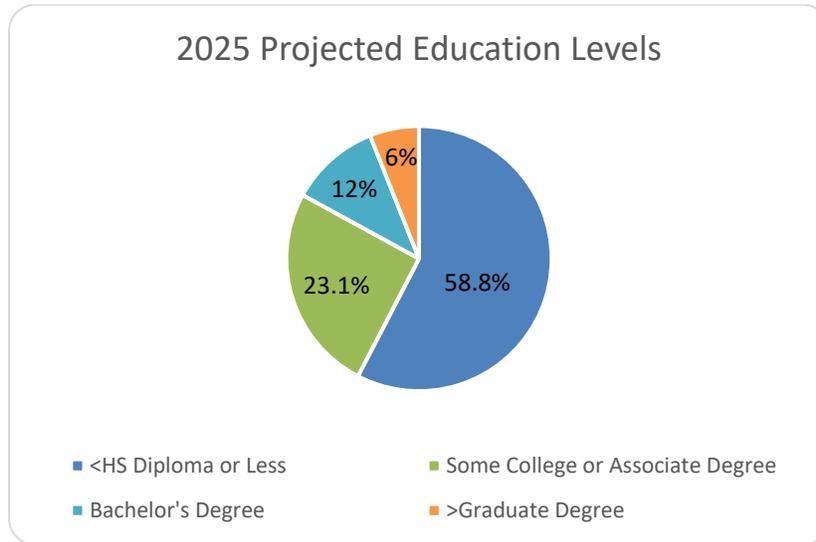
This analysis begins with a look at the education level of local area population 25 years of age and older totaling 314,469 in 2020. The projected population decreases to 308,844 by 2025, based on Center for Workforce Information and Analysis Q4 2020 data.



# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021



Over half of the population, 58.5%, possesses a high school diploma or less. A further breakdown reflects that 23% have an associate degree or at least some college, 12% have bachelor’s degrees and 6% have graduate degrees. This corresponds very closely with the data reflected in the most recent High Priority Occupation List education requirements for the region, according to the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis. Projected 2025 education levels show very little change.

The 2020 High Priority Occupation List for the local area provides a good starting point to analyze the employment requirements for industries and occupations that are important to the local economy. The regional list contains 69 occupations. The necessary entry level educational attainment levels are reflected below:

<u>Educational Level</u>	<u># Occupations on List</u>	<u>% of Total</u>
Work Experience	11	16%
Short Term OJT (<1yr)	3	3%
Med. Term OJT (<1yr)	23	33%
Long Term OJT (>1yr)	11	16%
Post-Secondary	9	13%
Assoc. Degree	5	7%
Bachelor’s Degree and +	8	12%

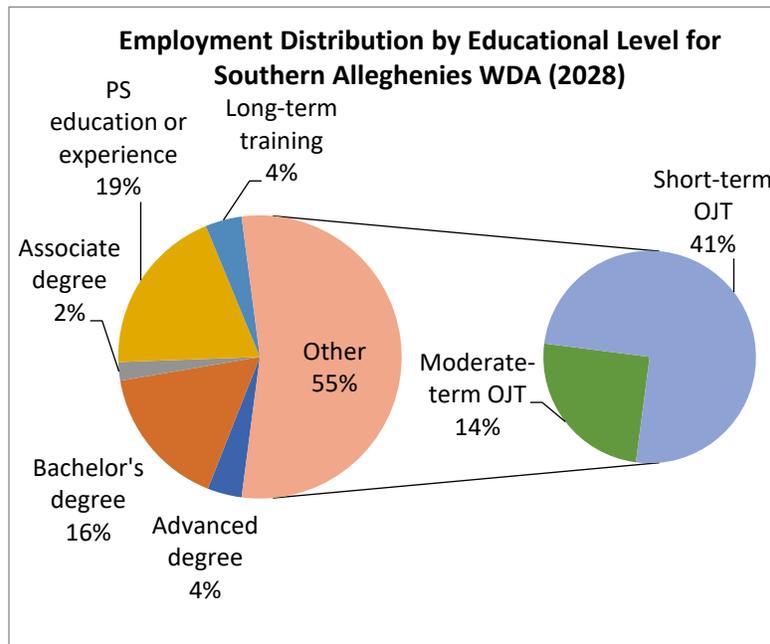
# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

The trend indicating a shift away from occupations requiring a bachelor's degree toward occupations that require previous work experience, willingness to engage in OJT and some type of post-secondary education continued from 2019. Consequently, the Board focus will continue directing resources to those types of training as much as possible and ensure career planners have up-to-date information that can be used to guide job seekers.

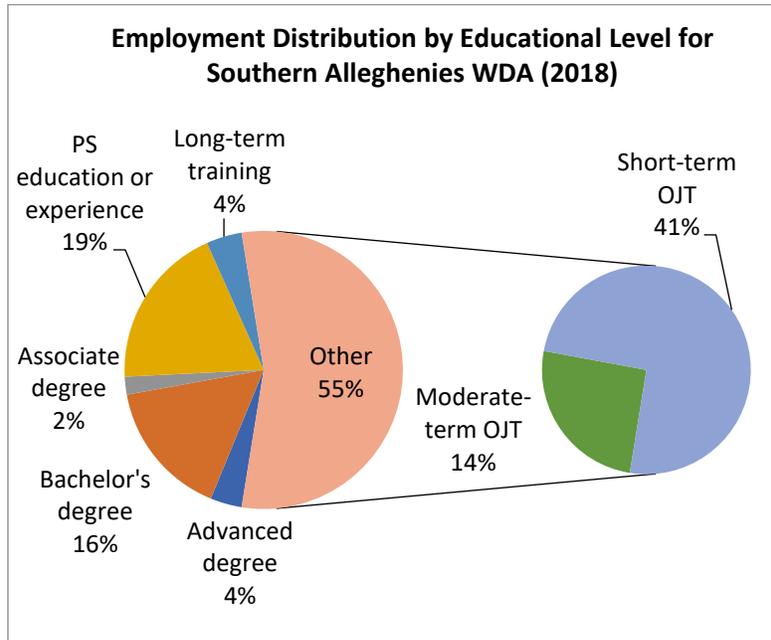
The CWIA Employment Distribution by Education charts below illustrate, that for the projectable future, the education requirements for the region's workforce are not expected to change. There will be virtually no change to the education distribution among the workforce. Short to moderate-term OJT will make up more than half of the requirement supporting the Board's decision to concentrate on marketing and promoting OJT and apprenticeship to area employers.



# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021



The Board will support policies and programs that strive to provide a solid foundation of soft skills in the PA CareerLink® sites and its partners while using training funds to focus on the skills that will support job placements in the High Priority Occupation List. The CWIA Occupational Employment Projections, 2016-2026 based on the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Information Network (O\*NET) Database reinforces this focus as seventeen of the twenty top skills are related to all the region's targeted industry clusters. Further reinforcement is derived from fifteen of the top twenty certifications being related to two industry clusters, Healthcare and Transportation. The importance of computers and associated software skills is evident from a review of the top twenty tools and technology with nineteen being directly related to computers and one being screwdrivers.

### *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?*

The challenges the Board faces are primarily related to timely intelligence and funding priorities. Consequently, the Board strategy will be to connect with as many employers as possible using multiple avenues striving to have an impact on:

- Timely identification of needs from employers
- Development of consensus to achieve multi-employer economies of scale
- Lead times for curriculum development
- Lead times for arrangement of trainers

The Board and staff will continue to participate on as many committees, advisory panels, and partnerships as possible to gather information from different industries, levels of leadership, and PA CareerLink® customers. The PA CareerLink® site administrators will oversee Business Service Teams

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

(BST) tasked with connecting employers with business services and potential employees, including incumbent workers. The board allocates funds every year to provide workshop seed money to the PA CareerLink® sites which they then leverage with partners to provide the needed training at little or no cost to the employer community. The SAWDB additionally allocates funding, if available, to provide the one-stop with assistance in conducting job fairs targeted at employers who have openings and are actively seeking employees. All these efforts can be successfully completed virtually or in person, depending on the circumstance and need. Through the efforts of the Business Service Strategy Team, an arm of the One Stop Operator, each PA CareerLink® in the region can conduct virtual job fairs or training, including breakout rooms for individual interviews or one-on-one training sessions.

The SAWDB's One-Stop Operator focuses primarily on the PA CareerLink® business service teams in building awareness of and partnership with regional employers. One method of success established was a quarterly scorecard that measures progress in contacting new employers, servicing current employer customers, and developing new services aimed at attracting, hiring, and retaining employees.

The SAWDB will continue to connect with the economic development community directly and through the Partnership for Regional Economic Performance (PREP) where one employer need can be identified and potentially embraced by multiple employers when staff shares that need with other contacts. Also, by being an active partner with PREP, the Board has access to employer surveys which often include skill training needs. The Board will continue to pursue similar opportunities whenever possible. Some of the other avenues the Board uses to gather skill gap information are various advisory committees for high schools, career and technical centers, community colleges, and adult literacy providers.

Another potential avenue to explore for filling employer needs for skilled labor begins by looking outside of our region to import these skilled workers. The Board will work with various community groups in Altoona and Johnstown who are focused on transforming their cities by addressing blight, crime, and business declines through community development aimed at bringing younger residents into the region and encouraging entrepreneurs.

The process of developing apprenticeships may provide a pathway to alleviating the lag in curriculum development by getting education providers in direct contact with employers who are determining what their related instruction needs to be. Consequently, the Board has placed additional focus on apprenticeship development which has already resulted in at least four companies starting on the apprenticeship development path this year. Development of apprenticeships for in-demand occupations helps to get that curriculum in place which can then be used for other apprenticeships or modified more quickly if necessary.

The Board was an active partner with the committee that recently completed the Southern Alleghenies regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2020-2024. The strategies noted below are in direct support of Goal Number One in the CEDS: Seek Expansion of the Regional Economy Through Diversified Job Growth. It is of special note that Workforce Development initiatives now have five focused strategies, highlighting the growing emphasis on workforce initiatives to achieve regional economic growth.

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

The first Strategy relating to workforce is under Objective A, which is to continue the gradual movement of the Region to a more technology-related, diversified economy.

- *Strategy 2:* Conduct annual assessments of high demand jobs and specific skills required in those positions to focus workforce development and job placement activities according to current opportunities.

The five strategies below fall under Objective C, which is to directly support workforce development initiatives that build the talent pipeline and enhance the skills of the incumbent workforce to ensure the Region's employers remain competitive.

- *Strategy 1:* Support and promote the Region's public workforce system, the Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Board, and its network of PA CareerLink® sites as a significant resource for employer and jobseeker services.
- *Strategy 2:* Expand and educate students and jobseekers to the many training options that lead to gainful employment in the Region. These can include traditional post-secondary education as well as occupational skills training through Career and Technology Centers and apprenticeships.
- *Strategy 3:* Support opportunities for increased communication and collaboration between the employer community and the Region's educators to help ensure that employer needs, and educational offerings are aligned.
- *Strategy 4:* Support programs that provide education, workforce preparedness training and hands-on learning for young adults with significant barriers to employment. These can include low education levels, homelessness, low income, aging out of foster care and criminal records.
- *Strategy 5:* Support expansion and enhancement of work-based opportunities for jobseekers, especially youth. These can range from summer work experience opportunities for in-school youth and internships for college students to transitional employment for adults with barriers to employment.

The various strategies described above are directed at ensuring the businesses in the region know and understand that the SAWDB and the PA CareerLink® sites are the face of the public workforce system and believe this is the place to call for assistance in addressing workforce related issues.

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

A wide range of workforce development activities are available within the Southern Alleghenies region and provided by multiple partners that include but are not limited to the one-stop system, career and technical centers, for-profit providers, community colleges, and post-secondary institutions. There are seven Career and Technical Centers that provide training to secondary and post-secondary students. There are two community colleges that provide training to most of the six-county local area. There are five degree producing institutions and one business college that also provide training to residents of the local area. In addition to institutions of higher education, the region has seen a growing number of registered apprenticeships.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

While the local area is home to a significant number of post-secondary institutions and a variety of public and private training providers, many of our residents are not prepared to pursue and successfully complete training programs because they lack the requisite reading, math, and digital literacy skills. The SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® sites will continue to work closely with the coalition of ABLE Title II providers, community-based and other service organizations that provide adult basic education services, and the local area's network of public libraries to ensure that job seekers have the necessary skills to successfully complete post-secondary education coursework and return to the workforce. The Division of Adult Education Coalition meetings are held regularly and include representatives from career and technology centers, school districts, child and adult development corporations, a WIOA Title I provider that also provides Title II services, and members of the SAWDB and its staff. Frequent communication with partners and referrals between providers and the Board and PA CareerLink® sites has served to better connect those customers in need of adult basic education with appropriate providers of the service. The SAWDB has further cemented its position on the importance of adult basic education by including a Coalition representative on the SAWDB, its One-Stop Operator Consortium and its committee dedicated to serving special populations. Digital literacy has been called 'the most important lifelong learning tool' and being 'digitally literate' is essential for jobseekers, regardless of their vocational goals. The PA CareerLink® sites offer the Northstar digital literacy assessment, which defines the basic skills needed to use a computer and the internet in daily life, employment, and higher education. PA CareerLink® customers can take any or all eleven modules that range from basic computer skills and Windows 10 and Mac OS X to Microsoft Office applications and information literacy. Our customers can receive digital badges whenever they pass the assessments and can additionally receive certificates when they pass the assessments in our proctored environment. The credentials associated with Northstar are included in the jobseeker's portfolio.

The Southern Alleghenies public workforce system consists of five full PA CareerLink® sites and four affiliate sites where residents can receive personal service or conduct self-service activities. This is critical given the diverse and rural geography of the region where a one-stop may be more than an hour's drive from some parts of the county. Those one-stops and the affiliate sites are the entry point to services that can include orientation, job search (both assisted and unassisted), career training, targeted skill development workshops, and job fairs. The activities are planned and organized so that a participant can get on at any point depending on their personal situation and level of need and get off when they have met their own goals. Orientation is the introduction to the one-stop and its services. A confident self-motivated job seeker can take advantage of PA CareerLink® 2.0® and the statewide system of job postings and somebody who never completed a resume can receive one-on-one assistance from staff to utilize PA CareerLink® 2.0®. Assistance with using labor market information to make informed career and training decisions is also available. A variety of workshops are offered regularly and range from basic and intermediate computer to preparing for an interview. All the activities are geared toward putting people to work.

Many of the institutions listed above provide programs made available to eligible workforce system participants through the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). Currently, the local ETPL has a total of 147 programs offered by 13 providers, currently the third highest number in Pennsylvania. The workforce system also provides the opportunity for work-based training through the OJT program,

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

transitional paid work experience for adults and dislocated workers who have limited employment histories, work experience for youth and internships offered through special grants.

The significant number of providers and the broad breadth of consumer choice from the large number of available courses combine to provide strength to the system's ability to respond to employer and jobseeker needs. Dual enrollment opportunities for secondary students are another strong element that helps to promote educational attainment by providing students with the chance to earn college credit while in high school.

In addition to customer access to higher education, individuals can participate in a growing number of apprenticeship programs. The SAWDB and its partners have been promoting apprenticeships as a viable path to family-sustaining employment, especially for those with multiple barriers to employment and for those who are not a 'good fit' for traditional classroom-based higher education. The PA CareerLink® partners have been using apprenticeship fairs to promote employers and their 'learn and earn' opportunities. The region's WIOA Title I providers have incorporated pre-apprenticeship activities into their youth serve mix and utilized Business-Education Partnership funds to further educate young people on the tremendous opportunities available through apprenticeships.

Even though there are many providers offering a broad set of choices for training, the rural geography of the region and general lack of public transportation combine to limit access to a significant portion of the local population. Another challenge is the level of technical training offered in the vocational or trades arena. The career and technical centers provide a variety of trades training and work closely with their employer advisory committees to ensure that their curriculum and certifications are recognized and in demand by employers. Still, the cost of education continues to be a deterrent to some seeking training even with funding support available through the public workforce system. This is particularly evident for dislocated workers and underemployed adults who often must choose between attending training or working at a job that pays significantly less than their prior earnings.

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

The SAWDB utilizes information from multiple sources including federal census data, state level resources, a regional data consortium, and local data gathered from PA CareerLink® partners, industry partnerships and economic developers.

### **Key Economic Conditions**

The civilian labor force across the six county Southern Alleghenies region has continued a downward trend since 2007, declining from 226,100 to 197,500 in November 2020, according to the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (CWIA) **January 2021 Southern Alleghenies WDA Profile** report. This is reflective of the decline in the available labor force across the Commonwealth, as the diminishing number of workers widens the gap between available jobs and skilled talent. These numbers reinforce all other projected trends including those spending more time in school, baby boomers continuing to retire, continued declining demand for less skilled workers that result in workers becoming discouraged about employment prospects, an aging workforce who is less likely to seek work compared to workers in the prime age category, and unemployed workers who have been unemployed for extended time periods.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

As the SAWDB relentlessly works to understand and address the many intricate causes of these labor force trends, associated demographic and labor market factors will continue to exert downward pressure on the already low labor force participation rate.

The Southern Alleghenies regional economy has continued to operate below its norm by the broadest measures punctuated by consistent annual average job losses for the past eight years. According to the CWIA **November 2020 Industry Sector** reporting, there were 186,300 jobs in the six counties in the region as of 2019. This was a loss of 1,600 jobs between 2015 and 2019. During the same period, jobs grew by 3.9% in Pennsylvania and 5.8% across the country.

According to **Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages Second Quarter Comparison 2019-2020**, Preliminary, from Q2 of 2019 to Q2 of 2020, average employment in the SA region decreased by 23,482 to 145,474, a 13.9% decline, with negative impact in nearly every industry, pointing to COVID-19 as the likely culprit. Average employment projections by the CWIA indicate a positive rebound from 2018 to 2028, at 189,290, a 1.5% increase.

The region performs consistently worse than both the state and national figures. Based on the **Central Pennsylvania Workforce Development Corporation Labor Market Status Reports October 2019, October 2020**, regional economic conditions include:

- Unemployment rates consistently higher than state average
- Declining labor force participation, with rates just above the 50% level
- Aging population
- Challenge to retain and attract younger workers to the region
- Business community vitality that creates employment opportunities through a diversified business base

The pandemic of 2020 caused a severe spike in unemployment in the Southern Alleghenies region. The Center for Workforce Information and Analysis reported in April of 2019 that the region's unemployment was 9,200, with the associated unemployment rate at 4.6%. Fast forward to April of 2020, when the pandemic's effects on the labor market were at their peak, and new unemployment claims totaled 37,100 in the Southern Alleghenies region, a 303% change from April 2019. The associated regional unemployment rate stood at 18%, while statewide unemployment totaled 976,000 claims, with an accompanying rate of 15.1 percent.

On the positive side, statistics reveal that if every online job posting were filled by Southern Alleghenies jobseekers, the unemployment rate in the Southern Alleghenies would drop to 0.0 percent. This statistic, based on the assumption that all online job postings are real, that they can be filled, and that only unemployed residents of the region fill those jobs, underscores a regional opportunity to respond to this growing need for a higher educated available workforce. The jobs in our region increasingly necessitate specific technical skills from an institution of higher learning. The CWIA reported in the **November 2020 Economic Outlook** report that the regional unemployment rate decreases from 7.7% to 4.2% when high school graduates attain a bachelor's degree or higher. Through the SAWDB,

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

partnerships with additional ETPL choices are flourishing.

## Unemployment

According to the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis, the region has the thirteenth highest unemployment rate among the 22 workforce development areas in the state. The unemployment rate in four of the six counties in the region is higher than the state rate and three of the counties are included with the 20 counties having the highest unemployment rates in the state.

## Labor Force

Based on **2019 5-year American Community Survey** calculations for the population 16 years and over, the labor force participation rate for 2019 stands at 56%, compared to 61.5% for the Commonwealth. The region loses nearly 18,000 workers net to other workforce regions every day and five of the six counties experience an overall net loss of workers daily. The overall population continues to age, based on the median age of 44.9 in 2019 with 24% more people aged 55-64 at 64,008 compared to the 48,816 ages 15-24. The population density of younger individuals in the region continues to be a concern. The population of the 55-64-year-old age group exceeds that of the 15-24-year-old group by more than 15,000, potentially leading to a labor shortage as older workers retire. Youth in the 15-24 age bracket are projected to decrease from 11.3% to 11% of the regional population.

## Technological and Demographic Factors

Additional conditions affecting the region that require consideration include the lack of even reliable dial-up internet service, not to mention any high-speed internet, that the pandemic has brought to the forefront. Drug abuse in the workforce has forced employers to reconsider pre-employment drug screening, according to the **Pennsylvania Department of Education September 2020**. Between 2015 to 2018, the number of high school graduates in the region declined 2.1% or 3,254 less high school graduates, while the total number of college graduates with a bachelor's degree decreased 1.8% at 682 less graduates, both negatively impacting the potential labor force supply.

Positive economic trends include industries that continue to do well, providing career opportunities for job seekers. Based on the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry statistics, the average weekly wages for all industries have risen by \$103 from January of 2016, to January of 2020. Additionally, the average wage paid for On-the-Job Training in the region has risen although occupational wages remain well below the state averages. There have been recent plant openings in manufacturing that provided new opportunities and while small initially, there is an expectation of growth that will add even more jobs.

The SAWDB will target Manufacturing, Construction, Business Services, Healthcare, and Transportation because of the high numbers of individuals employed, high wages, or a combination of these factors. The regional High Priority Occupation (HPO) List supports this strategy with numerous occupations covering all the targeted clusters. The pandemic of 2020 has placed Healthcare employment in the spotlight, as worker shortages place both healthcare workers and residents in a life-threatening situation. The Board has initiated short-term solutions that reach across international boundaries, working with Pennsylvania and Danish leadership to explore tools for healthcare staff recruitment. The pandemic has also accelerated the demand for transportation expertise.

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

Existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors include:

- Healthcare continues as the top existing in-demand industry employing 21.2% of the labor force. In the region, 35,400 healthcare workers have an average earning of \$45,124. Center for Workforce Information and Analysis project an 8.8% growth from 2018 to 2028.
- Accommodation & Food Services ranks fourth with 8.9% of the labor force.
- Business Services Industry Cluster is a broad category that covers many services provided to businesses in the region. Here we show both Professional and Technical Services coupled with Administrative and Waste Services. Combined, they contribute 6.3% of the workforce, commanding \$42,239 average annual earnings.
- Retail trade remained steady, and while the sector has significant employment numbers, wages and career opportunities exclude it from Board focus.

Existing and emerging in-demand industry sector(s) occupations include:

Healthcare positions including phlebotomists, registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and nursing assistants are in high demand across the region, numbering in the thousands. Additional health related occupations include medical and clinical technologist/technicians, radiologic technologists, and both physical and occupational therapy assistants.

Manufacturing occupations comprise a variety of jobs in the regional workforce with CNC machine tool operators, machinists, structural metal fabricators, maintenance and repair technicians, and welders, cutters, solderers and brazers being the top jobs.

Transportation and Warehousing related occupations have been a critical need in the region for several years, led primarily by both heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers, light truck drivers, while laborers and freight, stock and material movers are also in demand.

Southern Alleghenies Targeted Industry Location Quotients:

<u>Industry Cluster</u>	<u>Location Quotient</u>	<u>Employment</u>	<u>Employment %</u>
Healthcare	1.15	35,426	21.2%
Retail Trade	1.22	21,113	12.6%
Manufacturing	1.27	20,624	12.3%
Accommodation/Food Svc.	1.11	14,939	8.9%
Trans/Warehousing	1.05	9,336	5.6%
Construction	1.09	8,297	5.0%
Admin/Waste Services	0.62	5,666	3.4%
Professional/Tech Services	0.47	4,894	2.9%

Source: Center for Workforce Information and Analysis, Southern Alleghenies WDA Profile, January 2021

The region's employers require technically competent workers, capable of solving problems and

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

capable of daily commitment to being on time every scheduled workday for the business to meet performance goals and payroll. The **Central Pennsylvania Workforce Development Corporation Top Jobs Report September 2020** indicates skill sets that employers seek include communications and interpersonal interaction, understanding and using technology, critical thinking and analysis, physical work, quality assurance and standards enforcement. The SAWDB has allocated significant resources to supporting training for adults, dislocated workers, and youth. The Board and its staff have also worked with a variety of partners to communicate the need for higher education beyond high school, including short-term technical degrees, registered apprenticeships, and four or more years at academic institutions of higher learning. Technical skills in high demand include nurses and HVAC technicians. Registered apprenticeship opportunities have expanded beyond traditional unionized jobs to business services and IT, while bachelor and master's degree programs in human resources and civil engineers are on the top jobs list as high priority occupations.

Looking forward, the impact of remote workers and their working families potentially moving to the region, now that many employers are giving workers that option permanently, will require consideration. With the lower cost of living in the Southern Alleghenies region than larger metropolitan areas in the Northeast, workers relocating here is a reasonable expectation. Pew Research Center and Harris Poll both conducted surveys in 2020 to study this trend. Results from both studies are summarized in a Hybrid Workforce Feasibility Study conducted by **Headlight Data** of Austin, Texas for the Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission. Pew Research found that 3% of the more than 9,000 adults surveyed moved temporarily or permanently due directly to COVID-19. Of more interest to this study are the 9% of those movers who made a permanent change of address. These two factors combined indicate that roughly 0.27% of those surveyed permanently relocated. As another indicator of this trend, the Harris Poll conducted a survey in April 2020, which found that 38% of respondents living in urban areas considered themselves likely to "move out of densely populated areas and toward rural areas." Proportions were higher among both younger and more affluent households. It is important to note that these extrapolations are based on survey data gathered over short periods of time. The actual impact could be larger or smaller than these estimates. This could bring a fresh vitality for small business while providing a positive demographic shift of younger workers. Necessary technological changes, specifically reliable internet access, are already underway in the most underserved areas of the region.

## 2 STRATEGIC PLANNING: *Vision and Goals*

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

The Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Board (SAWDB) will lead initiatives designed to enhance the skills of the workforce to meet the needs of the region's employers to compete in a world economy. To accomplish this, the SAWDB is committed to supporting a data-driven, goal-oriented public workforce system that:

- Is flexible and responsive to the changing needs of jobseekers and employers
- Embraces innovation as espoused in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
- Is committed to serving all those who are seeking employment or employees
- Is integrated into a larger, coordinated network that includes other entities with a similar

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

mission

- Recognizes the importance of career pathways and invests in training opportunities that are tied to employer demand and result in jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage for the employee
- Is committed to excellence and accountable to its funding agents, its customers, and its partners

The SAWDB will help to advance its vision and support attainment of the performance accountability measures as outlined in the WIOA Section 116 for local areas through the following:

1. Increased resources directed to support industry-driven training. Beyond the training benchmarks established in Pennsylvania's Workforce Development Plan, the SAWDB will direct its WIOA Title I allocation, Rapid Response Funding, and National Emergency Grant awards and other competitively secured resources to support training that results in industry-recognized credentials. On-the-Job Training (OJT) will continue to be heavily promoted; all positions supported through OJT will provide a wage that meets or exceeds the local self-sufficiency level. The SAWDB will continue to seek flexible funding and leverage and align partner support to help raise the educational attainment level of our residents and support jobseeker and incumbent worker training needs. Efforts will be closely coordinated with the Partnership for Regional Economic Performance (PREP) partners and WEDnetPA service providers to ensure that employer needs are identified, addressed and services are not duplicated. As a member of PREP, the SAWDB will utilize the partnership opportunities with the region's economic developers to coordinate services that support business recruitment and retention, and incumbent worker skill advancement.
2. Increased alignment with WIOA Title II (Adult Education) and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) to support greater career pathway development and utilization. One in five WIOA Title I customers is basic skills deficient (reading below a 9<sup>th</sup> grade level), has a disability or both barriers to employment. Seamless service integration will be essential to ensure jobseekers receive the services they need. Strategies for the resource alignment are outlined in section 2.2.
3. Continued support for the region's Industry Partnerships (IPs). Industry-driven consortia have been in place and evolved in the region for more than 20 years. These will serve as a vehicle for promoting apprenticeships, a training model that has been slow to gain traction in the region. Increased engagement between employers that effectively utilize apprenticeships and those considering this resource for employee development and career advancement will be supported.
4. Greater analysis of the High Priority Occupation (HPO) and Eligible Training Provider (ETP) Lists to include data analysis of training investments and the effectiveness of preparing participants for employment in their fields of study. Increased communication and collaboration with members of the IPs and the Southern Alleghenies Higher Education Consortia will help to ensure that employer needs and educational offerings are aligned. Additional work will be

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

conducted to develop and promote micro-credentials and prior-learning credits.

5. Enhanced partner integration specifically with OVR, the Employment, Advancement, and Retention Network (EARN), and Department of Corrections with a goal of greater inclusion and seamless referral between programs. The SAWDB's standing committee will focus on service to target populations with significant barriers to employment. The SAWDB's Special Populations Committee will act as the conduit for information between agencies that serve WIOA target populations and the SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® sites.
6. Expanded and enhanced work-based opportunities for youth. The SAWDB will continue its support for and promotion of summer and year-round paid work experience, internship, and apprenticeship opportunities. Its modified OJT policy to allow for a slightly lower wage for youth participants has expanded utilization of this service. Signs indicate that continued SAWDB emphasis on OJT opportunities for youth have resulted in this service gaining greater traction and momentum. Contracts written to date far exceed the \$10.00 per hour minimum established for youth OJT participants.
7. Support for special initiatives such as reSTART, YouthBuild and other services that address the special challenges of Out-of-School Youth with significant barriers to employment including a history of incarceration.

Like the Commonwealth, the SAWDB and its workforce partners are committed to supporting an effective workforce development system built on a foundation of alignment, innovation, employer engagement, accountability structures and improved data.

Each year, the PA CareerLink® Management Teams, with assistance from the One-Stop Operator Consortium (OSO), develop their own measurable goals, objectives and action steps to support the SAWDB's vision and strategic objectives. The SAWDB PA CareerLink® Scorecard captures a variety of SAWDB-identified information designed to provide a 'performance snapshot' by PA CareerLink® that includes:

- Number of new UC claims filed and the percentage of claimants served
- Foot traffic
- Unique participants
- Percentage of customers with a barrier to employment
- Total services provided
- Percentage of employers using PA CareerLink®, including percentage of repeat customers
- Number of employer services provided
- Number of job postings
- Number of job referrals

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

- number of On-the-Job (OJT) training contracts
- Number of Workshops and recruitment events
- Labor force, employment and unemployment rates, and UC rates

This information is captured monthly and reported quarterly, and reviewed by the SAWDB, One-Stop Operator (OSO), and PA CareerLink® partners. It is also shared with system stakeholders. The partners, OSO, and SAWDB are in the process of reexamining the current metrics and the setting specific numerical goals around information captured on the Scorecard. Workforce development leadership will ensure that the new goals and objectives are aligned and further reflect Governor Wolf's and the SAWDB's strategic vision.

### *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?*

The SAWDB recognizes that having an effective OSO is key to core program integration and effective service delivery. Per the requirements of the WIOA, the SAWDB competitively procured the OSO; the selected consortium represents the following partners:

- WIOA Title I
- WIOA Title II Adult Education
- YouthBuild
- Community Services Block Grant

Together the SAWDB, OSO and core partner representatives will work together to ensure that services are coordinated, and resources are aligned in support of the SAWDB's strategic vision and goals. Seamless integration of services is key. For the average customer who enters a one-stop in the region, there is nothing to indicate that services are provided by the many organizations and agencies listed above. From its layout by function, rather than staff seating by agency, to the common forms shared by partners and the integrated referral network, the region's one-stops strive to be a model of service integration and inclusion. Lines of authority, chains of command, and mandated 'firewalls' are recognized and respected by those in the one-stop system. With the PA CareerLink® site administrators providing the functional leadership, the partners (mandated and others) within the region's PA CareerLink® sites are committed to providing the workforce services needed by the region's jobseekers and employers. They include but are not limited to:

- Office of Vocational Rehabilitation staff provide workforce information and referral for persons with disabilities and help customers to achieve their vocational goal. They assist other one-stop staff on matters related to disability awareness and accessibility and serve on the Business Services Teams. Staff assist individuals with disabilities to secure and maintain employment and independence under Title V of the Rehabilitation Act. Eligible OVR customers receive multiple services that may include but not be limited to diagnostic, vocation counseling and guidance, vocational evaluation, restoration, training, job placement and pre-employment training services for eligible high school students with disabilities. OVR also provides multiple

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

services to the business community designed to assist businesses with onboarding pre-screen 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), and 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 death. The state-wide business services staff can identify resources to assist any organization on how to improve access compliance and steps to diversify their workforce to include individuals with a disability.

- WIOA Title I staff provide Career (basic, individualized, and follow-up) services to adults, dislocated workers and youth. They assist in and coordinate the delivery of workshops and other common services with other partners.
- Bureau of Workforce Policy and Operations staff provide a variety of workforce services associated with Wagner-Peyser, including job search and placement assistance and provision of labor market information.
- Department of Human Services staff provide services for DHS-administered programs and work with one-stop staff to further the employment opportunities and goals of their clients.
- Adult Basic Literacy Education staff provide remedial adult education services to jobseekers.

There are currently three WIOA Title I subcontractors in the Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Area. The organizations and the counties they serve are as follows:

- Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies- Bedford, Blair, and Cambria Counties
- Employment & Training of Huntingdon- Fulton and Huntingdon Counties
- Community Action Partnership for Somerset County-Tableland Services, Inc.- Somerset County

These providers were selected through a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process initiated by the LEOs and the SAWDB and completed in May 2017. The SAWDB anticipates releasing its next RFP for Title I services in the near future and once some level of 'stability' has returned to the environment.

The SAWDB has taken a 'team' approach when it comes to operations in the region and it enjoys outstanding working relationships with everyone, from the local elected officials and members of the OSO and members of the PREP, to the core partner staff who work directly with the customers. Because of these strong lines of communication and spirit of cooperation that is present in the region, the local system has been recognized by the state and the US Department of Labor for its ability to meet the needs of its customers through its cooperative and coordinated approach to service delivery. Examples of this include:

- SAWDB staff meet regularly with WIOA Title I providers to discuss topics ranging from performance management to Board policy changes, operating system modifications, service delivery improvements.
- SAWDB director, systems operations and employer services specialists participate in monthly OSO and site administrator meetings to ensure communication flows from the SAWDB directly to the PA CareerLink® sites. The OSO also participates in and reports out at all SAWDB and Executive Committee meetings.

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

- SAWDB director participates in state-organized meetings of the local WDB directors to ensure that information flows from the local area to other LWDA's and the state and then back to the region.
- SAWDB director and staff participate in the PA Workforce Development Association Board, Policy Council, and technical work group meetings to ensure that communication flows from our local area to other LWDA's and the state and then back to our region.
- SAWDB staff participate in regularly scheduled meetings of Industry Partnerships, Business Service Teams, PREP partners, service organizations, etc., to convey information relative to workforce initiatives to these entities and provide feedback to the Board.

Furthermore, the SAWDB director and staff maintain an 'open door' policy so that they are accessible to all workforce partners and stakeholders, including PA CareerLink® staff at all levels.

### *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 commonwealth's workforce development system, as well any the goals and strategies articulated in the regional plan?*

This SAWDB's vision and goals, outlined above, reflect the values of the Board and its partners, and supports Governor Wolf's strategic vision and the prioritized five board goals for the workforce development system in Pennsylvania in the following ways:

#### **Commonwealth Goals**

- **Career Pathways and Apprenticeship:** SAWDB Goal 1,2,5, 6, 7- Increased alignment with WIOA Title II and OVR to support greater career pathway development and utilization and expanded partnerships with employers and educational institutions to promote apprenticeships. The increased support from and interaction with Title II Adult Education providers and the OVR, will enable individuals with barriers to employment to gain the necessary skills and credentials needed to obtain a family-sustaining job in the Southern Alleghenies. Promotion of Registered Apprenticeships- SAWDB, Business Service Teams (BSTs), educational partners, and economic developers have been actively promoting registered apprenticeships to the employer community. We believe that this industry model will provide the necessary skilled pipeline for employers, address their retention issues, and provide jobseekers with significant employment opportunities that will lead to self-sufficiency and enable them to secure transferable and transportable industry credentials.
  - **Sector Strategies and Employer Engagement:** Each of the SAWDB Goals 1-7, identified in Section 2.1, support investment in workforce pipeline and enhanced training opportunities for the incumbent workforce. Both are critical issues in the region. With a declining population, employers are projecting significant worker shortages as skilled employees reach retirement age and youth are not entering the skilled trades in sufficient numbers to replace those exiting the workforce. The SAWDB, PREP partners, and WEDNetPA providers have successfully coordinated large-scale incumbent worker trainings but they have only begun to 'scratch the

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

surface' in addressing employer-identified incumbent worker training needs. The SAWDB and its partners will continue to aggressively pursue flexible funding opportunities. Through greater analysis of the High Priority Occupation and Eligible Training Provider lists, and increased alignment with industry intelligence, the region's workforce system will be better positioned to support training that will result in the credentials most in demand by industry. With the SAWDB's investment in the Northstar Digital Literacy assessment, PA CareerLink® customers will be better positioned to meet employers' needs for a computer-literate workforce. ENGAGE visits, conducted by economic developers and PA CareerLink® business service team members, will also serve to increase recognition and value of the public workforce system in the eyes of the employer community, leading to great employer engagement.

- **Youth** SAWDB Goals 1,2,5,6,7 continue to place significant emphasis in support of youth and work-based learning experience, as illustrated in nearly all its goals found in Section 2.1. The SAWDB recognizes the importance of supporting work-based learning opportunities for youth and ensuring that the work-readiness standards that are applied to these services reflect employer expectations. While paid work experience services have been a long-standing offering, the utilization of OJT for youth had never fully reached its potential. The Board has modified its OJT policy to encourage employers to hire youth through this service; interest in and use of this service has subsequently increased. Additional initiatives in support of this goal include:
  - Activities through the region's Business-Education Partnership (BEP)- youth are exposed to the educational requirements and employer expectation. Increased connections with the Career & Technology Centers are also occurring because of the BEP. Career Camps and opportunities for youth to explore non-traditional occupations (nursing for men, construction for women) are exciting new program features.
  - YouthBuild, reSTART - these SAWDB-supported initiatives have enabled young people, with barriers to employment, to gain industry-recognized credentials and participate in paid work experience opportunities that mirror their interests and skills.
  - CSB2 STEM Ecosystem includes a consortium of secondary and post-secondary educators, students and parents, public libraries, employers, and the SAWDB and public workforce system. Due to the impact of COVID-19, the ecosystem partners have adjusted to students learning at home by providing free online services including TumbleMath and Tutor.com. TumbleMath is a collection of animated and narrated math picture books covering K-5 math concepts using stories and literature to reinforce concepts. Tutor.com is an on-line service to help students in grades K-6 in a variety of STEM-related subjects through live tutoring sessions, practice quizzes, tests, and video lessons. The ecosystems webpage will include monthly STEM challenges that students and parents can do at home. Remake Learning Days is a national celebration of innovative experiences and opportunities for youth to develop their sense of creativity, perseverance, and curiosity. The CSB2 Ecosystem will host some Remake Learning Activities in spring 2021, in partnership with the ENGINE Ecosystem of Central PA and the ecosystems of Southeastern and Southwestern PA. Throughout

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

the year, the ecosystem will be working to offer mini-camps, online learning opportunities and working with its partners in education, public libraries, and employers to develop more STEM learning activities.

- **Continuous Improvement of the Workforce Development System:** All SAWDB Goals 1-7 support improvement of the public workforce system by strategically directing resources in support of expanded and enhanced services to employers and jobseekers. As federal funding levels continue to fall, while the demand for services increases, it is more important than ever that local workforce boards prioritize the expenditure of their financial resources to have the greatest impact on the customers they serve.
- **Strengthening the One-Stop Delivery System:** All SAWDB Goals 1-7 serve to support strengthening the PA CareerLink® one-stops and its partners and stakeholders. From resource alignment for industry-driven training, to increased partner alignment integration and engagement and expanded and enhanced opportunities for youth, especially those with barriers to employment, the SAWDB is committed to ensuring that its PA CareerLink® sites and services are recognized for their quality, relevant to their customer base, and provided in a coordinated manner to be accessible to the region's jobseekers and employers.

The SAWDB believes that its efforts, examples of which are highlighted through the Regional and Local Plans, will serve to meet the unique needs of the region it serves, align with and support Governor Wolf's vision and goals for workforce development in Pennsylvania, and help to promote and facilitate 'jobs that pay' and 'schools that teach.'

## *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 Performance Accountability attachment includes the specific performance levels negotiated for the Southern Alleghenies region. The SAWDB's goals, identified in Section 2.1 of this plan, are tied directly to and support the achievement of the performance measures outlined in the WIOA Section 116. They include:

### **Title I Adult & Dislocated Worker Employment Rate**

- All the Board's goals, except for those related specifically to youth, support participant employment (2<sup>nd</sup> quarter and 4<sup>th</sup> quarter past exit). Stronger entered employment and job retention rates should result from the increased emphasis on connecting individuals with industry-driven training opportunities and providing the financial resources to reduce barriers to successful completion. This is especially true for participants in the On-the-Job training service; they are considered employed on day one of the contract and retained by the employer following the successful completion of the training plan. Greater integration with partner programs (OVR, EARN, Corrections), will mean additional leveraged resources including staff assistance with participant job search and placement.

### **Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Median Earnings**

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

- There is a well-documented correlation between an individual's educational attainment and their employment and earning potential. Greater emphasis in training, along with the increased resource allocation to support it, will result in more participation in classroom and OJT. Enhanced development of career pathways and support for micro and stackable credentials will further increase our customers' median earnings.

## **Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Credential Rate**

- Realization of the negotiated credential rate will hinge on the local workforce system's ability to connect its customers with credentialed training and the SAWDB's ability to reduce barriers to successful completion through resource allocation and program support. As with earnings, use of career pathways, and the stackable credentials that can be earned along the employment path, will help the achievement of this measure.

## **Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Measurable Skill Gains**

- Achievement of this performance measure hinges on the local system's ability to connect job seekers with training that will support employment in a high priority occupation and align to the participant's interests and abilities. Identifying and reducing/eliminating barriers to successful advancement will be key. Access to supportive services, combined with enhanced case management and service coordination and integration among workforce partners will support attainment of this measure. These factors apply to classroom training and OJT, with its structured training plan that includes identified skills to be attained.

## **Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Effectiveness in Serving Employers**

- The SAWDB's vision and strategic goals and those of its PA CareerLink® sites focus on identifying and meeting the workforce needs of the region's employers. Greater financial support for industry-driven training, both for potential new hires as well as the incumbent workforce, will help to address the employers' training needs. Increased collaboration among partners, including those housed in the one-stops as well as the PREP partners and community and faith-based organizations, will greatly improve service delivery to employers. No longer should employers be responding to multiple requests from various agencies all requesting the same information. Once an employer's needs are identified, referrals between partnering agencies should be much smoother and services provided seamlessly. Greater financial support for industry-driven training, both for potential new hires as well as the incumbent workforce, will help to address the employers' training needs.

### *3 OPERATIONAL PLANNING: 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.*

The local workforce development system includes a wide range of key stakeholders, from boards of local elected officials to small community-based organizations. These many and varied stakeholders are identified in the following narrative. The board of county commissioners representing the six-county Southern Alleghenies workforce development area, is designated the Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission (SAP&DC) as the Fiscal Agent for WIOA Title I funds. The SAP&DC, one

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

of the commonwealth's Local Development Districts, also provides the staff to the SAWDB. The majority of the SAP&DC board is comprised of commissioners from the six-county service area; several key private sector and education representatives also serve. The president of the Commission's board is designated the region's Chief Local Elected Official; he is responsible for approving all appointments to the SAWDB. The Commission's board also works in cooperation with the SAWDB to develop and approve all local plans, reviews and approves the SAWDB budgets, and performance benchmarks. Since the SAWDB is a non-incorporated body, all contracts for services are made between the SAP&DC and the individual subcontractor; the LEOs accept liability for WIOA funds allocated to the region. The SAWDB director meets with the LEOs bi-monthly, and communicates as needed between meetings, to ensure that they are engaged and kept up to date on the state of the region's workforce development system.

The SAP&DC, as fiscal agent, has a broad list of responsibilities related to the disbursement of funds including but not limited to:

- contract preparation and maintenance
- invoice review and check disbursement
- expenditure tracking
- draw-down of funds from the PA CareerLink® including preparing Requests for Funds
- fiscal monitoring of all subcontract/subcontractors
- preparation and delivery of fiscal reports to LEOs and SAWDB
- PA CareerLink® Operating Budget maintenance
- check disbursement on behalf of the region's PA CareerLink® sites

The SAWDB is comprised of 27 members that represent the private sector, organized labor, economic development (PREP partner), one-stop partners including OVR, Wagner-Peyser, and the Department of Human Services, community-based organizations including community action agencies, and education. They have optimum policy-making authority in their organization and are well-positioned to speak to the needs of their industry, organization, or client population. While board turnover is low, the LEOs work directly with appropriate entities in the Southern Alleghenies region to secure nominations to appoint new members or fill vacancies on the SAWDB. Private sector nominations are made by the appropriate county business organization; nominees come from companies that provide high-quality work and represent a targeted industry cluster. Economic development representatives are members of the PREP partners and are nominated by their individual board of directors. Representatives for education are nominated by their board of trustees, their operating committee, or in the case of adult education, by the ABLE Coalition. Labor representatives are nominated by their central labor council, regional council or area labor federation. The boards of directors for community-based organizations nominate their representatives. The Commonwealth Department of Labor and Industry nominates their representative. All nominations are made in writing on agency letterhead and forwarded to the Chief LEO. The Chief LEO reviews all nominations and officially appoints all members to the SAWDB at the bi-monthly meeting of the SAP&DC, or in between meetings when absolutely necessary.

The SAWDB is dedicated to ensuring that the region's residents receive the highest level of services available through the local one-stop system and that these services be provided by the PA CareerLink®

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

partners in the most efficient and effective manner possible. The SAWDB has four standing committees including:

- The Executive Committee that meets monthly and acts on behalf of the SAWDB between its regular meetings.
- The Fiscal Committee which develops budgets, provides oversight and other duties as identified in the PA Department of Labor and Industry Workforce System Policy No. 02-2015, December 18, 2015.
- The Young Adult Council which provides the SAWDB with input on all matters related to serving youth, from training-related issues to performance review. They also develop the local strategic plan for serving TANF youth.
- The Special Populations Committee focuses on identifying any service gaps in the local workforce system ensuring that the needs of those with significant barriers to employment are identified and addressed.

The role of the SAWDB in the workforce system has been expanded under the WIOA. The SAWDB complies with all regulations set forth in the WIOA and has executed the following in partnership with the local elected officials as they relate to the workforce system and its infrastructure:

- Competitive process to identify the OSO
- Negotiation of the Memorandum of Understanding and Infrastructure Funding Agreement with the PA CareerLink® partners to provide workforce services in the region
- Review and evaluation of performance of one stops and operators and certification of the region's PA CareerLink® sites
- Negotiation of WIOA Title I Performance Goals

Other key responsibilities include:

- The selection of the WIOA Title I providers and the development of a performance management system designed to capture Title I and PA CareerLink® performance benchmarks to ensure that the workforce system operates in the most efficient and effective manner possible.
- Labor market information data collection, analysis, and dissemination. The SAWDB has positioned itself as a "go to" entity for the most up-to-date labor market information. To date, recipients of this data include the region's employers, economic development agencies, secondary and post-secondary educational institutions, and the PA CareerLink® sites.
- Industry Partnership development and support. The Board will continue to identify resources to support and address the soft skills employers so often find lacking in their new hires and incumbent workforce.
- Involvement in regional educational initiatives like BASICS (Businesses and Schools Investing in Cooperative Solutions), and the CSB2 STEM Ecosystem. The SAWDB participation has helped to promote expanded career education and work experience opportunities for youth by leveraging non-WIOA resources.
- Support for and involvement in the Southern Alleghenies Entrepreneurial Ecosystem - Startup Alleghenies.

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

Together, the Chief Local Elected Officials, SAWDB, Fiscal Agent, and Equal Opportunity Officer (EOO) form a strong team committed to ensuring that the workforce services provided in the Southern Alleghenies meet the needs of the jobseeker and employer community. This includes ensuring that services are readily accessible in formats designed to meet the needs of jobseekers and provided without discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or political affiliation. Contact information for the EOO is widely communicated and is also found in Section 4.1, page 52 of this Plan.

### *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?*

***See Attachment 3 Workforce Development Delivery System Program Partner/Provider List for partner contact information. Sections 4.1 and 4.2 of the Plan include additional detail on programs included in the Southern Alleghenies local workforce delivery system.***

The SAWDB has taken a ‘team’ approach when it comes to operations in the region and it enjoys outstanding working relationships with everyone, from the local elected officials and members of the OSO and members of the PREP, to the partner staff who work directly with the customers. Because of these strong lines of communication and spirit of cooperation that is present in the region, the local system has been recognized by the state and the US Department of Labor for its ability to meet the needs of its customers through its cooperative and coordinated approach to service delivery. The SAWDB had completed a competitive Request for Proposal process to secure a new One-Stop Operator; this consortium has led the drive for innovation and excellence; many of its accomplishments are noted in the Plan. The OSO is a key player in workforce development; it is responsible to help provide direction to the delivery system and assist the one-stop with the implementation of the SAWDB’s strategic objectives. Its membership includes key stakeholders and form a consortium of three agencies (Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies, Employment and Training Inc. and the Community Action Partnership for Somerset County-Tableland Services), who collectively represent the mandated partners - WIOA Title I, WIOA Title II Adult Education, YouthBuild, and the Community Service Block Grant. They bring tremendous experience and a long and successful history of providing significant workforce services, especially to those with barriers to employment. They, along with the SAWDB director, business services and operations specialists, PA CareerLink® site administrators and Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations assistant regional director meet monthly to review performance metrics, discuss and identify service gaps, lay the groundwork for new program implementation, and address any pressing issues or concerns. Their current focus includes:

- Increased outreach to those with significant barriers to employment
- Identification of new performance metrics for the Pa CareerLink® Scorecards and the formation of an Operational Intelligence and Business Services Strategy Teams
- Modernize services and facilities to attract diverse customers
- Innovation of Business Services
- Promotion of the importance of Digital Literacy and Northstar Assessment

The OSO also:

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

- Assists with the preparation and maintenance of the PA CareerLink® Operating Budget in concert with the site administrators and one-stop partners
- Works to ensure seamless integration within the one-stop
- Helps prepare for PA CareerLink® quality review visits
- Ensures preparation and maintenance of the One-Stop Service Plan
- Serves as liaison to the SAWDB and provides one-stop updates at Board and committee meetings
- Selects, evaluates and supports the PA CareerLink® site administrators
- Provides oversight of the performance management system relative to Common Measures and the PA CareerLink® Scorecards
- Evaluates customer needs and satisfaction
- Completes reporting requirements
- Oversees marketing/outreach for PA CareerLink® sites and system

The OSO has already taken action to move customer satisfaction measurement to a digital platform, developed a website that will tie to social media applications and further promote the system, including the addition of a 'live chat' feature, the coordinated measurement of performance levels, further help expand services through greater use of technology, i.e., Zoom, Skype and teleconferencing, supported the move of the region's two largest comprehensive one-stops into more accessible public libraries, established three additional affiliate sites, rolled out the Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment, and delivered a number of professional development opportunities for all one-stop partners to name but a few of its many significant accomplishments.

Furthermore, the alignment of these programs, and their connection to the SAWDB, PA CareerLink® partners and workforce stakeholders directly supports the workforce strategies outlined in the state plan, the Southern Alleghenies Regional and Local Plans and the shared goals and objectives of the Governor and local Board. Examples of this include:

- The SAWDB/OSO/PA CareerLink® partner development of and support for the PA CareerLink® Scorecard, a single page 'performance dashboard' that illustrates, at a glance, how the sites are faring regarding customers served, including those with barriers to employment, training activities, placements, etc.
- SAWDB staff meet regularly with WIOA Title I providers to discuss topics ranging from performance management to Board policy changes, operating system modifications, and service delivery improvements.
- The SAWDB Special Populations Committee, with its representatives from state and community agencies that serve WIOA target populations, meet with the site administrators to identify service gaps and ways to improve outreach to those in need of the workforce services.
- SAWDB director participates in monthly OSO and site administrator meetings to ensure communication flows from the SAWDB directly to the PA CareerLink® sites. The OSO also participates in and reports out at all SAWDB and Executive Committee meetings.
- SAWDB director participates in state-organized meetings of the local WDB directors to ensure that information flows from the local area to other LWDA's and the state and then back to the region.
- SAWDB director and staff participate in the PA Workforce Development Association board,

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

Policy Council, and technical work group meetings to ensure that communication flows from our local area to other LWIAs and the state and then back to our region.

- SAWDB staff participate in regularly scheduled meetings of employers, Business Service Teams, PREP partners, service organizations, etc. to convey information relative to workforce initiatives to these entities and provide feedback to the Board.

Furthermore, the SAWDB director and staff maintain an 'open door' policy so that they are accessible to all workforce partners and stakeholders, including PA CareerLink® staff at all levels.

### *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.*

The WIOA has placed increased emphasis on expanding access to employment, training, education, and supportive services and serving those who are most in need of assistance, particularly individuals with barriers to employment. Thus, strong partnerships with community and faith-based organizations are more important than ever. The SAWDB began by expanding its membership to include the executive directors from two Community Action Agencies (CAAs) and with their assistance, the referral network between the one-stops and CAAs is being strengthened. As is often the case, those who come to the CAAs seeking assistance with housing and transportation, or drug and alcohol counseling are also in need of a job. In addition to working with CAA, the SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® staff have developed or expanded similar relationships with a wide range of entities that include:

- Juvenile and Adult Probation Offices
- Transitional Re-Entry Advisory Councils
- County Housing Authorities
- Food Banks
- Literacy Providers
- County MH/MR Offices
- County Assistance Offices
- Human Services Councils
- Highlands Health

When a customer initially enters a one-stop, a member of the Welcome Team meets with the individual to complete an initial assessment and determine the most appropriate 'next step' in service provision. A growing number of customers are entering the one-stop with significant barriers to employment, issues that must be first addressed before an effective job search can be initiated. Our partnerships with Community Action Agencies are utilized during the 'Stabilization Phase', when these individuals are immediately connected, through a face-to face referral or with technology i.e., Zoom or Skype, with the local community action agency. Inherent in the mission of these partner agencies, these staff are best positioned to assist with barrier remediation. Once the barrier/s has been effectively addressed, the individual returns to the one-stop and the job search work can begin. As one-stop staff and representatives from these agencies gain a greater understanding of each other's resources, clients and service needs/gaps, the opportunities for cross-referrals will be heightened and ultimately

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

clients/customers will have access to a broader range of services designed to meet their needs. An especially strong relationship exists with Highlands Health, a free medical clinic located in Johnstown. This important employer and community partner has stepped up to provide supportive service assistance in the form of free drug and other medical tests for individuals who require these as conditions of employment, but that do not have the resources to cover the costs of these tests. Highlands Health continues to serve as a worksite for SLIP interns, youth work experience, and as a 'second chance' employer and is a valuable and recognized workforce partner.

A growing number of the customers who seek services through the PA CareerLink® have a documented disability, that in many cases creates additional barriers to employment. As a WIOA Title IV mandated core partner, OVR is well positioned in the one-stop to provide exceptional services to jobseekers and employers. Eligibility to receive services under WIOA Title IV may only be determined by a qualified OVR Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors determine eligibility for and work with customers to develop an individual plan for employment and provide services necessary to meet the individual's specific vocational goal.

Goal setting and performance benchmarking, above and beyond Common Measures, have been the hallmarks of service delivery in the Southern Alleghenies. Part of expanding access to workforce services is to first understand current 'market share' and recognize who is using our system. The SAWDB and its workforce partners draw on many PA CareerLink® service utilization reports to better understand demand and customer demographics. From this data, the SAWDB, the OSO, and PA CareerLink® Site Administrators and management team members will set measurable goals for the program year. These targets will be included in the individual PA CareerLink® strategic plans and Scorecards and reviewed monthly to ensure that staff are working toward the goals.

In support of expanding services to individuals with the greatest barriers to employment, the SAWDB has a Special Populations Committee, which focuses on identifying any service gaps in the local workforce system ensuring that the needs of those with significant barriers to employment are identified and addressed. An OVR district administrator serves as the chair of this committee as well as on the SAWDB and its Executive Committee; this helps to ensure that the employment needs of individuals with disabilities will remain in the forefront. Other committee members include representatives from Department of Corrections, Human Services, Senior Employment, Adult Education, and others with a commitment to assisting those who face some of the most significant barriers to employment. The Board and its partners in the public workforce system recognize that innovative approaches must be identified and utilized if they are to be successful in placing these individuals in jobs with career pathways that ultimately lead to self-sufficiency. Specific programs and strategies are outlined in detail in Section 4.13 of this Plan.

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

Every effort is made to co-enroll jobseekers with WIOA Title I and all appropriate programs when they are eligible and suitable for such services. The SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® partners have developed and support overarching strategies to ensure that all persons are afforded the opportunity to access all levels of PA CareerLink® services. They include but are not limited to:

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

- Welcome Team members who provide a more customized approach when informing customers of the services/resources available to one-stop customers. The PA CareerLink® partners have been engaged in aggressive outreach to those targeted for the RESEA program. This includes direct mailings inviting dislocated workers to the PA CareerLink®, as well as follow-up phone calls to encourage/ensure participation. The PA CareerLink® in Cambria County has been piloting a commonwealth-sponsored outreach initiative targeting selected dislocated workers; it includes a more personal and customized approach.
- Preliminary Assessment - conducted early on to identify potential barriers to employment/service, identify service needs and appropriate service mix, and referrals to other partners. This also aids in determining those eligible for a priority of service including veterans and their spouses, low-income individuals and those receiving public assistance.
- Development of an Individual Service Strategy to identify a customer's vocational/service goal and the services to be provided for the individual to reach their goal.
- Case Management - the assignment of a career planner who will work one-on-one to help ensure that the customer receives the needed services. The career planner will also act as an advocate for the customer.
- Follow-up to include regular communication between the career planner and the customer once the customer has reached their vocational/service goal. This is to ensure that any barriers to continued employment are addressed early on.
- Availability of tools and resources including WorkKeys Career Readiness Assessment/Credentialing and Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment.
- Affiliate Sites - due to the geographic expanse of the Southern Alleghenies, the SAWDB has established and supports multiple sites in region. These are strategically located within Blair, Cambria, and Fulton County.
- Two Comprehensive one-stops are located into the region's largest public libraries so that workforce services are more readily accessible to larger target populations.

SAWDB support for program alignment extends far beyond the Core service providers. Increased service coordination and resource sharing are underway with many entities whose mission includes a workforce development component. These include expanded relationships with:

- Employment and Retention Network (EARN) - to better integrate customers and programs with core PA CareerLink® offerings. Strong EARN/TANF staff participation on the SAWDB's Special Populations Committee, PA CareerLink® staff participation in EARN Direct Service Team meetings.
- PREP - to ensure that the public workforce system supports the efforts of the region's network of economic developers.
- Community Action Agencies (CAAs) - lack of gainful employment and low literacy are key issues with so many clients who receive specialized assistance from the CAAs. Strengthening relationships with these vital community agencies has resulted in improved service alignment and coordination. As additional providers of literacy and GED services, the CAAs are positioned to provide leveraged resources and support a more holistic approach to meeting customer needs.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

The presence of a strong Adult Basic Literacy Education Coalition (ABLE) in the region, and specifically in the one-stops has helped to increase opportunities for partner referral to these vital sources for customer support. As noted throughout the Plan, significant WIOA Title I resources, as well as other partner funding, are used to support post-secondary education for eligible customers. Customer assessment has revealed the significant number of individuals who are basic skills deficient and therefore in need of adult basic education services. Referrals to these services are made by all partner programs and can come at any time during service provision.

The ABLE Coalition has helped to drive Career Pathway efforts as well and have educated one-stop staff, customers, and employers to the value of pathway recognition and support and many jobseekers have benefited from remediation at different levels of their engagement with the public workforce system. Under the WIOA, adult education functions as an individual's "on-ramp" to success in post-secondary education, job training, and career. The adult education on-ramp may serve people who are:

- working in low-wage, unstable jobs,
- without work history
- re-entering from incarceration
- testing at low learning levels
- preparing for college, or
- non-native English speakers

An on-ramp is a career pathway program designed to serve individuals with significant barriers to educational and economic success. The adult education on-ramp shares accountability with WIOA staff and takes into consideration the client's individual engagement with public and private systems and seeks to deliver integrated service that will address each individual's specific needs.

The following Adult Education services provide stepping-stones that prepare participants to enter and successfully complete training and enter employment.

- **ABE** (Adult Basic Education): Students reading between 0 and 9th grade level learn reading, writing and math skills.
- **ASE / HSE** (Adult Secondary Education / High School Equivalency): Students reading at or above a 9th grade level learn academic skills to prepare for postsecondary education or a high school equivalency diploma. (GED® or HiSET®)
- **College and Career Readiness**: Students at all levels receive rigorous academic training to prepare them for the transition from adult education into (1) postsecondary education, (2) on-job training, or (3) jobs and careers.
- **Workforce Preparation**: Students at all levels learn workforce preparation skills. These skills (including digital literacy, problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, time management, and other skills people need to be successful in any workplace) are embedded into appropriately contextualized learning opportunities.
- **Career Pathways**: Students learn about career options and the education and training pathway that will enable them to meet their career goals. Some adult education programs offer bridge classes to prepare students to enter a career area (e.g., health, manufacturing).

Some additional related services provided by adult education include but are not limited to the following:

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

- Health Careers Prep classes that learners can take to prepare to pass the school entrance exams for training in licensed practical nursing, certified nurse aide, phlebotomy, medical secretary and other related trainings.
- College Prep class is provided as an alternative to the non-credit bearing, but costly developmental math class offered by the college
- Community Agency Fairs where learners can consider post-secondary opportunities after they complete their adult education classes
- SMART goals are developed by the learners and their case managers and shared with instructors so that their adult education instruction can be used as an 'on-ramp' to their specific career goals.

The pandemic, and with it the closure of the region's physical one-stops, has created some unique challenges for providers of adult basic education. As a testament to their commitment to service, they have utilized different strategies to assist their students and incorporated remote learning opportunities into their service mix. Resources including Essential Education, TABE and GED Academy, New Readers Press and the Khan Academy.

The SAWDB and its staff also work closely with the region's Career and Technology Centers (CTCs) to ensure that their programs of study are positioned to meet employers' current and future hiring needs. Many of the region's employers have expressed concern over their ability to attract and retain a skilled workforce. In the next five to ten years, the number of retirees will exceed the number of those entering the skilled trades. The CTCs are well positioned to respond to industry needs and the public workforce system will support program alignment through the following:

- SAWDB member and staff participation on employer advisory councils and Perkins Participatory Planning Committees. These serve as excellent vehicles to communicate employer workforce projections and review and advise current and proposed programs of study.
- Provision of detailed labor market information. The SAWDB has positioned itself and the PA CareerLink® sites as the 'go to' source for detailed, up-to-date information that is used to inform school administrators, educators, counselors, parents and students on demand occupations, compensation, and education attainment requirements.
- Support for Pennsylvania Department of Education equipment grants and other competitive funding. The SAWDB and its staff will continue to work closely with the CTCs to assist with procuring equipment to provide 'state of the art' training for their students.

The SAWDB and its staff maintain continued engagement with the CTCs as a source for occupational skills training through the ETPL and as a source of incumbent worker training and apprenticeship development. The SAWDB invests a significant portion of its WIOA Title I funding and federal discretionary and competitive grant awards in training for eligible PA CareerLink® customers. In PY 19, 109 Individual Training Accounts were approved; 76% attended a Career and Technology Center. Given the significant level of investment, in terms of workforce dollars and customer time and commitment, it is vital that these programs of study align with employer demands, that graduates have the requisite skills to obtain gainful employment and that the SAWDB and the public workforce system provide the support necessary to ensure these successful outcomes.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

In addition to providing needed services, the SAWDB has made significant efforts to ‘take the services to the customer.’ This has been especially important given the geographic expanse of the region; the SAWDB has five comprehensive PA CareerLink® sites and four affiliated sites. Staff visit these sites and other community sites to meet with individuals or groups who are unable to travel to a comprehensive site. All this has been done to effectively bring “PA CareerLink® in your Community” or as was/is the case during specific times of the pandemic when services were only provided remotely “PA CareerLink® in your Kitchen.” The SAWDB, OSO and one-stop staff are exploring other opportunities to increase the mobility of service delivery to include regularly scheduling and holding appointments in the offices of workforce partners including housing authorities, community action agencies, prisons, foodbanks, and similar locations. This will further facilitate outreach to those unable to travel to a one-stop.

Because the one-stop system made the investment in technology that would allow for remote service delivery, staff were able to transition from in-person services quickly and effectively to virtual service delivery when the pandemic necessitated the closure of the physical one-stops. We are confident that once operations return to ‘normal’ meaning full accessibility to in-person services, we will maintain the availability of virtual services for those customers who choose to receive many services through this platform.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act requires eligibility determination and the completion of a WIOA application for all recipients of WIOA Title I Individualized Career Services and Training services. In Pennsylvania, all WIOA Title I participant service tracking information including the WIOA Title I Application are required to be entered onto the state’s operating system of record, the Commonwealth Workforce Development System PA CareerLink®. The SAWDB staff have developed an extensive monitoring system to validate eligibility determination. The process includes the following:

- File review - SAWDB staff review files annually to ensure that all appropriate eligibility documents have been secured and are included within the participant file. Also, that the information posted onto PA CareerLink® complies with state and federal requirements, as it pertains to data validation for eligibility verification for WIOA Title I outcomes, service, and program follow-up.
- Limiting use of Self-Certification - In the Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Area, the use of Self Certification for eligibility validation is permissible after all practicable methods of acquiring the proper verification have been exhausted or failed. This includes the use of telephone/documentation Inspection verification method prior to the utilization of self - certification to verify eligibility criteria. Concern over repeated use of self-certification led the SAWDB staff to develop a check list that is utilized by WIOA Title I staff and monitored by board staff during file review. It identifies the multiple methods that must be first utilized by staff before self-certification, as a last resort, is used to validate eligibility. SAWDB staff have analyzed the rates of usage of self-certification, reported the levels to WIOA Title I providers and provided them with technical assistance on the use of other preferred methods, including telephone verification. In addition to participant file review, the use of Self Certification as it pertains to eligibility verification, is tracked, and monitored in the Southern Alleghenies using data derived from a PA CareerLink® Ad-Hoc report created with the assistance of state staff. These combined efforts have contributed to a marked reduction in the use of Self Certification

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

for eligibility verification in the Southern Alleghenies region; it is utilized in less than 5% of all eligibility verification over the last two program years.

It is also important to note that an analysis of participant characteristics, including barriers to employment, has shown that the decline in the use of Self Certification for eligibility verification has not adversely impacted access to program services, particularly for those individuals with barriers to employment served in the Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Area.

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

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

Frequent and consistent employer feedback, combined with setting measurable employer-focused goals, will be essential to ensure the region's workforce development system meets the needs of the business community. Some efforts will include:

- The OSO is utilizing satisfaction instruments that are in a digital format. These are utilized to gauge business response to existing services and help identify gaps. With expected guidance from the US DOL and the PA Department of Labor and Industry, the SAWDB will work with the OSO, PA CareerLink® site administrators and WIOA Title I providers to develop an instrument that will help capture 'Effectiveness in Serving Employers' and measure movement toward meeting the negotiated WIOA performance goal. The SAWDB's PA CareerLink® Scorecard measures employer market penetration and system utilization by return employer customers as a measure of satisfaction.
- ENGAGE visits, conducted by county economic developers and PA CareerLink® Business Service Team leads will continue to provide real-time business intelligence that is used effectively and efficiently to help address the needs of employers. Executive Pulse and PA CareerLink® will continue to be used to capture company-specific information, make, and track appropriate referrals, and action plans developed to address the employer challenges.
- Employer-centric and measurable goals will continue and be expanded upon in the PA CareerLink® Scorecard. Current measurable objectives include increased employer market penetration as reflected in the number of job postings, return customer utilization rates and those participating in services including OJT and other training and recruitment-related activities. Goal setting around these metrics continues.
- Employer-driven discussions around training topics to include incumbent worker training, apprenticeship development and customized training programs will be facilitated. Significant efforts are currently underway to promote registered apprenticeships. The SAWDB and its OSOs will actively promote RAPs and the value they bring to employers and job seekers. While the Board does not currently utilize WIOA Title I Funds to support incumbent worker or customized training, it has and will continue to use these funds to financially support the OJT as well as classroom portion of RAPs. This additional financial support is promoted to employers, several of which have used this funding to cover those portions of RAPs. In supporting the expansion of the apprenticeship model, SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® partners envision the expansion of existing pre-apprenticeship and the development of new

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

programs, tied to existing apprenticeships, to further support the pipeline of workers and the vision of our youth who successfully complete pre-apprenticeship activities transitioning into recognized apprenticeships with local and regional employers. Roundtable discussions will continue to be held; these forums bring together employers, economic development, the public workforce system and education to begin identifying and addressing key issues. The SAWDB has long supported OJT and other work-based learning programs, industry partnerships, sector strategies, and career pathways. Targeted employer feedback will support program development that meets the needs of the business customer.

- Established employer forums will provide the conduit for key business intelligence to be communicated to the SAWDB and workforce partners and likewise offer the venue to promote workforce resources to the business community. Representatives from the one-stop Business Service Teams and workforce leadership will participate in employer consortiums, Society of Human Resource Management, Chamber of Commerce, and other business-led forums to identify and assess employer service needs. This information will be conveyed back to the SAWDB; the Board in turn will ensure that service priorities are communicated to providers and resources are dedicated to implement and expand training services to include incumbent worker and customized training and apprenticeship development.

To effectively serve employers, the workforce system must recognize the needs of the business community and respond with appropriate services to address those needs. Agility is a hallmark of any successful enterprise; successful businesses are positioned to meet the changing needs of their customers. The workforce system must do likewise. The strategies outlined above -- regular employer engagement and specialized service development, implementation, and assessment, will help to ensure that the region's workforce system will be well-positioned to meet the needs and exceed the expectations of the employer community it serves.

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

Ensuring business engagement in the workforce system, regardless of size and industry, comes down to three things: determining employer needs, informing the employer that the system is able, willing, and ready to meet their needs, and having the ability to meet those needs in a timely and effective manner. Small employers (49 employees or less) make up 95% of all the companies in the region. They often lack resources, both human and financial, so the SAWDB and its workforce partners will work to ensure that the one-stops are well-positioned to meet the needs of these business customers.

Strategies to ensure effective engagement of business and industry are and will continue to be developed and deployed on two levels: Administrative (SAWDB) and Programmatic (PA CareerLink® and Workforce Development Partners).

The Board will use continuous improvement techniques to evaluate the administrative and programmatic strategies, receive regular updates from staff and gather input from employer board members. Additionally, the Board and the one-stop operator consortium have collaborated to form a business services strategy team with business services representatives, Local Veterans Employment

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

Representative, Title I representatives and the board's Employer Services Development Specialist to examine current policies, make recommendations, help establish priorities and develop new strategies to increase employer engagement. The SAWDB, in partnership with the PREP, have expanded strategic outreach to employers through the Department of Community and Economic Development's ENGAGE initiative. In the Southern Alleghenies region, joint business calls are being conducted by county economic developers and PA CareerLink® Business Service Team leads. During these visits, participants engage in a 'deep dive' into the company's challenges and work together to identify ways to help address these issues. These visits have enabled one-stop staff to not only strengthen good existing relationships with the economic development community, but more importantly, they have made significant connections with business leaders that have resulted in increased employer recognition of and increased engagement with the public workforce system. The region's Scorecard will continue to track the percentage of employers in the region who use the one-stop, the percentage of repeat users, and the number of employer services provided each quarter. These figures will be used to track improvement towards the goal of increased employer engagement.

## Administrative

- The SAWDB will annually review its policies to ensure, where legally possible, they are employer-customer friendly and do not create barriers to effective service provision. Agility is key to business success and the public workforce system, and its administrators must strive for the same.
- The SAWDB will continue to support and look for opportunities to expand Next Generation Industry Partnership participation in targeted sectors.
- The SAWDB will continue to support opportunities for professional development and employer networking and identify and work to secure flexible funding to support incumbent worker training as well as address future pipeline supply issues.
- The SAWDB will promote opportunities for skill training to ensure that significant resources are available to expand the promotion and utilization of OJT, incumbent worker training, work-based learning opportunities, apprenticeships, customized training, and other proven employer training services. Interest in registered apprenticeships has begun to gain momentum and the SAWDB and its workforce partners will utilize employer forums to promote this valuable employee/employer tool.
- The SAWDB will continue to support staff involvement in and engagement with the PREP partners to ensure alignment of workforce and economic development strategies and resources.
- The SAWDB and OSO will annually review the PA CareerLink® employer service mix to determine any gaps, based on local need and WIOA direction.
- The SAWDB and OSO will annually review employer services outreach materials and enhance and professionalize the materials, utilizing the expertise of the SAP&DC Marketing and Communication Specialist.
- The SAWDB, with input from the PREP and employer partners, will review the High Priority Occupation List to ensure it reflects employer hiring needs.
- The SAWDB will encourage quality education providers to submit relevant programs for inclusion on the Eligible Training Provider List to ensure customers can access training that meets employer demands.

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

- The SAWDB and OSO will annually review PA CareerLink® employer-centric goals to ensure alignment with Governor Wolf's and the SAWDB's strategic vision and confirm that the benchmarks are sufficiently ambitious and promote continuous improvement.
- Though small (4), the SAWDB staff will continue to designate a staff person to serve as the board's 'point person' regarding to business services. A significant amount of her time is spent participating in Business Service Team meetings, attending Industry Partnership roundtables, and meeting, along with the site administrators and Business Service Team members, with employers to discuss available services and identify service gaps and training needs. Considerable time is spent monitoring the significant number of OJT contracts; the WIOA Title I providers contract directly with the employers but the SAWDB staff are responsible for all monitoring to include compliance with local, state, and federal guidelines and employer and employee satisfaction with the program.

## Programmatic

- The OSO, PA CareerLink® site administrators and PA CareerLink® management teams will review their employer policies and procedures to identify and mitigate any barriers to service provision.
  - The OSO and PA CareerLink® site administrators will ensure that each PA CareerLink® has an active Business Services Team made up of the 'right' representatives from partner agencies. As the lead entity responsible for facilitating employer engagement at the one-stop level, it is essential that the Business Service Teams are viewed by employers as professional, well-coordinated, business-focused and committed to service to the region's employers. These teams meet regularly to discuss engagement strategies and have 'point' staff responsible for different aspects of business services. Databases that track employer visits are utilized. In some cases, team members utilize Executive Pulse, a PREP tool, to track and make partner referrals. Close communication between partner staff dedicated to serving employers, including the use of spreadsheets that track employer visits, outcomes, and referrals, will help to significantly reduce the risk of redundant employer visits/communication pieces.
  - The PA CareerLink® staff will gather business intelligence through employer outreach and utilization of Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (CWIA) data to ensure alignment of job seeker services with employer hiring needs.
  - The PA CareerLink® site administrators and OSO will review Business Service Team communication plans to ensure that employer outreach is coordinated among all partners and that small employers and those tied to in-demand industry sectors are targeted for assistance.
  - The PA CareerLink® staff will strengthen relationships with employer-driven organizations and associations (SHRM, Chambers of Commerce, Rotary, etc.) and use these as vehicles to educate members on available services and resources.
  - The PA CareerLink® staff will work closely with PREP partners to provide leveraged resources in support of business recruitment, retention, expansion, and training efforts.
  - The PA CareerLink® staff will organize employer-driven incumbent worker training opportunities.
- *Better coordinate regional workforce and economic development strategy, messaging, engagement and programs; and*

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

The SAWDB will continue to support the long, well-established, and highly effective partnership between the public workforce system and the region's economic development agencies. For decades, the economic developers and workforce development professionals of the Southern Alleghenies have participated in a recognized and effective network dedicated to improving the region's economy. The public workforce system is a key partner in the Southern Alleghenies PREP; the SAWDB director and PA CareerLink® site administrators have been non-financial members since the PREP's inception. This relationship is reinforced and broadened through both entities' ties to the Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission (SAP&DC). Serving as fiscal agent and staff to the SAWDB, the SAP&DC is one of seven Local Development Districts (LDD) in the state uniquely positioned to help ensure the 'workforce-economic development connection' and alignment of programs and services.

As an arm of the SAP&DC, the SAWDB and its staff are involved in all projects that include a workforce development component. This helps to further cement the strong connection between the public workforce system and economic development network. Assistance to the affected companies and their workforce serves to illustrate the coordinated and cooperative approach taken by the region's workforce and economic development professionals. Each brings unique resources to the table that include:

## Workforce Development

- Labor Market Information - an inventory of the skill sets of the affected workers will help identify current opportunities for re-employment and provide economic developers with data they can use in their business recruitment efforts.
- Incumbent Worker/Dislocated Worker Training - assistance is available to companies that need to 'retool' their workforce as part of a job retention/product diversification strategy. Funding is available to train the affected dislocated workers so that they are prepared to reenter the workforce.
- Employer Services - range from Rapid Response assistance available after notification of a downsizing (staff from JARI, an economic development agency, participates on two counties Rapid Response Teams), to assistance with new employee assessment, recruitment, and training.
- Dislocated Worker Services - range from assessment and remediation to job search assistance and its components, career counseling, and opportunities for retraining.
- Resources of the US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration and the PA Department of Labor and Industry - from dedicated funding (National Emergency Grants, Made in America, POWER) to technical assistance and labor market information.

## Economic Development

- Employer intelligence - In-depth knowledge of the employer/industry and its needs, challenges, opportunities for growth/diversification/economic restructuring.
- New Market Identification & Expansion - assistance with government procurement and product export.
- Business recruitment services - financing packages, shovel-ready property, tax incentives understanding of supply chain. PA CareerLink® Business Service Team and SAWDB staff are

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

often invited by economic developers to participate in meetings with site selection teams. This reinforces the relationship between economic and workforce development professionals and presents a 'united front' to prospective companies.

- Resources of the Appalachian Regional Commission, Economic Development Administration, PA Department of Community and Economic Development, United States Department of Agriculture, Local Economic Development Fund, and Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority that range from dedicated funding to technical assistance.

Many of these same resources will also be coordinated in support of business recruitment and expansion efforts. The SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® sites are positioned to provide labor market information that can be used to promote the region to site selection committees. These range from radial analysis reports that illustrate population demographics and commuting pattern studies that identify workforce movement and possible recruitment opportunities to target industry data including an analysis of the location quotient and potential availability of a skilled workforce. Furthermore, workforce funding will be leveraged to incentivize a company to establish a presence or expand operations in the region. In many cases, the opportunity to access On-the-Job training funds resulted in companies' decisions to relocate to the region.

The workforce and economic development communities recognize the value and unique resources each possess, complementing rather than competing with one another. Opportunities for cross-referrals, joint employer visits, as demonstrated in the **ENGAGE** initiative, and coordinated business recruitment efforts will continue and grow.

The SAWDB, along with the PA CareerLink® partner staff and the PREP partners are committed to working together to ensure that the needs of the business community are identified and addressed. With this shared mission comes the risk of overwhelming employers with multiple communications, including visits designed to share information on available services and learn of the companies' needs. The following strategies will be utilized to increase coordination between the workforce and economic development partners to reduce the chance for duplication of services and lessen employer fatigue:

- Encourage greater connectivity between the worlds of workforce and economic development by inviting local economic developers to attend BST meetings when possible and appropriate; share minutes and other appropriate communications with the local agencies.
- Develop joint calls when and where appropriate. The local PREP partners are currently working with the BST leads in the **ENGAGE** initiative.
- Greater utilization of Executive Pulse to track employer contacts and outcomes. While one-stop staff enter employer engagement information into PA CareerLink®, they also utilize Executive Pulse to make and respond to referrals.
- Continued involvement in PREP meetings, and when possible and appropriate, PREP-related initiatives.
- Additional exploration in the utilization of the Next Gen Industry Partnership model will result in the communication of greater industry intelligence without the need to call on the employer in the workplace.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

We believe that increased collaboration between the region's workforce and economic development partners will lead to reduced service duplication and ultimately enhanced service to employers.

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

Recipients of Unemployment Compensation (UC) make up a significant percentage of the PA CareerLink® sites foot traffic and represent an important target customer group. This has become increasingly more evident this year, with the closure of so many businesses because of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the closure of these companies came the temporary shutdown of the physical one-stop facilities and the stoppage of the UC courtesy phones. The one-stop staff recognized that new strategies had to be employed to help the region's tens of thousands of individuals who found themselves out of work and unable to effectively connect with the UC system that was overwhelmed by over one million unemployed Pennsylvanians.

The PA CareerLink® staff developed an innovative approach to helping those with UC issues. Basic information was collected from those calling in to the PA CareerLink® seeking UC assistance. Select and trained Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations staff were dedicated to investigating each issue, and while not providing the customers with specific UC information, they were able to help them open new claims, or investigate issues with existing claims. Providing this assistance proved invaluable and helped some 9,000 individuals to collect desperately needed compensation. Our hope is that these efforts can continue, though on a greatly reduced basis.

Also, the SAWDB is highly supportive of the new outreach effort to UC recipients who have exhausted their benefits. With this initiative, each PA CareerLink® office will receive a list of UC exhaustees; staff will develop strategies on how to best connect with the target group. The one-stop staff will receive customer-specific data to not only include contact information but also specifics related to their industry and educational level. The outreach message will be consistent, regardless of the partners engaged in the outreach. It will be crafted to engage the customer quickly, be customized and speak to the individual, rather than just a 'form letter,' be supportive and empathetic, and encourage them to quickly connect with the one-stop staff. We anticipate that this approach will be successful, and results will be reflected in the number of exhaustees who engage with the workforce system.

With the passage of state legislation that requires those collecting UC to engage in the public workforce system, PA CareerLink® staff not only have the opportunity but responsibility to ensure that Pennsylvanians seeking to collect UC are complying with the "Register for Work and Work Search." Staff utilize the RESEA (Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment) lists to reach out to those expected to exhaust their unemployment benefits prior to gaining reemployment in a number of ways including:

- Direct call-in to attend RESEA orientations. Prior to the pandemic, in-person attendance was required and those who failed to participate were reported to UC. The RESEA program was temporarily suspended during much of the pandemic and was reinstated in January 2021. Services are currently being provided remotely; our hope is that in-person attendance can be

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

reinstated once it is safe to do so. During the sessions, participants learn about the variety of resources available to jobseekers through the workforce system. Sessions are informational and provide jobseekers with an overview of PA CareerLink® services and programs. The session covers such topics as: conducting a job search using the PA CareerLink® system, reviewing the tools available on the operating system, including the use of O\*net, an overview of local labor market information, WIOA training opportunities, Basic Career Service workshops, and partner services. Upon completion of the formal presentation, the WIOA Title I staff, and Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations staff can provide an individual counseling session that marks the beginning of the Preliminary Assessment process. This includes a review of the jobseeker's skills, abilities, work interest, job history, and recent job search activity. Staff identify any potential barriers to employment and make appropriate customer referrals to additional partner or community programming on behalf of the jobseeker. Individual career counseling services begin, and customers learn more about in-demand industry specific occupations. Jobseekers have the chance to review training opportunities using the High Priority Occupation List and the Eligible Training Provider List on the operating system. Information on funding opportunities for available training programs are introduced not only in the orientation program, but also again during the individual counseling sessions. Jobseekers are encouraged to take advantage of the array of Basic Career Services. At the conclusion of these orientations, RESEA participants meet with Wagner-Peyser staff to review RESEA -related requirements, while WIOA Title I and site staff provide services to the remaining jobseekers.

- Promoting special services available to long-term dislocated workers or those likely to exhaust their benefits. The SAWDB has secured and/or participated in state-wide special National Emergency Grants and other initiatives targeted to dislocated workers. Staff have effectively used the RESEA lists to market these special training programs and where appropriate, included program promotional flyers in UC mailings. The SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® sites have also used the UC call line to include messages promoting these programs. Instead of silence or music, listeners would learn about special workforce programs designed to help them reengage with the workforce and instructed them to contact their local PA CareerLink®.

The SAWDB measures the effectiveness of outreach to UC claimants and includes these outcomes on its PA CareerLink® Scorecard. A recent addition to this dashboard includes the number of UC claimants in the region in a given quarter compared to how many of these individuals have come into the PA CareerLink® and received a value-added service by staff. Under the leadership of the OSO, additional goal setting around these metrics will occur.

One would normally consider UC services applicable to the unemployed individual, however, the PA CareerLink® sites offer a valuable resource to the employer community. UC Board of Review hearings are held in many of our sites, offering greater convenience to the employers who participate in meetings. Each year, UC staff conduct UC-related seminars for employers to educate them on changes to the system, provide valuable information to those who have minimal experience with UC, and in all cases, share their expertise on a subject of great importance to employers. These workshops are well-attended by employers, who welcome and appreciate this assistance.

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

### *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?*

The SAWDB will continue to support the long, well-established, and highly effective partnership between the public workforce system and the region's economic development agencies. For decades, the economic developers and workforce development professionals of the Southern Alleghenies have participated in a recognized and effective network dedicated to improving the region's economy. The public workforce system is a key partner in the Southern Alleghenies PREP; the SAWDB director and PA CareerLink® site administrators have been non-financial members since the PREP's inception. This relationship is reinforced and broadened through both entities' ties to the Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission (SAP&DC). Serving as fiscal agent and staff to the SAWDB, the SAP&DC is one of seven Local Development Districts (LDD) in the state uniquely positioned to help ensure the 'workforce-economic development connection' and alignment of programs and services.

As an arm of the SAP&DC, the SAWDB and its staff are involved in all projects that include a workforce development component. This helps to further cement the strong connection between the public workforce system and economic development network. As noted earlier in the Plan, the region's companies have been hit especially hard during the pandemic. Assistance to the affected companies and their workforce serves to illustrate the coordinated and cooperative approach taken by the region's workforce and economic development professionals. Each brings unique resources to the table that include:

#### Workforce Development

- Labor Market Information - an inventory of the skill sets of the affected workers will help identify current opportunities for re-employment and provide economic developers with data they can use in their business recruitment efforts.
- Incumbent Worker/Dislocated Worker Training - assistance is available to companies that need to 'retool' their workforce as part of a job retention/product diversification strategy. Funding is available to train the affected dislocated workers so that they are prepared to reenter the workforce.
- Employer Services - range from Rapid Response assistance available after notification of a downsizing (staff from JARI, an economic development agency, participates on two counties Rapid Response Teams), to assistance with new employee assessment, recruitment, and training.
- Dislocated Worker Services - range from assessment and remediation to job search assistance and its components, career counseling, and opportunities for retraining.
- Resources of the US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration and the PA Department of Labor and Industry - from dedicated funding (National Emergency Grants, Made in America, POWER) to technical assistance and labor market information.

#### Economic Development

- Employer intelligence - In-depth knowledge of the employer/industry and its needs, challenges, opportunities for growth/diversification/economic restructuring.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

- New Market Identification & Expansion - assistance with government procurement and product export.
- Business recruitment services - financing packages, shovel-ready property, tax incentives understanding of supply chain.
- Resources of the Appalachian Regional Commission, Economic Development Administration, PA Department of Community and Economic Development, United States Department of Agriculture, Local Economic Development Fund, and Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority that range from dedicated funding to technical assistance.

Many of these same resources will also be coordinated in support of business recruitment and expansion efforts. The SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® sites are positioned to provide labor market information that can be used to promote the region to site selection committees. These range from radial analysis reports that illustrate population demographics and commuting pattern studies that identify workforce movement and possible recruitment opportunities to target industry data including an analysis of the location quotient and potential availability of a skilled workforce. Furthermore, workforce funding will be leveraged to incentivize a company to establish a presence or expand operations in the region. In several cases, the opportunity to access On-the-Job training funds resulted in companies' decisions to relocate to the region and bring with them 'jobs that pay.'

Two current initiatives serve as excellent examples of the strong working relationship between federal, state and the region's economic development agencies and the public workforce system. They include:

- **ENGAGE**- through support of the PA Department of Community and Economic Development, joint employer visits, conducted by PA CareerLink® business service team leads and county economic development directors, will continue to occur. Hundreds of visits with employer and industry leaders have occurred, resulting in 'realtime' business intelligence. Referrals to the PA CareerLink® and its workforce partners create an efficient system to help address the many and varied need of the region's employer community.
- **Southern Alleghenies Entrepreneurial Ecosystem** - 'Startup Alleghenies' - support from the Appalachian Regional Commission, Economic Development Administration, and PA Department of Community and Economic Development supported the creation of a massive initiative designed to foster entrepreneurial development in communities impacted by the downturn in the coal industry. Local partners include the SAP&DC, SAWDB, PREP partners, the SBDC, Ben Franklin Technology Partners, the OVR, and a myriad of other entities including but not limited to education, financial institutions, and community foundations. Potential entrepreneurs will have access to a wide array of wrap-around business support services facilitated via the ecosystem coaches and mentors. With guidance and support, they can access customized services and be coached through the ecosystem that includes training, information, and resources needed for success. 'Idea Mines' located in the impacted counties will include maker spaces, co-working spaces, and special purpose spaces; entrepreneurs can access equipment and technology in these locations. The appropriate 'tools' will be determined on an individual basis and will be accessed as the entrepreneur needs them.

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

Through the SAWDB and its one-stop's involvement in Startup Alleghenies, there has never been a closer connection between entrepreneurial development, including skills training and resource provision, and the public workforce system. This promotion of entrepreneurship has taken several forms including:

- Entrepreneurial skills training being taken to a new level for youth because of SAWDB and Startup Alleghenies collaboration. Several of the initiative's entrepreneurial coaches have been meeting with participants in the WIOA Title I program to discuss entrepreneurship and the essential ingredients of a successful business.
- 2020/21 SAWDB Teacher in the Workplace grant that focuses connecting educators with local business creators so that they can see entrepreneurship in action. The teachers will then incorporate entrepreneurship principles into classroom curriculum.

Also, there is a coordinated effort to promote apprenticeships with an initial focus on the manufacturing sector. The SAWDB, PA CareerLink®, economic development, Pennsylvania Highlands Community College and the region's Career and Technology Centers, with the support from the PA Department of Labor and Industry Office of Apprenticeships, continue to meet with employers to discuss the benefits of registered apprenticeships and in the case of several companies, take the initial steps in a positive direction.

The workforce and economic development communities recognize the value and unique resources each possess, complementing rather than competing with one another. Opportunities for cross-referrals, joint employer visits and coordinated business recruitment efforts will continue and grow.

## *4 OPERATIONAL PLANNING: 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.*

The local workforce development system includes a wide range of key stakeholders, from boards of local elected officials to small community-based organizations. The entities that comprise the workforce system's governance structure, to include the chief local elected officials, Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission (SAP&DC) and the SAWDB, and their roles and responsibilities are outlined in Section 3.1 of the Plan.

The OSO is a key player in workforce development; it is responsible for providing direction to the delivery system and assist the one-stop with the implementation of the SAWDB's strategic objectives. Its membership includes key stakeholders and form a consortium of three agencies (Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies, Employment and Training Inc. and the Community Action Partnership for Somerset County- Tableland Services) and collectively represent the mandated partners- WIOA Title I, Adult Education, YouthBuild, and the Community Service Block Grant. They bring tremendous experience and a long and successful history of providing significant workforce services, especially to those with barriers to employment. They, along with the SAWDB director and PA CareerLink® site administrators, meet monthly to review performance metrics, discuss and identify service gaps, lay the groundwork for new program implementation, and address any pressing issues or concerns. Since

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

March 2020, much of the focus has been on navigating the uncharted waters caused by the pandemic, the initial closure of the one-stops and their safe reopening, and the effective provision of virtual service delivery.

Additional focus includes:

- Increased outreach to those with significant barriers to employment
- Increased and improved effectiveness in serving employers
- Intelligence gathering and the identification of new performance metrics for the PA CareerLink® Scorecards

The OSO also:

- Assists with the preparation and maintenance of the PA CareerLink® Operating Budget in concert with the site administrators and one-stop partners
- Works to ensure seamless integration within the one-stop
- Helps prepare for PA CareerLink® quality review visits
- Serves as liaison to the SAWDB and provides one-stop updates at Board and committee meetings
- Selects, evaluates, and supports the PA CareerLink® Site Administrators
- Provides oversight of the performance management system relative to Common Measures and the PA CareerLink® Scorecards
- Evaluates customer needs and satisfaction
- Completes reporting requirements
- Oversees marketing/outreach for PA CareerLink® sites and system
- Assists with recruitment of additional partners
- Oversees professional development of PA CareerLink® staff through the availability of appropriate training opportunities
- Communicates the strategic objectives of the SAWDB and oversight to ensure that the objectives are met.

For the average customer who enters a one-stop in the region, there is nothing to indicate that services are provided by many organizations and agencies. From its layout by function, rather than staff seating by agency, to the common forms shared by partners and the integrated referral network, the region's one-stops strive to be a model of service integration and inclusion. Lines of authority, chains of command, and mandated 'firewalls' are recognized and respected by those in the one-stop system. With the PA CareerLink® Site Administrators providing the functional leadership, the partners (mandated and others) within the region's PA CareerLink® sites are committed to providing the workforce services needed by the region's jobseekers and employers. They include but are not limited to:

WIOA Title I - staff provide a full array of Basic, Individualized, and Follow-up services to adults, dislocated workers and specific career development and exploration services for youth. These include but are not limited to outreach, intake and orientation, assessment of skill levels, aptitudes, abilities, and supportive service needs, TABE, CareerScope, WorkKeys, and Northstar Digital Literacy, development of individual employment plans, individual and group counseling, case management,

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

short-term prevocational counseling, and access to WIOA Title I-funded training assistance and supportive services. Staff work closely with employers to assess their workforce needs and work with partner staff to identify candidates. They also develop and oversee all aspects of the On-the-Job training contracts with employers. As a financial contributor and co-located partner, WIOA Title I shares in the infrastructure and other costs associated with the PA CareerLink® sites. Staff also conduct a wide array of workshops and other general services on behalf of all jobseeker and employer customers. During periods of remote service delivery, many virtual workshops were developed and offered to jobseekers and employers. These workshops are housed on one-stop social media pages and are available 24-7 to interested persons.

There are currently three WIOA Title I subcontractors in the Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Area. The organizations and the county(s) they serve are as follows:

- Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies - Bedford, Blair, and Cambria County
- Employment & Training of Huntingdon - Fulton and Huntingdon Counties
- Community Action Partnership for Somerset County - Tableland Services, Inc.- Somerset County

The SAWDB also utilizes its Request for Proposal (RFP) procurement process to promote continuous improvement in the WIOA Title I services it supports. Procurement notices were sent to roughly 200 bidders from across the region, state and country, ads were placed in papers of record, and the solicitation was included on the Pennsylvania Development Workforce Association website; all of this was done to encourage responses from qualified organizations with a strong history of providing quality workforce services. After a rigorous board-driven review process, two of the region's six counties have a different service provider, effective July 1, 2017. All contracts are considered annually and renewed based on provider performance. The SAWDB went through a similar process to competitively procure its OSO. Performance reviews of the consortium will continue to be conducted annually. These providers were selected through a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process initiated by the LEOs and the SAWDB in early 2017 and completed in May 2017. A RFP process for OSO procurement will take place again in 2021.

There are currently three WIOA Title II Adult Education and Literacy program providers in the Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Area. WIOA Title II Adult Education and Literacy staff provide remedial adult education services to jobseekers and are key partners in the region's Pathways to Employment sector partnership initiative. Listed below are the WIOA Title II Adult Education and Literacy program providers and the county(s) they serve:

- Altoona Area School District - Blair, Huntingdon, and Fulton Counties
- Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies - Cambria County
- Somerset County Technology Center - Somerset and Bedford Counties

Wagner-Peyser staff provide employment services to job seekers and employers through PA CareerLink® centers. Services to job seekers include but are not limited to job search and job placement assistance; career counseling; needs and interest assessments; proficiency testing; workshops; development of an individual employment plan; and case management. Services to employers include assistance in developing and posting job orders, referral of qualified job seekers to job openings and organizing job fairs. Both job seekers and employers are also provided with labor market information

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

to help inform their activities. As a financial contributor and co-located partner, Wagner-Peyser shares in the infrastructure and other costs associated with the PA CareerLink® sites. Staff also conduct a wide array of workshops and other general services on behalf of all jobseeker and employer customers.

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation staff provide workforce information and referral for persons with disabilities and help customers to achieve their vocational goal. They assist other one-stop staff on matters related to disability awareness and accessibility and serve on the Business Services Teams. Staff assist individuals with disabilities to secure and maintain employment and independence under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act. Eligible OVR customers receive multiple services that may include but not be limited to diagnostic, vocation counseling and guidance, vocational evaluation, restoration, training, job placement and pre-employment training services for eligible high school students with disabilities. OVR also provides multiple services to the business community designed to assist businesses with onboarding pre-screen 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 death. The state-wide business services staff can identify resources to assist any organization on how to improve access compliance and steps to diversify their workforce to include individuals with a disability.

Additional partner and key stakeholder information is detailed in Section 4.2 of the Plan.

The SAWDB has taken a team approach when it comes to operations in the region and it enjoys outstanding working relationships with everyone, from the local elected officials and members of the OSO and members of the PREP, to the partner staff who work directly with the customers. Because of these strong lines of communication and spirit of cooperation that is present in the region, the local system has been recognized by the state and the US Department of Labor for its ability to meet the needs of its customers through its cooperative and coordinated approach to service delivery. Examples of this include:

- SAWDB staff meet regularly with WIOA Title I providers to discuss topics ranging from performance management to Board policy changes, operating system modifications, service delivery improvements.
- SAWDB director participates in monthly OSO and site administrator meetings to ensure communication flows from the SAWDB directly to the PA CareerLink® sites. The OSO also participates in and reports out at all SAWDB and Executive Committee meetings.
- SAWDB director participates in state-organized meetings of the local WDB directors to ensure that information flows from the local area to other LWDBAs and the state and then back to the region.
- SAWDB director and staff participate in the PA Workforce Development Association board, its councils, and technical work group meetings to ensure that communication flows from our local area to other LWDBAs and the state and then back to our region.
- SAWDB staff participate in regularly scheduled meetings of Business Service Teams, PREP partners, service organizations, etc. to convey information relative to workforce initiatives to these entities and provide feedback to the Board.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

Furthermore, the SAWDB director and staff maintain an open-door policy so that they are accessible to all workforce partners and stakeholders, including PA CareerLink® staff at all levels.

The SAWDB members and its staff serve as the common thread that connects the local elected officials, workforce partners, system stakeholders and related advocacy groups. They further help to ensure that these diverse agencies/individuals have access to needed services and a voice in helping to inform the system leaders and partners of those services most in demand by those with barriers to employment.

In the formation of the SAWDB, strategies were deployed to include not only the mandated members but many individuals who represent the historically underserved and those with the most significant barriers to employment. A number of Board seats are held by individuals who advocate for youth, veterans, those living in poverty, people with disabilities, substance abuse and behavioral health issues and criminal backgrounds. The region's local elected officials have been instrumental in structuring such a diverse board. This has helped to ensure that those in tremendous need of services have a clear and strong voice at the governance table and with it, significant interaction with the local workforce system. This spirit of inclusion carries into the workings of the SAWDB's Special Populations Committee, which includes not only board members but also representatives from additional advocacy groups and the PA CareerLink® site administrators. The Board has placed significant responsibility on this committee to help affect change in the public workforce system and ensure that it remains relevant to all jobseekers and employers.

Board and its staff member and PA CareerLink® staff are also active on a significant number of local and regional initiatives that further engage local advocacy efforts with the public workforce system. These include but are not limited to:

- Transition Councils that advocate for increased opportunities for individuals with disabilities
- Re-entry Teams that include individuals who work on behalf of the previously incarcerated
- Healthy Blair County Coalition that includes SAWDB staff, representatives from family and victim services, the United Way, health and welfare councils, drug, alcohol, and crime prevention
- Chambers of Commerce that advocate for business and industry

From the diverse makeup of the SAWDB and its Special Populations Committee to the formal relationships/partnerships with many of the region's advocacy groups, the Southern Alleghenies local service delivery system expands far beyond the co-located partners to touch those in our communities most in need of workforce assistance and support.

Listed below are the designated equal opportunity liaisons for each PA CareerLink® center within the local area and the EO officer for the Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Area. These individuals are responsible for ensuring equal employment opportunities and civil rights protections:

- PA CareerLink® Bedford County  
One Corporate Drive, Suite 103  
Bedford, PA 15522

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

EEO Liaison: Staff Name, Job Title and Partner Affiliation

John Gardner Local Veterans Employment Representative

Phone: 814-623-6107 ext. 122

TTY: 814-623-6069

Email: [johgardner@pa.gov](mailto:johgardner@pa.gov)

- PA CareerLink® Blair County  
1600 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 200  
Altoona, PA 16602  
EEO Liaison: Staff Name, Job Title and Partner Affiliation  
Stephanie Romagna PA CareerLink® Specialist BWPO  
Phone: 814-940-6231  
TTY: 814-569-1066  
Email: [sromagna@pa.gov](mailto:sromagna@pa.gov)
- PA CareerLink® Cambria County  
248 Main Street, Suite 100  
Johnstown PA 15901  
EEO Liaison: Staff Name, Job Title and Partner Affiliation  
Jeff Grandas PA CareerLink® Specialist BWPO  
Phone: 814-534-2500 ext. 266  
TTY: 814-535-6698  
Email: [jgrandas@pa.gov](mailto:jgrandas@pa.gov)
- PA CareerLink® Huntingdon County  
54 Pennsylvania Ave  
Huntingdon PA 16652  
EEO Liaison: Staff Name, Job Title and Partner Affiliation  
Dana Rogers PA CareerLink® BWPO Supervisor  
Phone: 814-641-6408 ext. 108  
TTY: 1-866-395-0149  
Email: [darogers@pa.gov](mailto:darogers@pa.gov)
- PA CareerLink® Somerset County  
6022 Glades Pike, Suite 100  
Somerset PA 15501  
EEO Liaison: Staff Name, Job Title and Partner Affiliation  
Vincente Rodriguez, Bi-Lingual PA CareerLink® Specialist BWPO  
Phone: 814-445-4161 ext. 226  
TTY: 814-444-5814  
Email: [virodrigue@pa.gov](mailto:virodrigue@pa.gov)
- Deborah Shaffer  
SAP&DC

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

E.E.O Officer  
3 Sheraton Drive  
Altoona Pa. 16601  
Phone 814-949-6513  
Email: [dshaffer@sapdc.org](mailto:dshaffer@sapdc.org)

*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).*

The Southern Alleghenies PA CareerLink® Partners include the following:

**The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation** - provides a variety of services to eligible OVR customers that may include but are not limited to diagnostic, vocational counseling and guidance, vocational evaluation, restoration, training, job placement and pre-employment training services. OVR also provides multiple services to businesses designed to assist them with onboarding pre-screened qualified individuals with disabilities. Additional service information can be found in section 3.2 of this Plan. OVR contributes to the local workforce delivery system in multiple ways. As a financial contributor and co-located partner, OVR shares in the infrastructure and other costs associated with the PA CareerLink® sites. As the system's expert on serving individuals with disabilities, OVR staff provide technical assistance to PA CareerLink® staff and help to ensure that the facilities remain ADA compliant.

**WIOA Title I** - staff provide a full array of Basic, Individualized, and Follow-up services to adults, dislocated workers and specific career development and exploration services for youth. These include but are not limited to outreach, intake and orientation, assessment of skill levels, aptitudes, abilities, and supportive service needs, TABE, CareerScope, and WorkKeys, Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment, development of individual employment plans, individual and group counseling, case management, short-term prevocational counseling, and access to WIOA Title I training assistance and supportive services. Staff work closely with employers to assess their workforce needs and work with partner staff to identify candidates. They also develop and oversee all aspects of the On-the-Job training contracts with employers. As a financial contributor and co-located partner, WIOA Title I share in the infrastructure and other costs associated with the PA CareerLink® sites. Staff also conduct a wide array of workshops and other general services on behalf of all jobseeker and employer customers.

**Wagner-Peyser** - Wagner-Peyser staff provide employment services to job seekers and employers through PA CareerLink® centers. Services to job seekers include but are not limited to job search and job placement assistance; career counseling; needs and interest assessments; proficiency testing; workshops; development of an individual employment plan; and case management. Services to employers include assistance in developing and posting job orders, referral of qualified job seekers to job openings and organizing job fairs. Both job seekers and employers are also provided with labor market information to help inform their activities. As a financial contributor and co-located partner, Wagner-Peyser shares in the infrastructure and other costs associated with the PA CareerLink® sites. Staff also conduct a wide array of workshops and other general services on behalf of all jobseeker and

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

employer customers.

**Trade Adjustment Assistance** - Trade Act programs are focused on getting participants reemployed and ensuring those individuals maintain employment. The TAA Program includes training, employment and case management services, job search allowances, relocation allowances, Trade Readjustment Allowances (TRA), Reemployment Trade Adjustment Assistance (RTAA) and Alternative Trade Adjustment Assistance (ATAA), and the Health Coverage Tax Credit (HCTC) [a benefit available to eligible TAA recipients which is administered by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS)]. As a financial contributor and co-located partner, Trade Act shares in the infrastructure and other costs associated with the PA CareerLink® sites. Staff also conduct a wide array of workshops and other general services on behalf of all jobseeker and employer customers.

**Unemployment Compensation** - Meaningful assistance is provided to individuals seeking help in filing an unemployment claim in PA CareerLink® sites; claimants will have dedicated access to UC service center staff as well as access to important UC information. Assistance to individuals filing an unemployment claim will be provided by offering a courtesy telephone at PA CareerLink® sites which is dedicated to serving one-stop customers in a timely manner. In addition, a computer may also be provided to allow one-stop customers access to unemployment compensation services online along with informational UC postings, signs, pamphlets and forms for UC claimants and employers. In addition to physical accessibility, UC provides programmatic accessibility through TTY on its dedicated courtesy telephones, as well as bilingual translation and sign language interpretation when needed. Partner collaboration locally will ensure all special populations can be served via referral to partner program supports.

**Community Services Block Grant** - Services carried out under the CSBG are intended to have a measurable impact on the causes of and lessen poverty in a community. Funding is used to address the needs of low-income individuals including the homeless, migrants, and the elderly and provide services and activities aimed at addressing employment, education, better use of available income, housing, nutrition, emergency services and health. Though not co-located in the PA CareerLink®, the CSBG has provided funding to support one-stop infrastructure and other associated operating costs. Strong partnerships with the local Community Action Agencies (CAA), the administrators of CSBG funding, is essential. The clients of the CAAs make up many of the WIOA target populations. These agencies figure prominently in providing barrier remediation for those one-stop customers who are not prepared to begin an effective job search.

**YouthBuild** - YouthBuild is a discretionary grant program that serves 17–24-year-old youth who are high school dropouts or those who have dropped out and subsequently re-enrolled. Participants also must be one of the following: member of a low-income family, in foster care, an offender, an individual with a disability, the child of a current or formerly incarcerated parent, or a migrant youth. YouthBuild combines academics to support secondary diploma or equivalency receipt for participants with hands-on occupational skills training in construction and/or other in-demand industries, resulting in industry-recognized credentialing. The program also includes a strong emphasis on leadership development, community service, and soft-skills competencies. This program is not co-located in the one-stop but the service provider, Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies, who is also the WIOA Title I provider. Where

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

possible and appropriate, youth are co-enrolled in the WIOA Title I Youth program. YouthBuild provides funding in support of PA CareerLink® infrastructure costs in Cambria County.

**Indian and Native American Job Training Assistance and Employment Program** - serves American Indians, Alaskan Native or Native Hawaiian who are unemployed at least seven days, employed less than full time, are underemployed or are economically disadvantaged. Services include individual employability evaluations, classroom training assistance, career counseling, and job search and placement assistance. The program is not co-located in the one-stop and there is no financial contribution to the one-stop. Staff from the service provider, Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center, Inc., will travel throughout the region to meet with participants and one-stop partners will maintain information on the program so that they can make solid referrals to the Council.

**Job Corps** - Job Corps is a no-cost education and vocational training program administered by the U.S. Department of Labor that helps young people ages 16 through 24 improve the quality of their lives through vocational and academic training. Job Corps has been training young adults for meaningful careers since 1964 and is committed to offering all students a safe, drug-free environment where they can take advantage of the resources provided. Job Corps' mission is to set highly motivated young people on a pathway to education and training for successful careers in the nation's fastest-growing industries. Currently there is no provider office located in the region and no financial contributions are made to one-stop costs. However, staff will travel throughout the region to speak with potential participants; program referrals are also made by PA CareerLink® partners, especially by WIOA Title I.

**Senior Community Service Employment** - The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) is a community service and work-based job training program for older Americans; the program provides training for low-income, unemployed seniors. SCSEP participants gain work experience in a variety of community service activities at non-profit and public facilities, including schools, hospitals, day-care centers, and senior centers. Participants work an average of 20 hours a week, and are paid the highest of federal, state or local minimum wage. Participants must be at least 55, unemployed, and have a family income of no more than 125% of the federal poverty level. Enrollment priority is given to veterans and qualified spouses, then to individuals who are over 65, have a disability, have low literacy skills or limited English proficiency, reside in a rural area, are homeless or at risk of homelessness, have low employment prospects, or have failed to find employment after using services through the PA CareerLink® system. The SCSEP places senior workers in the region's one-stops; they provide invaluable assistance to staff and customers. The costs associated with employing these individuals is the program's in-kind contribution to the PA CareerLink® site's operation costs.

**Foreign Labor Certification** - Staff within this unit provide employers with other U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) mandated Foreign Labor Certification process services, and help employers complete the SWA related segments of the temporary foreign labor H-2A and H2B. They will assist in administering an internet-based labor exchange on PA CareerLink®. Staff also offer a variety of other employer services including education and training services to help employers build a quality workforce. They will help employers fulfill part of the USDOL requirements for FLC by helping them recruit U.S. workers and determine whether there are any qualified job applicants available to fill their job postings. The goal, as required, is to find U.S. workers for all positions.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

**Jobs for Veterans State Grant** - Staff provide special individualized services to disabled veterans. Disabled Veteran Outreach Program (DVOP) staff work in conjunction with PA CareerLink® partners to identify veterans and establish an appropriate plan to meet the individuals' employment and training needs. These specialized counselors work directly with disabled veterans, as defined in 38 U.S.C. § 4211(1) and (3) with service-connected disabilities in the provision of labor exchange services, securing appropriate training services and obtaining appropriate employment at a family sustaining wage. In addition, the JVSG allows for Local Veterans Employment Representatives to do employer outreach and promote veterans as job seekers who have highly marketable skills and experience. As a financial contributor and co-located partner, Jobs for Veterans shares in the infrastructure and other costs associated with the PA CareerLink® sites. Veterans receive priority of service. Referrals to this program, and referrals coming from program staff to other Partners ensures that our veterans receive all services necessary to help them reenter the workforce.

**Carl Perkins Career and Technical Education** - The purpose of the "Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006" is to develop more fully the academic, career and technical skills of secondary education students and postsecondary education students who elect to enroll in career and technical education programs by building on the efforts of states and localities to develop challenging academic and technical standards and to assist students in meeting such standards, including preparation for high skill, high wage, or high demand occupations in current or emerging professions; promoting the development of services and activities that integrate rigorous and challenging academic and career and technical instruction, and that link secondary education and postsecondary education for participating career and technical education students; and supporting partnerships among secondary schools, postsecondary institutions, baccalaureate degree granting institutions, area career and technical education schools, local workforce investment boards, business and industry, and intermediaries. As a financial contributor and co-located partner, Carl Perkins Adult Education shares in the infrastructure and other costs associated with the PA CareerLink® in Blair County.

**Title II Adult Education - (ABE)** Staff provide program orientation, assessment, educational planning and classroom instruction. Initial assessment of reading, math, and language levels are provided. Specialized learning plans are developed to identify a participant's learning style, educational goals, individualized educational plan and specific career goals. All classes provided are open-ended and open-exit and include high school equivalency preparation, brush-up classes for those who do not require extensive assistance, and adult basic education for lower literacy students. As a financial contributor and co-located partner, Title II Adult Education shares in the infrastructure and other costs associated with the PA CareerLink® sites. ABE staff are an integral part of the Partner referral network. So many of the individuals who enter the public workforce system are basic skills deficient, they have literacy levels below 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and they require remediation to progress to post-secondary education or reenter the workforce.

**TANF** - Staff provide access to many programs including: Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), cash assistance program, formerly known as AFDC, Aid to Families with Dependent Children. This helps to cover living expenses to eligible families; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known as food stamps; medical assistance to individuals and families of varying income and

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

circumstances; LIHEAP, a seasonal program that provides assistance with utilities for heating during the winter months, as well as referrals to the Weatherization program for furnace repairs and insulation; and LTC/Waiver programs provide assistance to persons who need help paying for Nursing Home Care or for programs to assist aged or disabled individuals receive care in a Home or Community based setting. As a financial contributor and co-located partner, TANF shares in the infrastructure and other costs associated with the PA CareerLink® sites. Low-income individuals are included in the priority of service. Referrals to this program, and referrals coming from program staff to other Partners ensures that participants receive all services necessary to help them enter the workforce. EARN (Employment, Advancement and Retention Network) Staff within the PA CareerLink® Huntingdon provide a variety of workforce-related services to eligible customers who are referred to the program by the Huntingdon County Assistance Office. Services range from job search assistance to participation in community service projects. Similar services are offered by EARN program providers throughout the region but only in Huntingdon is the program co-located with a PA CareerLink® office.

**Second Chance Act** - While no agency in the Southern Alleghenies region receives Second Chance Act funding, staff within the one-stop provide significant outreach and service to individuals who have been previously incarcerated or are about to reenter the community. Workforce development services including job search assistance are provided to individuals on-site while they are still incarcerated and continue after release. Many one-stop staff have secured professional development certifications that make them uniquely qualified to provide services to individuals with these barriers. Staff also participate on local re-entry councils so that they and the board are well-positioned to provide needed financial, i.e., support for retraining, as well as service-related resources that will enable these jobseekers to reenter their communities and become contributing members.

**Family Self-Sufficiency Program** - This Housing and Urban Development program focuses on the development of community strategies aimed at helping voucher families secure employment that will lead to economic independence and self-sufficiency. In the Southern Alleghenies, only the Altoona Housing Authority receives these funds. They support the PA CareerLink® office in Blair County through in-kind services that include the provision of workshops.

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

The WIOA has placed increased emphasis on expanding access to and serving those who are most in need of assistance. As a result, strong partnerships with community and faith-based organizations are more important than ever. The SAWDB includes the executive directors from two Community Action Agencies (CAAs) and with their assistance, the referral network between the one-stops and CAAs has been strengthened. As is often the case, those who come to the CAAs seeking assistance with housing and transportation, or drug and alcohol counseling are also in need of a job. Similar relationships are being developed or reinforced with other entities that include:

- Juvenile and Adult Probation Offices
- Transitional Re-Entry Advisory Councils
- County Housing Authorities
- Food Banks

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

- Literacy Providers
- County MH/MR Offices
- County Assistance Offices
- Human Services Councils

The SAWDB's Special Population Committee includes representatives from the majority of the entities noted above. The committee has been engaged in service gap and barrier identification with the PA CareerLink® site administrators and SAWDB staff. The OSO is working with all parties to improve outreach, access and service to these target populations. As one-stop staff and representatives from these agencies gain a greater understanding of each other's resources, clients and service needs/gaps, the opportunities for cross-referrals and leveraging of additional resources is heightened and ultimately clients/customers have access to a broader range of services designed to meet their needs.

While Section 4.2 of the Plan identifies the one-stop partners and their roles, it is important to note that all partners are not physically co-located in the region's PA CareerLink® sites. This is especially true for rural areas where we have found that many program resources are centered in more urban/suburban areas. For this reason, an electronic and ever-expanding referral network is utilized to connect one-stop customers to these important resources. PA CareerLink® staff frequently refer customers to off-site partner staff for programs that include but are not limited to Family Self-Sufficiency (available only in Altoona, Blair County), Job Corp (with representatives in the Pittsburgh area), Indian and Native American Job Training Assistance and Employment (with representatives in western Pennsylvania), and Second Chance Act. Through their coordinated system of referral and follow-up, one-stop staff work to ensure that the referral is acted upon by both the customer and referred-to partner and ultimately, the customer is able to access needed on-site services.

Goal setting and performance benchmarking, above and beyond Common Measures, have been the hallmarks of service delivery in the Southern Alleghenies. Part of expanding access to workforce services is to first understand current 'market share' and recognize who is using our system. The SAWDB and its workforce partners draw on PA CareerLink® service utilization reports to better understand demand and customer demographics. From this data, the SAWDB, the OSO, and PA CareerLink® site administrators and management team members continue to set measurable goals. These goals will also incorporate the Department of Labor and Industry's benchmarks associated with serving low-income individuals and those with barriers to employment. These targets are included in the individual PA CareerLink® strategic plans and performance Scorecards and reviewed monthly to ensure that staff are working toward the goals.

In addition to providing needed services, the SAWDB has made significant efforts to 'take the services to the customer.' This has been especially important given the geographic expanse of the region. In addition to 5 comprehensive PA CareerLink® sites and 4 affiliate sites, one-stop staff have developed strong working relationships with community centers and public libraries; information on the public workforce system is made available at these locations. Since late 2018, the region's two largest comprehensive sites have co-located into the prominent public libraries in Johnstown and Altoona. These locations are considerably more accessible to many of our target populations. This has been a natural outgrowth of the SAWDB and its one-stops' relationships with public libraries. Staff and

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

volunteers are shown how to navigate PA CareerLink® and refer their job seeking customers to the closest one-stop. The SAWDB, OSO and one-stop staff have also made great strides in placing 'PA CareerLink in Your Community' by deploying staff to the offices of workforce partners including housing authorities, community action agencies, prisons, foodbanks, and similar locations. This will further facilitate outreach to those unable to travel to a one-stop. The investment in technology that facilitates remote service provision enabled the region's one-stops to move seamlessly to virtual service provision during the pandemic. Also, in support of remote service delivery, and to further help keep customers and staff safe, our one-stops have had their Wi-Fi- expanded from the buildings into the PA CareerLink® parking lots. When necessary, staff can meet customers in the parking lot with a laptop or tablet and assist the customer directly without them having to physically enter the building. We believe that there will be a continued demand for services to be provided virtually, and in this manner long after we are able to fully reopen the one-stops to in-person services.

The SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® sites and staff make every effort to ensure that services are accessible to all. This includes the following:

- A TTY telecommunication device and amplified telephone receiver speakers, as well as the provision of a PA certified American Sign Language Interpreter, available upon advance request, are available for Deaf and for individuals who are hard of hearing.
- Designated computers have ZOOM text that enlarges written materials for those with a visual impairment and JAWS software that reads the information to the individual. Orientation information and service-related materials are available in Braille.
- The Language Line is available for those with limited English literacy. This line enables the PA CareerLink® staff to connect, via telephone, with translators capable of speaking to customers in over 80 languages. The one-stops also maintain a LEPP or Limited English Proficiency Plan that addresses how staff will provide services and support to individuals who are unable to communicate fluently in English.

These materials and technology are reviewed by the SAWDB staff during each PA CareerLink® monitoring visit to ensure that materials are available, and the technology is in good working order.

The SAWDB recognizes that technology can be an important and useful tool; computer literacy is necessary to navigate the PA CareerLink® and increasingly employers are utilizing on-line job applications. With SAWDB support, PA CareerLink® sites have been offering basic, and on a limited basis, intermediate computer classes for jobseekers. Through this instruction, individuals learn how to effectively use the workforce's information technology systems to conduct a job search. These classes have been especially beneficial in the region's more rural areas and for those older jobseekers who have had little exposure to computers. In addition, the Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment is available in all the region's one-stops. Customers have the capability to earn electronic badges as they advance through the assessment and earn credentials awarded to those who pass the various assessments in our proctored setting. The use of technology can open doors to many but the SAWDB, through research and analysis, learned early on that technology cannot take the place of face-to-face assistance provided by a skilled career planner. Much of the six-county region has no access to highspeed internet; basic cellular telephone service is lacking in many areas as well. The workforce, and consequently the jobseekers, are aging with many lacking even basic computer literacy. To expect

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

individuals to conduct job search remotely, from a home computer or smart phone, is unrealistic. As referenced above, the SAWDB supports physical locations and staff trained to assist all jobseekers in their employment search.

The tracking of services, and the measuring of performance outcomes, are essential to service provision. PA CareerLink® is recognized as the system of record; non-commonwealth information systems are not utilized by contracted service providers. In many cases, information is entered by the jobseeker or employer, especially onto PA CareerLink®. PA CareerLink® staff assist in the entry of information for jobseekers at the time they are determined eligible and enrolled into services. All service is recorded on PA CareerLink® and input at the time-of-service enrollment, in real time. Employer-related information, i.e., job orders are placed on PA CareerLink® no later than 24 hours after receipt, but all efforts are made to input the information as soon as it is received by the employer. Enhancements to PA CareerLink® allow for electronic referrals between internal as well as external community partners. We believe this update will greatly facilitate service provision between the PA CareerLink® partner staff and the many community-based organizations that are well-positioned to assist the one-stop customers.

The SAWDB recognizes that other commonwealth-owned information systems are utilized with the public workforce system and include the following:

- Adult Education- e-Data system captures all service and outcome related information. The information is input by program staff on a weekly basis and is kept up to date.

Every effort is made to co-enroll jobseekers with WIOA Title I when they are eligible and suitable for such services. In cases where individuals are not receiving Title I or Title II career or training services but are enrolled in other WIOA programs through Adult Education or OVR, participants' services records are updated as services are received or on a weekly basis, depending on the provider. Program staff, including clerical staff, are responsible for this data entry.

As outlined in other sections of this Plan, the SAWDB maintains a close working relationship with the providers of Title II Adult Education, the initial developers and drivers of Career Pathways in the region. The SAWDB's connection and access to employers has helped to facilitate the development and expansion of these pathways, as the employer community provides their confirmation. With participants often co-enrolled in Title I and Title II services, access to employment and training has been greatly facilitated.

#### *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?*

Continued support and involvement from the OVR staff, along with PA CareerLink® management and oversight by the OSO and SAWDB, will help to ensure that the facilities are fully accessible, have the

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

necessary technology, and materials in alternative formats for use by individuals with disabilities. Services will be provided in a seamless manner and referral to appropriate partner programs will be facilitated through increased communication and cooperation between one-stop partners. The Board's Special Populations Committee is dedicated to identifying, promoting, and assessing services for special populations, including individuals with disabilities; the OVR district administrator serves as the chair of this committee. This helps to ensure that the employment needs of individuals with disabilities will remain in the forefront. OVR and PA CareerLink® staff will continue to develop and coordinate services designed to promote disability inclusion including joint workshops and career fairs. A consent form has been implemented to allow greater sharing of customer information and improve communication between the vocational rehabilitation counselors and WIOA Title I career planners. Much has been accomplished and OVR, Board leadership, and PA CareerLink® staff will continue to identify ways to expand and enhance workforce services to individuals with disabilities. OVR staff are also positioned to assist other PA CareerLink® staff to better understand and appreciate the unique challenges faced by jobseekers with disabilities. As a local and 'in house' expert, OVR staff are well positioned to help ensure that the one-stop facilities comply with state and federal ADA requirements and assist other PA CareerLink® staff to better understand and appreciate the unique challenges faced by jobseekers with disabilities. OVR staff as well as other partner staff, i.e., WIOA Title I provider Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies, are well positioned to and have provided staff training workshops on how to provide enhanced services to individuals with disabilities. The SAWDB's Special Populations Committee also includes individuals who serve those with intellectual disabilities. Service to this growing segment of jobseekers requires special skills and we look to these partners and board members to help educate one-stop staff on effective service delivery strategies.

Coordination of outreach to employers has improved with OVR's hiring of Business Services Representatives; they are active members of the PA CareerLink® Business Service Teams. Never have there been greater efforts toward disability inclusion. OVR and other PA CareerLink® staff have been coordinating the development of joint workshops and career fairs and the regional OVR office has set benchmarks for customer participation in these events.

In addition to the sites being physically accessible, the one-stops utilize key technology and materials to assist in service delivery to individuals with disabilities. These include the availability and use of TTY lines for those with a hearing disability. Also, designated computers have ZOOM text that enlarges written materials for those with a visual impairment and JAWS software that reads the information to the individual. Orientation information and service-related materials are also available in Braille.

A two-pronged approach is used to address the needs of those with limited English proficiency. The PA CareerLink® sites utilize the Language Line to connect with translators who will help to bridge the language barrier between staff and customers. Each one-stop maintains an up-to-date LEPP or Limited English Proficiency Plan that outlines the staff that will effectively serve those with a language barrier. The WIOA Title II provider also plays a key role as the partner best positioned to assist those with English literacy challenges. While there has not been a significant demand for translation services or adult education for those whose primary language is not English, the region's PA CareerLink® are positioned to provide services to these jobseekers or employers.

The SAWDB, OSO and workforce partners place considerable emphasis on supporting professional

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

development opportunities, especially those that enhance staffs' ability to serve those with multiple barriers to employment. The OSO has taken the lead to identify and promote professional development opportunities for PA CareerLink® staff. The following outlines 2020, trainings and notes planned opportunities. These trainings have also been conveyed to the Commonwealth's office of Equal Opportunity as part of the office's monitoring:

- PA CareerLink® Huntingdon County and Fulton Employment and Training (affiliate site):
  - EEO Liaison Training provided by PA L & I staff (February 2020)
  - Disability Sensitivity Training provided by OVR for all staff (September 2020)
  - Gender Identity and Expression by Employment & Training (October 2020)
  - Diversity Training for entire staff (Date TBD)
  - EEOI Training for entire staff (Date TBD)

The ADA equipment including the Zoom Text and Jaws software is tested monthly. These testing dates provided all staff with the opportunity to refresh their knowledge on the usage of the equipment.

- PA CareerLink® site Blair County:
  - Assistive devices, etiquette, white cane/human guide provided by Blind and Visual Services staff for all staff (January 2020)
  - Disability etiquette provided by site administrator for all staff (February 2020)
  - EO Orientation provided by state EO monitor for all staff (March 2020)
  - ESL provided by EO Liaison for all staff (April 2020)
  - LEP Training by EO Liaison for all staff (May 2020)
  - COVID-19 and ADA provided by Goodwill staff for all staff (August 2020)
  - EO Postings by EO Liaison for all staff (September 2020)
  - ADA equipment by EO Liaison for all staff (October 2020)
  - Discrimination Claims Filing by Goodwill staff for all staff (November 2020)
  - Age Discrimination by Goodwill staff for all staff (January 2021)

The ADA equipment including the Zoom Text and Jaws software is tested regularly and staff receive refreshers on use of the equipment.

- PA CareerLink® Bedford County:
  - ESL provided by OVR for all staff (January 2020)
  - ADA/OVR provided by EO Liaison for all staff (January 2020)
  - ADA Customer Service provided by EO Liaison for all staff (February 2020)
  - ADA/ESL provided by EO Liaison for all staff (May 2020)
  - LEP Training by EO Liaison for all staff (May 2020)
  - COVID-19 and ADA provided by Goodwill staff for all staff (August 2020)
  - EO Postings by EO Liaison for all staff (September 2020)
  - ADA equipment by EO Liaison for all staff (October 2020)
  - Discrimination Claims Filing by Goodwill staff for all staff (November 2020)
  - Age Discrimination by Goodwill staff for all staff (January 2021)

The ADA equipment including the Zoom Text and Jaws software is tested regularly and staff receive refreshers on use of the equipment.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

- PA CareerLink® sites Cambria and Somerset Counties:
  - ADA/Sensitivity Training by OVR for all staff (Date TBD)
  - DOL Compliance Assistance Summit by Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs for EO Liaison (September 2020)
  - Filing a Discrimination Complaint by PA Human Relations for BWPO staff (September 2020)
  - EO101 provided by EO Liaison for all staff (September 2020)
  - Disability Related training found at ESS Training site for BWPO staff (November 2020)
- The ADA equipment including the Zoom Text and Jaws software is tested regularly and staff receive refreshers on use of the equipment.

As outlined above, the PA CareerLink® staff receive a wide variety of training. These are normally held during office-wide partner staff meetings and include participation by staff representing:

- WIOA Title I
- WIOA Title II, Adult Education
- Wagner-Peyser and BWPO
- Carl Perkins Post-Secondary Education
- OVR
- Community Service Block Grant
- TANF
- Senior Community Service
- Trade Adjustment Assistance

The OSO and one-stop staff are taking a proactive approach as they work with the OVR to receive additional sensitivity training that will better prepare them to effectively serve individuals with disabilities. The SAWDB has placed increased importance on outreach and service to low-income individuals. The Board believes that the public workforce system must be positioned to help these individuals move out of poverty. The PA CareerLink® staff participation in poverty simulations is a direct reflection of this emphasis to serve individuals with this barrier to employment.

The SAWDB and the PA CareerLink® and OSO recognize the importance of targeted and effective affirmative outreach to individuals from different racial and ethnic/national origin groups, religions, and individuals with limited English proficiency, disabilities, and ages. Effective outreach begins with providing appropriate professional development opportunities to one-stop staff so that they are better positioned to engage with individuals from these targeted populations. As identified in the 2020, PA CareerLink® training above, one-stop staff receive professional development on disability sensitivity, gender identity and expression, diversity training, English as a Second Language, and age discrimination. The SAWDB and one-stop staff work closely with a variety of organizations and agencies that serve these populations and include but are not limited to the NAACP, community action agencies, neighborhood churches, Centers for Independent Living, and our PA CareerLink® partner staff from the Senior Community Service Employment Program, and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. The one-stops work closely with Associates for Training and Development (A4TD) and the AARP Foundations to create awareness of their training and job opportunities for workers over 55. The region's PA

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

CareerLink® sites have also served as host sites for those workers where they learn skills needed to apply for and secure jobs in today's market.

There is also a strong partnership between the public workforce system and the NAACP. Together they support an annual Apprenticeship Fair, work with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation OJT program for minorities and the Highway Trade Unions. Local NAACP leadership also regularly refers individuals to the PA CareerLink® for workforce services. In Cambria County, the Title I youth staff place youth work experience participants in a learning pod for the Johnstown School District, where they assist and mentor the younger youth.

Affirmative outreach is also carried out by one of our one-stop's key partners in Cambria County, the economic development agency Johnstown Area Regional Industries (JARI), in partnership with the PA CareerLink® Cambria County. The Neighborhood Assistance Tax Credit Program (NAP) is offered by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development and gives businesses with state tax liability the option to make a donation to the JARI Workforce Program and receive a 55% tax credit in exchange for the donation. The funding is used to provide customized training programs for low skilled, low-income residents living in area with the following criteria: high unemployment, low labor participation rates, high rates of poverty and an area that is in Act 47 status. The City of Johnstown meets that criteria. The programs offered are determined by local employers as critical for specific high priority occupations. Trainings have included welding, CDL, construction technology, electrical technology, basic machining, and medical office assistant. The objective is to offer a short-term training program to provide individuals with the basic skills they need for an entry level position, with the understanding that employers will then continue with on-the-job training. Companies provide input into the curriculum and letters of support that state their need and that they will consider graduates for employment. This process helps to get qualified candidates to employers in a short period of time. Seventy-five individuals have graduated and been placed over the past five years.

The PA CareerLink® assists with outreach, making referrals, providing job search assistance and then provides financial support for on-the-job training contracts to those companies who will hire the graduates and continue with the training process. All potential participants are required to enroll with the PA CareerLink® and are referred to other eligible and appropriate programs. Program participants also perform some type of community service as a pay it forward.

#### *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.*

In support of continuous improvement and performance management, the SAWDB has implemented a system that includes the acquisition and dissemination of performance data. The sources of this data include:

- Commonwealth Workforce Development System - the system of record for the tracking of customer services and performance for the one-stop delivery system in the SAWDA. PA CareerLink® and SAWDB staff have been trained and regularly draw performance-related

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

reports from the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Reports Management System. The reports have been especially useful for management of Title I performance.

- Training service utilization including course of study, training provider, completion information, employment upon graduation (and if placement is in the customer's field of study), and wage at placement. This data is reviewed regularly by the SAWDB; particularly important in the review of high priority occupations and placement success rates and trends. Likewise, this information is used to help guide the investment of WIOA Title I training funds and to determine the return on investment of these funds.
- WIOA Title I Quarterly Performance Report - developed by the SAWDB for WIOA Title I - Specific information that includes number of new and returning customers, job placements, wage at placements, placements into training programs, OJT contracts. WIOA Title I providers also identify outreach efforts, challenges and opportunities related to service provision.
- PA CareerLink® Scorecards contain one-stop wide performance metrics and tracks activity in support of reaching the established goals. It includes the following information by county:
  - Statistics for labor force, employed, unemployed and UC Rate
  - Number of New UC claims files and the percentage of UC claimants served
  - PA CareerLink® foot traffic
  - Unique participants served
  - Percentage of customers with a barrier
  - Total services provided to job seekers
  - Percentage of employers using the PA CareerLink®
  - Percentage of repeat employer customers
  - Total services provided to employers
  - Job postings placed and number of referrals made
  - OJT contracts prepared
  - Workshops provided and recruitment events held
- A comprehensive monitoring/quality assurance/continuous improvement system that incorporates a performance monitoring component, utilized to ensure high quality service provision. This model incorporates a combination of written instruments, site visits, service observations and customer interviews, represents a coordinated team effort and includes numerous partners, each with a distinctive role. The performance management system is led by the SAWDB and its staff, in partnership with the region's OSO. The SAWDB has empowered its local PA CareerLink® sites to be active participants and share in responsibility for performance management at the local level. This is handled by each PA CareerLink® Management Team and site administrator. In addition, each of the region's one-stops has a performance point of contact (POC). These individuals serve as liaisons between their site, the SAWDB and the OSO. The site monitoring visits are conducted by SAWDB staff on an annual basis. The process includes the utilization of a locally created instrument that integrates elements aligned with the SAWDB's vision and goals and PA CareerLink® Scorecards. The instrument was designed to evaluate integral elements related to overall PA CareerLink® operations including governance, service mix and provision, site administration, staff qualities, and performance. Reports that summarize review results are shared with the site administrator, the OSO and SAWDB Chair immediately following the site visits; the reports are shared quarterly with the full Board. Each PA CareerLink® is expected to share its performance

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

with the public; this is reviewed during SAWDB annual monitoring.

The SAWDB has historically dedicated significant financial resources to support training and increased educational attainment for the region's residents. Consequently, performance accountability figures significantly when it considers programs for inclusion in the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) and Local Training Provider List (LTPL). Before a request for inclusion on the list is submitted to Harrisburg, SAWDB members and staff carefully review the performance-related data and ensure that it meets the standards outlined in the WIOA and the *Workforce System Policy No. 04-2015, (Change 1) April 4, 2018 Eligible Training Providers - Initial Implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act*. Monitoring of provider effectiveness continues beyond placement on the ETPL and LTPL. The SAWDB tracks outcomes for training participants to assess return on investment of training dollars. While program completion and placement rates are important, of equal or greater relevancy to the SAWDB is completion and placement in the field of study rates and associated earnings. This performance information is calculated by staff and shared with the SAWDB, PA CareerLink® staff, OSO, and workforce partners on a regular basis; the information is utilized by career planners as they assist customers in making informed choices regarding careers and training opportunities. The SAWDB has aggressively sought to include high quality programs on the ETPL/LTPL and continues to work with the region's educational institutions to place a significant number of relevant programs on the lists. The Southern Alleghenies region boasts the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest number of courses/programs on the ETPL. Currently 13 schools, ranging from career and technology centers to private proprietary schools and a state-sponsored community college and member of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) make up the ETPL for the region and offer 147 different programs in support of high priority occupations.

Employer and stakeholder input figures prominently in the SAWDB's continuous improvement model. The High Priority Occupation List (HPO) is shared with system partners and stakeholders to ensure that it accurately reflects employer hiring demands. In cases where greater demand is projected, or emerging occupations are noted, the SAWDB will petition for specific occupations to be added to the ETPL. Industry support, in the form of 'commitment' letters form the basis for the petition.

The SAWDB also utilizes its Request for Proposal (RFP) procurement process to promote continuous improvement in the WIOA Title I services it supports. In 2017, the Board completed a competitive procurement for all Title I services. Procurement notices were sent to roughly 200 bidders from across the region, state and country, ads were placed in papers of record, and the solicitation was included on the Pennsylvania Development Workforce Association website. All of this was done to encourage responses from qualified organizations with a strong history of providing quality workforce services. After a rigorous board-driven review process, two of the region's six counties have a different service provider, effective July 1, 2017. All contracts are considered annually and renewed based on provider performance. The SAWDB went through a similar process to competitively procure its OSO. Performance reviews of the consortium were conducted first at six months and then annually.

Measurement of customer satisfaction is another continuous improvement tool and one utilized aggressively, and across all partners and funding streams. Currently employer satisfaction is measured as part of OJT monitoring, and customers (employers and jobseekers) participating in certain services, i.e., training, work experience for youth, core workshops, are monitored for service satisfaction. The

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

OSO and PA CareerLink® site administrators, in partnership with the SAWDB, are utilizing customer satisfaction surveys that are presented in a digital format and include participants in Basic and Individualized Career Services and Training and employers.

With the data, both quantitative and qualitative, derived from the activities and instruments referenced above, the SAWDB, OSO, and its service delivery partners will continue to assess the effectiveness of the services offered, identify service gaps, and apply continuous improvement strategies.

#### *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.*

The Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Area includes the counties of Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Fulton, Huntingdon, and Somerset. The SAWDB supports five PA CareerLink® sites, four affiliate sites in Fulton, Cambria and Blair Counties, and multiple sites housed in public libraries, senior and community centers and a YMCA. Adults and dislocated workers can access a full array of WIOA services at all one-stop locations; services are provided on a more limited basis at the affiliated sites. In addition to the services listed below, the SAWDB, its WIOA Title I providers and workforce partners work together to evaluate existing programs and consider new offerings to meet the needs of its adult and dislocated worker jobseekers.

The WIOA supports 'career services' and 'training services' for adults and dislocated workers. Unlike service provision under the Workforce Investment Act, there is no requirement that these services be accessed in a predetermined sequence.

Three types of career services are provided in the region. They are:

#### 1) Basic Career Services - available to everyone and include:

- Program eligibility - includes determining if the individual is eligible to receive additional assistance under the WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker or Youth programs.
- Outreach and orientation - includes participation in RESEA. Participants receive information on the wide array of services provided by the PA CareerLink® and other resources available.
- Initial and Preliminary Assessment - includes the identification of potential barriers to employment, assists with identifying special status or priority of service (veteran, low income, individual with a disability).
- Labor Exchange - supported by Wagner-Peyser staff and includes provision of labor market information, job search and placement/job referral assistance, coordination of activities including referral for service to be provided by PA CareerLink® partners as well as other organization/agencies in the community.
- Provision of Information including:
  - Performance data including information related to the one-stop's ability to meet WIOA performance goals but also separate benchmarks established by the SAWDB for the one-stops.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

- Training-related information including review of the ETPL and LTPL, school performance (completion rates, placement, wage), cost and financial aid.
  - Access to Unemployment Insurance phone
  - Availability of supportive services including transportation, childcare, implement allowance and referral network for additional services
- 2) Individualized Career Services may be provided to individuals who need additional assistance to retain or obtain employment and include:
- Comprehensive and specialized assessments - these include the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) to determine math and reading literacy levels and identify basic skills deficiencies, CareerScope to identify career interests and aptitudes, and WorkKeys® career readiness credential that assess reading for information, locating information and applied mathematics levels and the NorthStar digital literacy assessment. In addition to these tools, case managers and career planners may utilize intensive customer interviewing to identify additional barriers to employment and provide more effective career planning counseling.
  - Preparation of the Individual Employment Plan (IEP) - this document serves as the road map and includes the customer's vocational goal and identifies the services, planned and provided, that will help them reach their goal. It also identifies any barriers to employment and where appropriate, referral to other services. This is not a static document but is regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changes in services and customer circumstances.
  - Counseling, career planning and case management - includes more intensive assistance job search and mentoring.
  - Short-term prevocational services - includes helping customer gain a clearer understanding of desirable 'work ethics' and employer expectations, the importance of strong communication skills, Internships and work experience including paid and un-paid.
  - Work-Readiness services - includes computer classes (basic and intermediate), time management, conflict resolution and other workshops that help prepare the customer for employment or education.
  - Financial literacy services - includes budget development and 'Is Training Right for You' workshop that explores the financial implications that accompany post-secondary education.
  - Job search assistance for those who wish to leave the Southern Alleghenies.
  - English as a second language (ESL) and integrated education and training (IET)
- 3) Follow-up Services will be provided to those customers who are placed in unsubsidized employment for one year following placement. Maintaining the relationship between career planner/counselor and customer is vital, even after employment has been secured. This allows the PA CareerLink® staff to identify and address any possible barriers to job retention.

Training Services are available to those individuals who do not possess the marketable skills needed to obtain or retain a job that meet the region's self-sufficiency level. They can take many forms and include:

- Individual Training Account- the SAWDB awards up to \$4,500 to support post-secondary education programs that are less than one year and \$6,000 for programs that are one year and

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

greater. Currently, the SAWDB is administering a National Dislocated Work Grant that targets former employees in the retail and service sectors. Funding through this grant will cover up to 100% of the training costs. All training must be tied to an occupation on the High Priority Occupation List; the training provider and program must be on the ETPL. While customer choice largely drives training decisions, up-front career planning is essential so that the customer makes informed choices regarding field of study and training provider. Since 2016, 100% of those who completed ITAs are employed and 73% are working in their field of study; a solid return on investment.

- Work-based Training - these include OJT, customized training, incumbent worker training and transitional employment, and apprenticeships.
- OJT – In most cases, the SAWDB will provide a 50% wage reimbursement during the participant’s training period. This percentage may fluctuate depending on the source of funding. To be considered for an adult or dislocated worker OJT contract, the position must pay an amount equal or greater to the region’s family sustaining wage. The minimum wage for a youth OJT was set at a lower amount, \$10.00, to encourage employer consideration of youth. The completion rate for OJT participants from June 1, 2016 to June 30, 2019, is 86%, a solid return on investment and testament to the importance of effective case management and career counseling.
- Incumbent Worker Training, Apprenticeships, and Transitional Jobs- the SAWDB, PA CareerLink® staff and economic developers have been working closely with employers to identify training needs and promote these opportunities. Due to an aggressive promotional campaign, registered apprenticeships have been gaining traction in the region. As a result of its focus on moving people out of poverty, the SAWDB began financial support for Adult and Dislocated Worker paid work experience. This transitional job program is geared toward adults who lack meaningful work experience and dislocated workers who are looking to change their employment direction and lack meaningful work experience. To date 71 individuals have been enrolled in this program, 23 are still active, 20 have dropped out and 28 have been placed in employment.

The services listed above continue to meet the needs of jobseekers and employers, as demonstrated by measured jobseeker success at securing gainful employment with a self-sufficient wage. However, individuals with more significant barriers to employment are seeking services in greater numbers than ever before. The Board’s Special Population Committee has been charged with identifying service gaps, based on the needs of their target populations and compared to current service offerings. We anticipate specific new service recommendations to be presented by this committee in the coming program year; these will help to improve and increase relevancy of the services provided to those adults and dislocated workers with significant barriers to employment.

To further align its supported programs with the WIOA, the SAWDB implemented a Priority of Service Policy that mirrors the requirements under the law. Veterans and their eligible spouses are given the highest priority followed by recipients of public assistance, low-income individuals and those who are basic skills deficient. All others who do not fall into the above categories fall under the lowest priority for service. The PA CareerLink® sites, under the direction of the SAWDB, measure and report service utilization by target populations on the Scorecard.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

With the WIOA came the requirement to dedicate 75% of the Board's Youth allocation in service to out-of-school youth. This required a significant paradigm shift on the part of the Workforce Investment Act Title I providers who previously focused on servicing in-school youth. While SAWDB policy continues to allow service to eligible in-school youth with WIOA Title I funds, it holds each provider responsible for exceeding the 75% expenditure requirement with its Title I award. The SAWDB staff collect monthly pipeline reports that identify the outcome of outreach activities to out-of-school youth and the source of customer referrals. This has enabled SAWDB staff to monitor provider efforts to identify and serve the out-of-school population; corrective action plans have been required from those providers who were failing to reach anticipated service numbers. The SAWDB has also expanded its fiscal Red/Green Report, which outlines Title I provider expenditure levels by funding stream, to include fiscal tracking by out-of-school youth and work experience expenditures. This report is reviewed monthly by the Board and providers to ensure that the region is on track to meet these expenditure requirements; it is anticipated that the region will meet and exceed the WIOA fiscal requirements.

Each year, the SAWDB has experienced a 10% to 15% cut in its WIOA Title I allocation. Sometimes it has been challenging to meet all the jobseeker requests for post-secondary training. The SAWDB has successfully sought competitive funding to support training for adults and dislocated workers and on occasion, has transferred funding from the Dislocated Worker funding stream to the Adult training budget to help meet demand. To anticipate demand for training funds, the SAWDB staff receive monthly reports from the WIOA Title I providers that outline the anticipated requests for classroom and on-the job training. This allows the SAWDB to project demand and identify any funding shortfalls in advance. If such a shortfall is anticipated, the SAWDB reviews its financial position to determine if a transfer request between programs is feasible; if so, it takes an action to approve the request at a public meeting of the SAWDB or its Executive Committee. By taking this proactive approach to financial management the SAWDB, and the public workforce system it supports, continues to fund significant training opportunities for the region's adults, dislocated workers and youth.

As described earlier in this Plan, the SAWDB is a proponent of and provides significant support for the development of Career Pathways. Furthermore, it expects that jobseekers will be co-enrolled in all workforce programs that will help the individual achieve their employment goal. The Board has reviewed and endorsed the initial assessment, utilized across the region, as an instrument to identify individual needs and determine the services, and provider mix, needed to help the participant reach their goal. Program co-enrollment is reviewed by SAWDB staff during WIOA Title I and PA CareerLink® monitoring to ensure that jobseekers are connecting with all appropriate services and providers. An essential service element is access to skilled and work-based training. The SAWDB has placed significant value on work-based training and each year it allocates significant financial resources to support on-the job training. Support for transitional jobs using WIOA funding is aimed at out-of-school youth, adults with minimal work experience, and dislocated workers who possess minimal skills in more in-demand occupations. Providers of the Employment Advancement and Retention Network (EARN) services are considering the use of their program funds to initiate support for transitional jobs; since PY 18, WIOA Title I funding has been used to support transitional work opportunities for co-enrolled (EARN and WIOA Title I) customers. Following considerable analysis, the SAWDB has directed additional funding in support of OJT; the use of OJT has been used effectively to provide work-based training for adults with

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

limited work experience. With transitional jobs, employment is not guaranteed when the contract ends. With OJT, the participant is considered employed on day one.

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

The SAWDB has always placed considerable emphasis on and allocated significant resources in support of classroom and work-based training opportunities. The current cap for Individual Training Accounts is \$4,500 for programs less than one year and \$6,000 for programs one year and longer. These levels were determined after considering the average costs for programs on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), PELL awards and other grants. With the costlier training, a participant may contribute a nominal amount to the expense as well. The SAWDB believes that in many cases, a participant is more likely to follow through with the training requirements when they have at least a small financial stake in the training. The SAWDB policy requires that WIOA Title I funds, along with any other grants or awards received by the training participant be first utilized to offset the cost of training before personal funds are used. In many cases, it will then be unnecessary for training participants to use any personal funds to cover the cost of their training. Currently, the SAWDB is administering a National Dislocated Work Grant that targets former employees in the retail and service sectors but is open to any eligible dislocated worker. Funding through this grant will cover up to 100% of the training costs.

As with all services, the type of training is based on customer need and choice. Many individuals arrive at the PA CareerLink® with a documented work history, strong skills, and the desire and need to enter/reenter the workforce as soon as possible. These individuals are prime candidates to participate in an On-the-Job Training contract. Each PA CareerLink® has a strong Business Service Team that has a pool of 'work ready' jobseekers it can refer to appropriate employers who wish to utilize OJT.

Just as many jobseekers come to the one-stop with limited marketable skills and they have the need, desire, and ability to pursue post-secondary education. The SAWDB has long prided itself on having one of the most robust Eligible Training Provider Lists (ETPL) in the Commonwealth. Currently there are 13 providers offering 147 programs. This gives the region's customers the third largest list of programs to choose from in the Commonwealth. While the SAWDB continues to promote 'informed customer choice' when it comes to the selection of training providers and courses of study, it views the training dollars awarded to participants as 'investments' and wants to do everything possible to ensure the collective investment of WIOA Title I funding and a participant's time (and potentially resources), are sound. WIOA Title I staff carefully review the information found on the state's ETPL with jobseekers so that they can compare provider outcomes and price. This includes on-line training opportunities, which historically have had poor performance outcomes.

WIOA Title I also work to ensure, as much as possible, that customers have the necessary skills to succeed in post-secondary training. Participants are required to have a minimum of a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education, as documented on the TABE 11/12 assessment or through documented post-secondary education. However, for individuals with a documented disability, the WIOA Title I staff will work with the customer's OVR case manager and accept OVR-conducted assessments and referrals in consideration for WIOA Title I training funds.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

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

The Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Board, in recognition of the intent of WIOA, established priority of service to those youth/young adults with barriers to employment which require intervention for success. The targeted groups include those exhibiting the following characteristics: low income, basic skills deficient, English language learner, an offender, homeless, pregnant or parenting, individual with a disability, or a school dropout. By targeting a variety of most in need youth, the Board has insured that the program would maximize the opportunities for eligible youth. In order to maximize services to both in-school and out-of-school youth, the Board has established a priority of service consistent with TANF and WIOA guidelines that emphasizes service to out-of-school youth under WIOA and in-school youth under TANF. The Board has communicated these priorities and intends by not only incorporating them within the Request for Proposal process and the awarding of service contracts but also in review of those contractors' performance. The Board's summer program is an example of expanding the client base to serve those most in need, and both population groups, and remain consistent with the use of multiple funding sources. By utilizing WIOA and TANF youth funds to support the summer program, the Board can expand the number of youth served who receive work readiness and work-based learning and meet the priority groups from each source of funding. Another example of efforts to expand the service to as many eligible youth as possible is the braiding of funds for Youth ITAs to include PELL, PHEAA and, for youth with disabilities, designated OVR funds. This collaborative effort extends to other partners. The Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies operates both the YouthBuild and the WIOA Title I & II Programs in Cambria County. Funding of training for YouthBuild clients are shared by the two programs with those clients dual enrolled in both programs. YouthBuild clients are referred and served by WIOA after completion of the YouthBuild program. In the case of Job Corps, the Job Corps does not have a facility within our region, but the Job Corps recruiter receives referrals from the PA CareerLink® staff.

The Board's Young Adult Council has been appointed to advise the Board on the design and implementation of youth services within the region. Due to its makeup, the Council is uniquely qualified to dispatch these duties. The Council is made up of representatives from the private sector and from the following organizations that serve the targeted clients in addition to a past program participant: children and youth, county probation office, secondary schools, vocational technical schools, housing authority, Job Corps, and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. The Council makes recommendations to the Board concerning policy establishment, contractor funding, and budgeting of financial resources. The Council also establishes and reviews both program performance criteria and financial performance at the contractor and regional level. Client service levels by contractor are established and monitored for attainment as well. The Council recommends to the Board minimum requirements in the design of critical components of the program such as the content of the academic component of work experience and adherence to the minimum of 20% expenditures for work experience and 75% expenditures for out-of-school youth. These parameters are monitored by the Council along with the delivery of the 14 Program Elements as defined by each service provider's statement of work. The Council has set parameters for leveraging TANF Youth Development funding by allowing its use to expand the youth served on the summer work experience program and by directing services in support of area schools'

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

efforts to comply with PA Career Education and Work Standards. With Council membership from partner agencies, opportunities for co-enrollment of youth in job corps and OVR funded programs are identified and encouraged in those cases where the client's initial assessment and individual service strategy are in alignment.

The Board, with input from the Young Adult Council, has established the following steps in identifying and serving eligible youth:

- Recruitment
- Eligibility Determination - Upon recruitment, youth and young adults are determined eligible for WIOA services. As part of the intake process, client information is gathered on characteristics which effect eligibility such as in-school or out-of-school status, age, barriers to employment, and low income where appropriate. The barriers to employment that are identified in WIOA and documented include: basic skills deficient, English language learner, offender, homeless individual, pregnant or parenting, youth with a disability, and school dropout. In addition, as required, the Board has defined an eligible at-risk youth that "requires additional assistance to complete an education program or to secure and hold employment" as follows: An individual mentally or physically challenged, learning disabled, noncash recipient or having no marketable skills (No meaningful unsubsidized work experience of at least two years cumulative or has not completed post-secondary training that has resulted in a degree, license, or certificate in a demand occupation). Documentation sources are to adhere to the Department of Labor most recent Source Documentation Requirements for WIOA Data Element Validation along with related Training and Employment Guidance Letters.
- Orientation that provides an overview of available services.
- Initial assessment - This initial assessment includes an analysis of many factors affecting the employability of the client to include barriers to employment, functional basic skills, interests and aptitudes, etc.
- Service Plan - Subsequently a service plan is developed that will lay out the services needed to support attainment of the identified vocational goal established between the career planner and the client.
- Provision of Service - Available services are the 14 mandated service elements under WIOA.

The five area PA CareerLink® sites and affiliate sites are the hub for delivery of youth services within the region with remote sites utilized for targeted populations such as area schools. The following are types of local area youth workforce investment activities that are provided to eligible young adults and youth as appropriate:

Dropout Recovery/Basic Education Instruction- These services are provided in partnership with Title II Adult Basic Education partners who are generally co-located within the PA CareerLink® with the youth service providers. High school dropouts receive instruction that leads to a General Equivalency Diploma (GED). These services may be supplemented where insufficient Title II WIOA services are available.

Career Awareness/Exploration - These are a key component of activities targeted to in school and out of school youth who are unsure of their career aspirations or need further research on identified careers. Youth are assessed for aptitudes and interests and participate in researching careers. Labor

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

market information is provided in support of career matching activities to help steer the youth to possible careers in demand. In support of career exploration, tours of local employers and job shadowing opportunities are made available to clients. As part of research on careers and training opportunities, youth are provided information on and research opportunities for apprenticeships. An example of introduction and instruction specifically targeted to apprenticeship opportunities in a selected field was the Heavy Highway Construction Fair at the Greater Johnstown High School. The Title I youth provider, Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies, in conjunction with the Constructors Association of Western PA, sponsored instruction on apprenticeship requirements and opportunities in some of the following careers sponsored by various labor unions: carpenters/pile drivers, cement masons, laborers, operating engineers, and truck drivers. Students from area schools learned about paid apprenticeship opportunities, prerequisites and the application process. Another career alternative that is explored with clients is setting up their own business. Entrepreneurial training is introduced to youth as an alternative to working for an employer. Clients assessed with the aptitudes and interest in this area are provided more in-depth training on the numerous aspects of starting their own business.

Workforce Preparation/Paid and Unpaid Work Experience including Internships - Summer and year-round paid employment opportunities are available. Both in-school and out-of-school youth are assigned work sites in the private and public sector consistent with an identified career interest where possible. Postsecondary attendees and graduates, including Individual Training Account participants, are funneled to work sites that allow application of acquired skills. Consistent with the WIOA emphasis on work experience, many youth throughout the region participate in this activity. At least 20 hours of instruction in the following possible areas are provided in conjunction with this type of paid work experience:

1. Work Readiness Skills Instruction on the twelve skills identified by employers will be required and provided before work at the assigned site. These twelve work readiness skills are contained in a Work Readiness Assessment Form used by the work site supervisors to assess the client's level of skills exhibited on the job.
2. Instruction in the following areas are provided before or during work at the assigned site:
  - Labor market information about in-demand occupations
  - Career awareness/exploration utilizing internet-based resources and visits to local employers
  - Financial Literacy Education
  - Additional topics of instruction may include:
    - Resume preparation
    - Interviewing techniques
    - Activities that help a youth prepare for and transition to post-secondary education and training such as researching postsecondary courses, schools, and apprenticeship opportunities including visits to postsecondary educational facilities.
  - Entrepreneurial training
3. On-the-Job Training Opportunities - For youth entering the workplace that exhibit job ready skills, referral to OJT contracts is provided. With the struggles of youth and young

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

adults to compete for existing jobs, the SAWDB has revised its existing policy for supporting an OJT contract. As an enticement to consider a youth/young adult for employment, the prior minimum wage rate for an OJT was reduced from \$14.37/hour to \$10.00/hour. In response to this action, OJT opportunities for youth/young adults have been expanded. From July 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020, five Youth OJT contracts were finalized. It is anticipated that this activity will continue to grow as an important activity for youth/young adults.

**Occupational Skills Training** - For youth lacking occupational skills required for employment in occupations in demand, Individual Training Accounts are available. For those youth/young adults whose assessment and service plan determines it to be appropriate, an ITA request will be completed by their career planner and submitted to SAWDB staff. Approval of training requests will be contingent upon the training program appearing on the ETPL. While in training, the assigned career planner will continue to support the client to ensure his progress in the training program.

**Referral to Employment** - For those job ready clients, referral to job orders posted with the PA CareerLink® sites will be provided. In addition to use of computers with internet capacity to access the PA CareerLink® system, clients will be notified of OJT and job orders which their career planner believes are a match with their skills.

In the delivery of services to unique categories of clients, collaboration with partners who possess certain expertise and complementary resources is critical. This is especially relevant to serving in-school youth with disabilities. The SAWDB will collaborate with OVR in the provision of WIOA Title IV Pre-Employment Transition Services to in-school youth with disabilities. The Board and its Title I providers look to collaborate with OVR to provide in-school youth with disabilities opportunities to participate in pre-employment transition services and work-based learning services to gain skills and knowledge to enter competitive integrated employment. These meaningful opportunities allow in-school youth with disabilities to assess their own strengths and skills, while exploring vocational possibilities and removing barriers to employment. Work based learning is an important experience coupled with career exploration information for in-school youth with disabilities to engage in so they may be afforded opportunities to discover career paths. Other services that may be provided by OVR to this group are:

- Counseling and guidance from professional vocational rehabilitation staff to explore career and training options as well as understand OVR services.
- Independent Living Skills to allow students to gain knowledge to perform the daily tasks essential for maintaining or obtaining independence.
- Self-Advocacy Training to assist students with disabilities to gain knowledge on disability awareness and advocacy.
- Workplace Readiness Training will provide knowledge needed to find and maintain competitive integrated employment and may include soft skills training, interview skills job readiness, and other skills needed to become “workplace ready.”
- Job Shadowing will provide students with disabilities a one to five-day job shadowing experience, for a maximum of 25 hours per school year in an occupation of interest.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

The use of TANF funding figures prominently in the provision of services, primarily to in-school youth. The table below outlines which of the 14 WIOA Youth Program Elements will be offered using TANF funding and related information regarding the service provision:

WIOA Element	Provider*	Activity Time	Goals
Tutoring, Study Skills, Dropout Prevention	GSA	Year Round	10 of 426 or 2%
Leadership Development	GSA, TSI, E & T	Year Round	112 of 426 or 26%
Supportive Services	GSA, TSI, E & T	Year Round	40 of 426 or 9%
Financial Literacy Education	GSA, TSI, E & T	Year Round	259 of 426 or 61%
Entrepreneurial Skills Training	GSA, TSI, E & T	Year Round	241 of 426 or 17%
Labor Market/ Employment Information	GSA, TSI, E & T	Year Round	304 of 426 or 71%
Post-Secondary Prep/ Transition Activities	GSA, TSI, E & T	Year Round	304 of 426 or 71%
Follow-Up for 12 months post completion	E & T, TSI	Year Round/Summer	179 of 426 or 42%
Comprehensive Guidance/Counseling	E & T, TSI	Year Round/Summer	179 of 426 or 42%
Adult Mentoring	E & T, TSI	Year Round	20 of 426 or 5%

\*GSA - Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies, TSI - Tableland Services, E & T- Employment & Training

The WIOA Title I program managers and career planners are responsible for the recruitment of youth participants. Methods for recruitment will include but are not limited to the following:

- Social Media Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Rallyhood and PA CareerLink® and Goodwill websites.
- Community Partners including the Alternative Community Resource Program, My Life/Magellan Healthcare, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, REI/Community Based Vocational training (CBVT), UPMC Behavioral Health, Blair County Youth Connections Task Force and Blair Family Solutions, County Assistance Offices.
- School Partnerships, both secondary and post-secondary include but are not limited to the Career and Technology Centers in each county, local community colleges, teen parenting programs, the Pennsylvania Graduation Initiative, and Appalachia Intermediate Unit 8 transition services.
- Word of Mouth, Refer-a-Friend and Cold Calls also play a key role in the recruitment process. Staff encourage all youth participants to refer friends and family and focus recruitment strategies and efforts toward special populations such as community and school youth groups, centers of faith, independent living homes and teen centers.

Participants in paid work experiences will receive a maximum of 360 hours at \$9.00 per hour. This enhanced work experience provides an increase from 160 hours (year-round work component) to 240 hours (summer work component) at \$8.00 per hour in past years. The increased wage will make the experience more enticing to local youth and will enhance the success of collaborative co-op and work release programs with local schools. The \$9.00 per hour wage is in line with local employers' entry level wages for most labor positions and allows staff to maintain positive relationships with employer partners. The shift from an 8 week to a 360-hour program allows for modifications to be made amid

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

uncertainties that exist due to current and future COVID measures. It also allows for an enhanced paid work experience that is tailored specifically to participant and employer needs and schedules.

Each paid work experience includes pre-employment and job readiness training, alongside career and post-secondary school exploration and character development. Participants in the year-round and summer programs will be offered up to 20 hours of academic instruction. The hours dedicated to the academic component for the year-round work experience allow staff to accommodate the unique needs of our participants' school schedules and extra-curricular activities. All lessons will align with the career education and work standards as well as WIOA's 14 Youth Program Elements.

Group sessions and career planner caseloads will be kept smaller than in past summers and social distancing and other measures, as directed by the Pennsylvania Governor and Department of Health, will be practices. This aligns with the year-round work experience and offers staff the flexibility to provide a variety of digital, virtual, and in-person instruction while focusing on a quality work experience for youth participants and employers.

The academic component will consist of payroll and safety in the workplace, as well as money management, dressing for success, work ethic, and employer expectations. In addition, staff may incorporate a combination of any of the following topics: skill and aptitude assessments, career and post-secondary school exploration, labor market information, interviewing, application completion, resume writing, personal branding and social media footprint, entrepreneurial skills education, mock interviews, exposure to community engagement and volunteering, digital literacy instruction, high priority occupations and career pathways, teamwork, communication and active listening skills and pro-social behaviors.

Program managers, youth staff, WIOA Title I Business Service Coordinators, and other PA CareerLink® Business Service Team members all play an active role in the recruitment of employers and organization that serve as worksites. Recruitment and maintenance of business partnerships occur through community and economic development consortia group memberships and organized events, networking and job seeker and business service team collaboration.

All six counties have a vast pool of businesses, community, education, and workforce partners that they draw upon to implement planned services. These include employers from high priority occupations in each county that serve as host work sites for paid work experience, attend career and job fairs specifically geared toward the youth and young adult population and volunteer their time to participate in classroom activities that provide school to work applications of concepts demonstrated by staff during job readiness and career exploration services.

Non-monetary contributions are provided by our local business partners. These partners include but are not limited to REI Distribution Center, Lampire Biological, UPMC Bedford Memorial, Spherion, M & T Bank, Bedford Reinforced Plastics, New Pig and New Pig Energy, McClanahans, Altoona Curve, Balfurd Linen Services, Riggs Industries, Highlands Health, Conemaugh Hospital, multiple community banks, the Learning Lamp, CJL Engineering, DRS Laurel Technologies, Johnstown Veterinary Association, multiple automotive dealerships. Community partners include local military recruiting offices, county probation, county assistance offices, children and youth services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, teen shelters,

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

independent living homes and the Alternative Community Resource Program. Education partners include the region's career and technology centers, community colleges, IU8, Penn State Altoona, and school districts throughout the region. Workforce partners include the Bedford County Chamber of Commerce, Bedford County Development Association, Johnstown Area Regional Industry, Altoona Blair County Development Corporation and the Blair County BASICS initiative.

Monitory contributions will include:

- Community Foundation for the Alleghenies - will supplement the TANF youth development funding through its provision of the Johnstown Youth Corp. It will provide paid work experience offering philanthropic and mentoring experiences for local youth and young adults.
- Central Pennsylvania Graduation Initiative - will provide transportation assistance for customers enrolled in the drop-out prevention, year-round paid work experience program.
- The Challenge Program, Inc - will collaborate with staff to combine TANF youth development funding business donations awarded to local schools to expand opportunities available to local high school students.

The Southern Alleghenies Workforce Development Board plans to use a portion of its TANF development funds to offer incentive funds to youth based upon its Youth Incentive Payment policy, which was previously submitted and approved by the PA Department of Labor and Industry. The explanation of the available incentive payments will be shared with youth as part of the recruitment and orientation to the program. Incentives will be attached to perfect attendance during paid work experience, classes and workshops, attainment of identified work readiness skills, safety on the work site, assignment completion, GED attainment, and documented increase in educational functional level for participants who are basic skills deficient. Service providers will submit their plans to provide one or more of the permissible incentives for acceptance by the local board staff consistent with the incentive policy established by the Board. Local board staff will then review budgets, expenditures, and program operations for consistency with the approved incentive payment plan and service providers staff will track and issue checks.

The SAWDB staff person responsible for the implementation, tracking and reporting of the TANF youth development funds is Ms. Jennifer Sklodowski, 814-949-6531, [jsklodowski@sapdc.org](mailto:jsklodowski@sapdc.org).

The contact information for each TANF Youth Development Program provider is as follows:

- Amy Horwath, Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies  
540 Central Avenue, Johnstown, PA 15902  
[ahorwath@gogoodwill.org](mailto:ahorwath@gogoodwill.org), 814-536-3536 Ext 287
- Barbara Covert, Employment and Training, Inc.  
54 Pennsylvania Avenue, Huntingdon, PA 17233  
[bcovert@emp-trng.org](mailto:bcovert@emp-trng.org), 814-641-6408 Ext 122
- Lisa Phillips, Tableland Services, Inc.  
535 East Main Street, Somerset, PA 15501

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

[lphillips@capfsc.org](mailto:lphillips@capfsc.org), 814-445-9628 Ext 203

Those responsible for the compilation and submission of the DHS Qualification Spreadsheet on DocuShare are:

- Sarah Helman, Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies  
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[akimmell@capfsc.org](mailto:akimmell@capfsc.org), 814-445-4161 Ext 232

Ms. Jennifer Sklodowski serves as the SAWDB staff lead monitor for TANF-funded programs. Staff uses a combination of methods to monitor local providers. These include direct visits to classrooms, worksites and meetings with clients, when possible. The pandemic has affected staff ability to observe and interact with provider staff and clients in order to evaluate services. Also, client files are reviewed for service plans and educational material and work completed by clients. Monitoring results are compared with local provider statements of work to confirm compliance with contract content.

#### ***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 staff of the SAWDB, PA CareerLink®, WIOA Title I, and Rapid Response have a strong and effective working relationship. This partnership has been essential to service provision in our region where large dislocations have unfortunately been a part of the economic history and continue to plague the Southern Alleghenies. Rapid Response support is offered to employers facing worker dislocations. All efforts are coordinated, and the Rapid Response team includes not only PA CareerLink® and Rapid Response staff but also representatives from community-based organizations and economic development; team members are selected based on the needs of the affected workers. When appropriate, SAWDB staff have participated in Rapid Response events, most recently to promote the National Dislocated Worker Grant targeted at individuals displaced from the retail and service sectors. Larger dislocations have led to the formation of Transition Teams, former co-workers who come together to help organize special activities on behalf of their fellow dislocated workers. These teams receive support from a variety of workforce partners including the SAWDB and SAP&DC who provide fiscal support. Information related to Rapid Response is provided by the regional coordinator and shared quarterly with the SAWDB, Local Elected Officials, workforce partners and system stakeholders.

Guidance provided by the State Operations Division in 2017 is used as it outlines Rapid Response Team and PA CareerLink® staff responsibilities as well as details related to the provision of Rapid

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

Response Services, including the step-by-step process for Early Intervention and the Benefits Rights Interview (BRI). With SAWDB support, during the BRI, affected workers not only receive Trade-related information but are also co-enrolled in partner programs, especially WIOA Title I. The SAWDB, Rapid Response Team members, and partner programs will continue to use this guidance to ensure that Rapid Response services are provided in a coordinated manner to provide the greatest benefit to the dislocated workers.

During 2020, our region participated in expanded outreach efforts to encourage greater worker participation in Rapid Response events. Due to the pandemic, large, in-person events could no longer be supported. Rapid Response meetings, using virtual platforms like Zoom, met with limited success in terms of attracting significant participation. PA CareerLink® staff developed a process of enhanced outreach to affected workers to include individual telephone calls and personalized emails. These efforts will continue and be expanded in 2021.

In the past, the SAWDB has requested and utilized Rapid Response Additional Assistance (RRAA) funding to provide career, training, and supportive services to dislocated workers when special circumstances have arisen and the Board's WIOA Title I allocation was insufficient to handle the demand for services. Currently, the SAWDB has sufficient resources (WIOA Title I Dislocated Formula Funds and state-provided Rapid Response Funds) to handle current requests for training and supportive services. However, should the demand for funds outstrip available local resources, the SAWDB will request RRAA as needed.

#### *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).*

Coordination with the higher education consortium, county career and technology centers (CTCs) and secondary schools is facilitated through SAWDB member and staff involvement on many of the college boards and committees, CTC advisory boards and Perkins Participatory Planning Committees, the CSB2 STEM Ecosystem, school boards of directors, and school to career and employer advisory committees. Representatives of the public workforce system, through their involvement on these key committees and boards, helps to ensure that communication flows between the workforce system and its education partners. The SAWDB can also serve as the 'honest broker' and bring a variety of education providers together to develop strategies to address regional issues, leverage resources, identify gaps and highlight opportunities for improved service provision. The SAWDB staff, as a member of many Perkins Participatory Planning Committees, have provided assistance to the CTCs and post-secondary Perkins Committees as they drafted their CTE Comprehensive Needs Assessment. Staff will continue to serve on these committee and assist with updating the needs assessments. The SAWDB and its public workforce partners have considerable experience in service gap identification and are well positioned to provide assistance with the following:

- Provide input on membership and serve on the stakeholder team
- Assist with identification and analysis of data sources
- Provide input in the identification of growth areas
- Provide input on opportunities for improvement

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

- Assist in setting priorities

The WIOA has required a shift in services, away from support for in-school activities and instead toward tremendous emphasis on serving out of school youth. This has not meant the end of service provision to youth in secondary education. It has however required leveraging other, non-WIOA resources to support its work. Through its partnership with the OVR and its Pre-employment Transition Service (PETS), and by utilizing its annual TANF allocation, the SAWDB and its Title I providers continue to support paid work experience for youth while they are still in school. Related services that include industry tours, career fairs, employer in the classroom and educator in the workplace are also provided. These activities help to prepare youth for the world of work and assist the educators in meeting the Career Education Standards. As a founding member and continued participant in the BASICS (Business and Schools Investing in Cooperative Solutions) initiative, the SAWDB continues to work with educators and employers to develop career exploration opportunities, employer-educator forums, and work experience and mentoring programs for young people.

The SAWDB's Business-Education Partnership Grants have afforded additional opportunities to increase coordination and alignment of education programs with workforce development activities. The SAWDB has helped to facilitate strategic relationships between chambers of commerce, educational institutions, employers, and workforce partners. Career camps, pre-apprenticeship workshops, STEM camps and co-op experiences, along with paid work experience/internships were supported for youth at sites related to their post-secondary school majors.

These entities have collectively been working on a variety of annual initiatives that serve to communicate employer needs to educators and expose students to career opportunities in the Southern Alleghenies Region. Examples include:

- Manufacturing Day - prior to the pandemic, this event brought together employers, educators and students, economic developers, and workforce development professionals. Activities included include industry tours, opportunities for educators, students, employers, and workforce professionals to share information on employment expectations, educational opportunities, and showcase career opportunities. Our hope is to restore this event once in-person events can occur safely.
- Careers in Demand/Career Fair - The Young Adult Council has begun exploration of virtual events that highlight and promote the region's careers in demand.
- CSB2 STEM Ecosystem activities as identified in detail in Section 2.3 of this Plan.

The SAWDB and multiple partners from the public workforce system are engaged in all aspects of planning and implementation. These strong levels of engagement have helped to not only position the board and its system as key partners in these workforce/education activities but have also led to greater coordination, sharing and leveraging of resources, and expanded opportunities for interaction between workforce, education, employers, and economic development.

Despite its rural nature, the Southern Alleghenies has a rich and significant mix of post-secondary education and training providers to include two community colleges, seven career and technology

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

centers (CTC), five nationally recognized colleges and universities and several private, proprietary schools. The colleges and universities have an organized regional education consortium; they support collective job and education fairs, industry tours, and educator in the workplace events. College representatives also participate in the employer consortium and BASICS committees, WEDnet trainings and apprenticeship fairs. Likewise, the seven career and technology centers frequently collaborate on regional initiatives, work together to draft petitions for the High Priority Occupation List, and collectively respond to Requests for Proposals. The Southern Alleghenies maintains an active regional Adult Basic Literacy Coalition (ABLE) that works closely with the PA CareerLink® sites and SAWDB in support of joint initiatives. The Coalition's involvement and support are key to addressing the significant number of individuals who are basic skills deficient. The region's education and training providers also figure prominently as partners in the public workforce system. Currently 13 schools, ranging from career and technology centers to private proprietary schools and a state-sponsored community college and member of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) make up the ETPL for the region and offer 147 different programs in support of high priority.

There is great connectivity at all educational levels in the region. This is due in no small part to the roles played by the SAWDB, those of convener, supporter, coordinator, facilitator, and funder. Board involvement at all levels has helped to ensure that there are increased levels of communication and cooperation with the public workforce system and that programs address identified needs, resources are leveraged, and service duplication is minimized.

*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.*

The SAWDB recognized early on that developing strong relationships with and respect for their one-stop partners is key to ensuring effective one-stop operations, including service coordination and performance attainment. It begins with regular and open communication at all levels and includes:

- Monthly meetings that include members of the SAWDB and its staff, members of the OSO, the BWPO assistant regional director and the PA CareerLink® site administrators. These forums serve to strengthen the connection between the SAWDB and the one-stops and offer tremendous opportunities to share information and address challenges or concerns. Following each board and committee meeting, the OSO, SAWDB staff and PA CareerLink® site administrators, and BWPO assistant regional director meet to review performance benchmarks, special initiative implementation, PA CareerLink® agreements and receive state and SAWDB updates.
- PA CareerLink® staff meetings and one-stop functional team meetings occur regularly and help to ensure that staff are kept up-to-date on all pertinent issues. Partners also share program-specific information so others at the site are informed. Email blasts are used between the face-to-face meetings so that information is shared and kept current.

It is also vital to have the appropriate workforce partner representatives involved in all levels of administration and service delivery. For example, the assistant regional director for the Commonwealth's Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations (BWPO) currently serves on the SAWDB, the SAWDB Executive Committee and participates in the monthly OSO meetings.

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

## Goal Setting and Implementation:

Each year, for more than eleven years, the Southern Alleghenies PA CareerLink® sites have been setting measurable operational goals. These goals are aligned to the SAWDB's vision for workforce development and its strategic objectives and PA CareerLink® staff, led by the Management Teams, work together to develop their site's operational goals, formulate specific action items, develop timelines for implementation and completion, and identify the lead partner(s). Staff are also empowered and accountable to set their sites' performance levels, track progress toward goal attainment, and when necessary, develop corrective action plans to address shortfalls. While all PA CareerLink® staff are involved in the site's performance management, the WIOA Title I and Wagner-Peyser staff take the lead and jointly organize efforts. The enhanced PA CareerLink® Scorecard provides an 'at a glance' review of one-stop performance outcomes.

This cooperation and coordination exhibited in goal setting and performance management also extends to service delivery within the one-stop system. The physical layout of the one-stop includes staff seating by function rather than by agency. Common forms are shared by partners, case notes are placed on PA CareerLink®, and an integrated referral network is established in each facility. The SAWDB has also taken steps to formalize and monitor for effective service coordination. During the annual PA CareerLink® quality assurance and monitoring visits, SAWDB staff review the following:

- Evidence of joint provision of services among multiple partners and supporting internal communication
- Coordinated job development services
- Joint development of customer service plans (IEPs)
- Sharing of understandable performance information with the public
- Customer referral tracking and follow-up across multiple partners

All the strategies identified above have led to strong service integration and delivery and lessen the occurrences of duplication. In 2020, all PA CareerLink® sites in the region were recertified.

The OSO figures prominently in PA CareerLink® operations. The competitively procured OSO is a consortium of three entities, Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies, Employment and Training, and the Community Action Partnership for Somerset County. Collectively they represent WIOA Title I, Adult Education WIOA Title II, YouthBuild, and Community Services Block Grant - all mandated partner programs and service providers to WIOA target populations. As the lead entity charged with service coordination, it is focused on the 'implementation of a PA CareerLink® system that provides effective services for employers and job seekers in alignment with the priorities of the SAWDB, and state and federal requirements.' (OSO mission statement.) It will accomplish this through:

- Management of the region's five comprehensive sites and four affiliated sites.
- Strengthening the region through the sharing of resources, knowledge, expertise and best practices, including coordination of professional development training.
- Utilization and strengthening of partnerships and leveraging of resources through a strategy to develop an advisory council to consult and assist the OSO.
- Support to the site administrators, management teams and staff in outreach efforts, including

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

an enhanced social media presence.

- Oversight of progress and a desire to work together with partners and stakeholders to ensure continuous system improvement.
- Recognition that collaboration is key to effective service delivery along with the goal of identifying and piloting best practices.

The SAWDB's Special Populations Committee was tasked with attending the one-stop orientations and note any concerns, or outstanding practices, with delivery and materials provided. The initial assessment form provided to all customers was developed by the OSO, in partnership with the site administrators and their management teams. It is designed to identify customer service needs early on and facilitate referrals to partner programs and others to address those needs. To facilitate information sharing between partners, the SAWDB requires that pertinent customer case notes be placed on PA CareerLink® so that all partners providing services can be informed of progress.

In the one-stops, partner training/cross training occurs at least quarterly and often monthly, depending on the subject. During the pandemic, virtual training was occurring throughout each month. Each partner, both those co-located and those not found in the one-stop, are called upon at each meeting to 'highlight' their services. This provides PA CareerLink® staff with a solid grounding in all program specifics and facilitates appropriate referrals to address customer needs. Also, all new PA CareerLink® staff attend all the different orientations and workshops to ensure that they are aware of the service basics.

Professional development of PA CareerLink® staff is provided through a variety of means and venues. Section 4.4 outlines EEO and ADA related trainings that all partner staff have participated in but that only scratches the surface. The Board and its members, and partner staff have provided training on subjects ranging from working with individuals with intellectual disabilities to stress and time management and developing effective communication practices. All workshops and trainings are intended to enhance the skills of partner staff.

The WIOA Title II Adult Education providers are uniquely positioned to support staff development by providing selective professional skills training to one-stop staff. Adult Education providers have delivered instruction and guidance to staff on the proper administration and scoring of the TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education); they have also provided training to WIOA Title I staff on how to interpret and review the assessment results with customers. Consideration will be given to having the WIOA Title II provider train the WIOA Title I staff to administer the TABE assessment and include utilization of the TABE training course through the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Professional Development System. In addition to this 'formal' training, staff would then shadow and learn from Title II staff during the actual administration of the TABE.

The Title II providers are also well-positioned to train staff on some of the unique challenges experienced by participants in the English Language Learners program. Though the number of participants generally is small, the challenges they face are significant and the Title II providers can educate one-stop staff on effective strategies to better serve these participants.

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

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

The region is fortunate to have an active WIOA Title II Adult Basic Literacy and Education (ABLE) coalition made up of quality providers who coordinate closely with the SAWDB and PA CareerLink® sites to provide essential remedial education services to job seekers and those in need of this special assistance. SAWDB staff participate in the quarterly coalition meetings and use these forums to share board updates, discuss customer needs and service gaps, and identify resources and opportunities to expand delivery. During the planning process, members of the ABLE coalition received the guidance documents and drafts of ABLE-related portions of the plan. Coalition input was sought, received and incorporated in the Local Plan.

The Adult Education providers have always maintained a pivotal role in one-stop service delivery, a role that has expanded and been enhanced. With increased emphasis on occupational skills training and service to those with significant barriers to employment, the demand for literacy remediation has never been greater and the Title II providers have proven up to the task. Individuals who are basic skills deficient are targeted for priority of service and many are interested in pursuing post-secondary education. A smooth referral system to WIOA Title II has helped to facilitate access to skills training for many of these individuals.

Board engagement with the ABLE providers has been enhanced to include a review of the Title II applications prior to submission to the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The Title II applications will be transmitted to the SAWDB for their review. These applications must demonstrate alignment with the SAWDB's Local Plan. At this time, the SAWDB will offer recommendations, if needed to promote further alignment of services. The SAWDB will follow the timeline provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Education as it relates to board review of adult education applications

The ABLE Coalition members will continue to make their annual 'Year in Review' presentation during the fall quarterly SAWDB meeting. This provides an excellent venue to highlight program outcomes, performance and promising practices and raise awareness for the increased need for literacy services.

## ***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 SAWDB and the region's PA CareerLink® sites are committed to serving all those who want and need assistance. However, increased emphasis and priority of service will be placed on outreach and service to those with the greatest barriers to employment. These include:

- Displaced homemakers
- Low-income individuals
- Indians, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiians
- Individuals with disabilities, including youth with a disability
- Older individuals
- Ex-offenders

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

- Homeless individuals, including homeless children and youth
- Youth who are in or have aged out of the foster care system
- Individuals who are English language learners, individuals who have low literacy levels or are facing substantial cultural barriers, including refugees
- Eligible migrant and seasonal farmworkers
- Individuals who are within 2 years of exhausting lifetime eligibility under part A of Title IV of the Social Security Act
- Single parents, including single pregnant women
- Long-term unemployed individuals
- Others groups the Governor determines to have barriers to employment

The SAWDB has set the direction and tone for service delivery through the formation of its Special Populations standing committee; this group focuses on assistance to the target populations identified above. This committee is chaired by the OVR regional administrator and includes representatives from Corrections, Public Assistance, Senior Employment (pending), Title II Adult Education, a Community Action Agency, the Highlands Health Free Medical Clinic, a provider of mental health services to individuals with intellectual disabilities, and others with a commitment to assisting those who face some of the most significant barriers to employment. This committee is currently engaged in working with PA CareerLink® site administrators in identifying service gaps and outreach strategies to better connect these individuals with one-stop and partner services with demand occupations. With significant input from this committee, the public workforce system will continue to develop and deploy unique strategies designed to provide employment opportunities for those with barriers.

When an individual enters the PA CareerLink® to begin their relationship with the public workforce system, they meet with a member of the Welcome Team to complete an initial needs assessment. This allows the customer to identify their goals, any special needs they may have, and any potential barriers that might keep them from attaining their goals. They can also self-identify if they fall under one of the categories referenced above and entitled to a priority of service. However, regardless of an individual's 'status' the one-stop staff work with the customer to identify all their needs and seek to provide assistance, either through direct service provision or referral to a partner or non-partner program.

In the initial meeting with a member of the Welcome Team, information specific to the individual and their needs is provided. This represents a departure from the PA CareerLink® orientation, when a detailed review of the many resources that will be made available to them as they engage in their job search. While services are provided in a non-siloed manner, customers are made aware of the many special programs and resources that are provided by the one-stop partners. After meeting with a member of the Welcome Team, the individual is introduced to an appropriate one-stop staff member who is best positioned to begin helping the customer to meet their vocational goal. If the individual's barriers are such that they are not able to begin an effective job search, they are connected to the county's community action agency or other appropriate community-based organization. Once barriers have been remediated to the point that the individual is 'stabilized,' they will be referred back to the one-stop and the job search can begin. The enhanced PA CareerLink® referral system is used to record and track referrals to partner agencies.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

As with its methodical customer flow process, the PA CareerLink® system utilizes a coordinated approach to customer outreach and includes printed materials, in-person opportunities, and social media to promote one-stop services. Under the leadership of the site administrator and management team, promotional materials that outline jobseeker and employer services are prepared for distribution. These materials are reviewed by the OSO and SAWDB staff to ensure quality, accuracy, and alignment with materials provided elsewhere in the region. These materials are widely distributed to off-site partner agencies and other locations where jobseekers may live (housing authority offices and public housing), visit (libraries, community centers), shop, or receive related services (county assistance offices, Department of Human Services agencies, EARN centers, community action agencies, Veteran's Assistance Medical Center and other veterans' service and social organizations and agencies, medical clinics, probation offices, Day Reporting Centers, food banks). One-stop staff also ensure that staff at these partner agencies or locations have a basic understanding of the services being referenced/promoted to further encourage individuals to connect with the PA CareerLink®. The OVR and other partner programs utilize their significant relationships with vendors and supporting agencies throughout the state, as a means of outreach to potential customers.

The one-stop staff have also begun using social media as a means of outreach to potential customers. From LinkedIn® to Facebook® and Instagram®, many individuals are utilizing electronic means to stay in touch with one another and connect with resources. It is vital that the public workforce system use similar tools to connect with potential jobseekers and employer customers. The OSO has also developed and promoted the use of the region's website, [www.gocareerlink.org](http://www.gocareerlink.org). This site includes information to jobseekers and employers and includes a 'live chat' feature that allows the public to connect immediately with a one-stop staff person. The OSO and site administrators are currently engaged in an initiative to expand outreach using social media and will be tracking outcomes.

One-stop staff also engage in 'in-person' outreach that includes taking informational presentations that utilize PowerPoint to off-site locations, many of which were identified in the above paragraph. This is another example of taking services, or information on available services, to the customer. The one-stop staff, in conjunction with on-site partner and affiliated organizations, also hold special events like resource, education and career fairs and even county fairs to promote workforce services. The PA CareerLink® booth is often seen at community events where large gatherings are expected. Though the list of venues is extensive, the OSO will be charged this year with identifying additional outreach opportunities and expanding the use of technology to reach those in need of assistance.

Sections 4.6 and 4.8 of the Plan identify the wide variety of services that are made available to all job seekers; those with barriers to employment receive priority access to these services. In addition, the SAWDB and the public workforce system will deploy strategies and support enhanced services and activities to provide special assistance to those with barriers to employment. These include but are not limited to:

- Promotion of Apprenticeship Fairs - these events have fostered closer working relationships with companies that support apprenticeships and improved partnerships with those labor councils that provide apprenticeships. The fairs will be aggressively marketed to dislocated workers, especially the long-term unemployed and those with readily transferable skills,

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

individuals on public assistance including EARN program participants, and young adults in hopes of addressing pipeline issues.

- Career Fairs for Target Populations - building on a successful recruitment tool, the SAWDB and its PA CareerLink® sites will support events designed to enhance employment opportunities for special, target populations including individuals with disabilities, senior workers, low-income residents, young adults, refugees, and others in need of service.
- Enhanced Business Service Team Membership - efforts will be made to ensure that representatives from the EARN program, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Senior Employment Service, and Corrections have every opportunity to actively participate on these teams and coordinate employer outreach efforts on behalf of all jobseekers. The state-wide business services staff can also serve as a resource to help the Committee identify strategies to promote workforce diversification and inclusion.
- YouthBuild and ReSTART - transformative programs that combine academics, to support secondary diploma or equivalency receipt, with hands-on occupational skills training. Program participants are ages 17-24 who have dropped out of high school or have dropped out and subsequently re-enrolled and are also from a low-income family, or in foster care, an offender, an individual with a disability, child of a current or formerly incarcerated parent, or a migrant youth.
- STEPS (Steps Toward Employment-Progress-Success) - this innovative program developed by the Community Action Partnership for Somerset County, the WIOA Title I provider in Somerset County, helps participants address three specific barriers to employment: criminal backgrounds, mental health issues and substance abuse. During weekly sessions, participants tackle the issues, receive support and additional referrals to relevant agencies, and ultimately graduate to a Job Club and mainstream job search services.
- Individuals with Disabilities- WIOA Title IV eligible OVR customers receive multiple services from qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors that may include, but are not 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.

The SAWDB anticipates that the continued work of its Special Populations Committee will translate into additional special initiatives and services designed to move those with barriers to employment into jobs that provide self-sustaining wages.

The provision of services to all jobseekers begins with an assessment of individual needs. When a person enters the one-stop, they are encouraged to complete an initial needs assessment. This 'customer friendly,' simple form allows the individual to identify some of their basic needs and goals and permits them to 'self-identify' any barriers to employment. From the responses, staff can initiate referrals to in-house and community partners who are best positioned to help the jobseeker. Additional information, and confirmation of a barrier, if necessary, is gathered by WIOA Title I and Title III staff at the time of service enrollment. Throughout this process, staff are committed to providing a customer-focused, customized approach and work with all individuals regardless of barriers, in a non-discriminatory manner while providing equal access to all. Non-discrimination requirements are

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

outlined in greater detail in the SAWDB/LEO/Partner Memorandum of Understanding; an agreement signed by all PA CareerLink® partners.

Customers with disabilities eligible for services under WIOA Title IV will receive additional assistance from the OVR that may include but not be limited to diagnostic, vocational counseling and guidance, vocational evaluation, restoration, training, job placement and pre-employment training.

Of even greater importance, especially in service to the target populations, is utilizing effective outreach strategies to take services out into the community. Sections 4.3 and 4.4 of the Plan identify some of the unique partnerships that have been developed, including the close working relationship with Community Action Agencies. Referrals between these partner agencies and the one-stops have enabled a greater variety of services to be provided to customers, going beyond those workforce-related and provided through the PA CareerLink® system. Off-site system partners including libraries, social service agencies, housing authorities, food banks, juvenile and adult probation offices, county MH/MR offices and county assistance offices have readily accepted one-stop materials including service-related information and calendar of events. Under the direction of the OSO, the SAWDB will be encouraging PA CareerLink® staff to meet customers in these facilities and other community locations, where possible, to reduce any travel challenges and provide initial services to these individuals in a more familiar setting.

The PA CareerLink® Scorecard is being utilized to track, by one-stop, the percentage of customers receiving WIOA Title I services who have barriers to employment. In PY 19, 61% of WIOA Title I customers had at least one documented barrier to employment. The barrier breakdown, as captured in WIOA Title I Eligibility, voluntarily disclosed at intake, is as follows:

- 58% were Low Income
- 31% were Ex-Offenders
- 17% were English Language Learners, Low Level of Literacy or had Cultural Barriers
- 6% were Long-Term Unemployed (27 consecutive weeks or more)
- 1% were Displaced Homemakers
- 21% were Individuals with Disabilities
- 16% were Single Parents including Single Pregnant Women
- 2% Were Homeless Individuals
- 1% were Youth in Foster Care or had Aged out of the System
- 3% were Veterans

The SAWDB, OSO and one-stop partners will continue to monitor service levels to the target populations and use this information to gauge the effectiveness of the outreach strategies.

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

Employer support for and use of the public workforce system is critical; without this most essential customer group the PA CareerLink® will become redundant. Section 3.4 of the Plan identifies the administrative and programmatic strategies that will be utilized to engage businesses. As noted earlier,

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

to keep employer support, the workforce system must have 'products' or services that employers need to maintain their competitive edge and with it, a healthy bottom line. Equally important, they must be able to listen to the employer and let them drive the discussion around service needs rather than present to employer a static list or menu of available services. The SAWDB has long required each one-stop to have an active, well-organized and relevant Business Services Team (BST). The Board has chosen to rely on a team made up of a variety of partner staff to provide the essential services rather than competitively procure for an agency or organization to assess the needs of employers and provide essential services.

Each BST includes individuals whose positions involve interfacing with employers, assessing their needs, and ultimately helping to address their hiring needs, preferably filling the vacancy with one of their customers. While membership may vary somewhat from one-stop to one-stop, staff from the following partner agencies consistently serve on the BST:

- WIOA Title I
- OVR
- WIOA Title III
- Local Veterans Employer Representative
- Wagner-Peyser

Depending on the nature and timing of BST initiatives, economic developers, including the PREP Consortia, adult basic education providers, post-secondary educational institutions including career and technology centers and the Pennsylvania Highlands Community College may also be 'at the table' helping to assess and address the needs of employers. With a staff of four, the SAWDB and SAP&DC have, for some fifteen years, dedicated resources to support the position of Employer Services/Special Initiatives Specialist. This individual is responsible for helping to coordinate business services across the region and ensure a level of consistency of service provision between all five PA CareerLink® sites and quality of materials. This staff person attends BST meetings, provides technical assistance, and helps to channel BST-related communication between the SAWDB, the OSO, and one-stop staff; she provides no services to employers but rather supports the efforts of the BST.

Since 2018, the region's economic developers and Business Services Team leads have worked together to implement the ENGAGE program here in the region. With funding provided by the PA Department of Community and Economic Development, joint calls are made to targeted companies to listen and respond to the employers' needs. Following the visit, and when appropriate, an action plan is developed that lays out the strategy for addressing the employer issues and identifies appropriate partner agencies that will work together. In over 90% of the visits, workforce-related issues are noted so the one-stop staff can plan a significant role in providing essential support to the company. This process moves the one-stop away from simply providing the employer with a menu of services to choose from and instead places BST staff in a more 'consultative' role.

Each BST has a leader or point person who assists in coordinating the BST's outreach activities and service provision; in the region, the position is held by either a WIOA Title I staff person or Wagner-Peyser merit staff member. Regardless of their employer of record, the BST is expected to work as a well-coordinated unit. Regular and frequent communication between team members is essential;

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

seamless, non-silo service delivery does not only apply to jobseekers. Team members fill various roles; not all may be involved in employer visitations. Each BST tracks employer contacts and notes the type of contact - by telephone, e-mail, or in-person visits. The BSTs will continue to organize industry tours with key employers and among targeted sectors. These give business leaders the opportunity to 'show off' their facility and workforce staff the chance to see operations first-hand, hear about business opportunities and challenges from company leadership, and help to establish a professional relationship with the company. If the workforce system expects to meet the needs of its employer community, it must have an in-depth understanding of those needs and be prepared to meet and exceed business expectations.

The available business services are many and varied and include but are not limited to:

- Assistance with employee hiring. WIOA Title III, Wagner-Peyser staff are trained to assist employers registering with PA CareerLink®, place job orders on the system, and identify potential candidates for the positions. Staff can personally place job orders for an employer or their legal representative or instruct them on how to place the order themselves and search the system, with or without staff assistance. Special assistance will be given by the Local Veterans Employer Representative (LVER) to employers wishing to hire veterans.
- Coordination of job fairs and larger recruitment events. These can be organized for an individual employer, industry sector, or group of employers. Apprenticeship fairs are also provided.
- Access to funding to offset training costs. Many employers utilize OJT contracts when hiring one-stop customers. This service is a 'win-win' for both jobseeker and employer; the jobseeker becomes employed on day one and earns a self-sustaining wage and the employer receives funding to offset the costs associated with training the new employee, up to 50% of the wages earned during the pre-determined training period.
- Professional development/training. The SAWDB has supported 'Core Workshops'- brief, employer-centric trainings designed to address some immediate business needs. Training topics have included 'Understanding Multi-Generational Workplace,' 'Improving Communication Skills,' 'High-impact Sales' and 'Time and Stress Management.' These workshops are offered at no cost to the employer participants, have been extremely well-received and have helped to build solid relationships between the employer community and the PA CareerLink®. In 2019, the SAWDB and Startup Alleghenies co-sponsored a day-long conference entitled 'Alleghenies Ahead: Creating an Entrepreneurial Spirit in the Workplace.' The SAWDB will continue to identify and support professional development/incumbent worker training opportunities for employers.
- Assistance with general human resource functions. Many smaller businesses lack a human resource professional. One-stop staff can provide some technical assistance and direct employers to the appropriate individual/agency for additional assistance.
- Development of employer-specific strategies that can include career pathway identification, skill upgrades using incumbent worker training and skill standard development.
- Access to WorkKeys® assessment. The one-stops administer the WorksKeys® career readiness credential. It is provided to interested jobseekers to enhance their portfolio but is also available to employers for potential new hires and their incumbent workforce.
- Proposed access to the Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment.
- Next Generation Industry Partnership participation. The PA CareerLink® staff can help to

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

facilitate employer involvement.

- Access to Work Opportunity Tax Credits information.
- Access to up-to-date labor market information. Employers often request regional salary information to assist them with human resource functions.
- OVR. Provided assistance to businesses with on-boarding pre-screened, qualified employees with disabilities. OVR on-boarding supports for a qualified new hire can include reasonable accommodation consultation, initial probational period wage reimbursement (OJT), referral on tax credits or deductions. OVR can also provide no-cost consultation of the Americans with Disability Act, accessibility standards, and help with employee retention following an accident, injury, or disability.

Businesses engage with education on a regular basis in multiple ways in the Southern Alleghenies. The Business-Education 'connection' is varied and includes but is not limited to:

- Employer participation on Career & Technology Advisory Councils.
- Employer participation on post-secondary institutions' Boards of Directors and Boards of Trustees.
- Employer participation in school-sponsored career days and industry tours.
- Provision of worksites for co-op and other work experience programs.
- Engagement in the region's Teacher in the Workplace Grants where teachers spend time with targeted employers and then incorporate their observations into classroom curriculum.
- Participation in county and regional committees like BASICS (Businesses and Schools Investing in Cooperative Solutions) and the CSB2 STEM Ecosystem. Members work together to address common issues and support work experiences for youth.

The SAWDB, OSO and one-stops are utilizing the PA CareerLink® Scorecard to illustrate and demonstrate value of employer services. This dashboard includes:

- The percentage of employers using the PA CareerLink® compared to the total employer population.
- The percentage of repeat employers utilizing the system (a measure of employer satisfaction and engagement).
- The total number of employer services delivered.
- The number of job postings and job referrals.
- The number of OJTs written.
- The number of recruitment events and workshops.

Under the direction of the OSO, the one-stops will be setting measurable goals to include employer utilization metrics. The Scorecard will continue to be a valuable tool to educate the employer community and other stakeholders to the systems performance outcomes and the value provided by the one-stop.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

### *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?*

The SAWDB will continue to consistently make supportive services available to target populations engaged in training (OJT and ITA), work experience and adult literacy services. Local policy requires the coordination of these services with other agencies including OVR, community and faith-based organizations, incarceration re-entry programs, Community Action Agencies, United Way, Child Development Corporations, TANF and EARN providers, Dress for Success programs, legal aid services, and other agencies dedicated to serving many of the workforce system's target populations or to ensure that WIOA/Rapid Response funds supplement rather than supplant other funding sources. During formal and informal customer assessment, the career planners identify any barriers that might affect a customer's ability to participate in and successfully complete planned WIOA-funded services. Once identified, these are noted in the Individual Employment Plan (IEP) and the career planner works with the customer and partner, and non-partner programs to address these barriers and coordinate services. Funding is used to cover:

- GED testing fees. Title II partners have shared cases of individuals who were prepared to take the GED test but could not afford the \$120 testing fee. Through SAWDB support, these costs are covered and GEDs are earned.
- Mileage reimbursement to and from school, OJT and other work experience worksites. This helps to reduce barriers to participation and successful program completion.
- Childcare assistance to help offset the cost of daycare. Though available, it has not been used; the average age of our participants has increased and securing childcare has not been an issue.
- Clothing (for interviews, job-specific requirements), tools (job specific), and professional or commercial certifications. All services are intended to enhance the marketability of the customer and/or facilitate participation in a work experience program.

The supportive services referenced above are tracked carefully by WIOA Title I case managers and closely coordinated between those partner programs that also offer supportive services to ensure that customers do not receive duplicate services. The customer IEP and PA CareerLink® are utilized to note the provision of such services. Solid lines of communication between partner program staff, and involvement in coordinated customer-focused service meetings, i.e., Direct Service Team meetings, TRADE/WIOA staff meetings related to co-enrolled customers, have helped to ensure that program funding for needed support services is coordinated between providers and not supplanted.

Access to transportation, especially in the region's rural areas, can create challenges for job seekers. See Section 1.7 of the Regional Plan. Efforts are currently underway, by the SAP&DC as the Rural Planning Organization, to secure funding to address the issues identified in its transportation plan, to include greater access to transportation resources for the low-income job seekers.

The region's county-based Community Action Agencies (CAAs) are natural partners in supportive service coordination. So many of the common customers have needs far beyond employment; basic needs including access to safe housing and food, appropriate childcare, therapeutic care for mental health issues, and more. Many of these issues must be addressed before the individual is positioned to conduct a dedicated job search. PA CareerLink® staff will work with CAAs and other similar agencies

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

to assess the needs of the customer and determine which agency or partner is best positioned to provide the essential services. The customer's Individual Employment Plan will serve as the road map to identify their workforce goal and the many and varied services needed to achieve that goal. The services will also be recorded on PA CareerLink® to facilitate coordination between partner agencies. Ultimately, the needs of the customer will be identified and addressed through supportive service and resource coordination, and barriers to employment will be reduced or eliminated.

## 4 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.**

The SAWDB and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) have strengthened and expanded the partnership between the Board, OVR, and the region's PA CareerLink® sites. The relationship between Board and local OVR leadership is strong, a direct result of increased communication and collaboration between the offices. On many occasions, the SAWDB director has met with OVR administrators and vocational rehabilitation counselors and participated in OVR-sponsored public meetings to discuss the WIOA and opportunities for enhanced service provision including strengthening the referral process and leveraging Title I and OVR resources to support occupational skill training for individuals with disabilities. Likewise, an OVR District Administrator (OVR DA) is an active and valued member of the SAWDB, serving as a member of the executive committee and chair of the SAWDB's Special Populations Committee.

While always a key partner in the local workforce development system, the SAWDB and OVR leadership recognize the opportunity for greater involvement in PA CareerLink® initiatives. As a local and 'in house' expert, OVR staff are well positioned to help ensure that the one-stop facilities comply with state and federal ADA requirements and assist other PA CareerLink® staff to better understand and appreciate the unique challenges faced by jobseekers with disabilities. Coordination of outreach to employers has improved with OVR's hiring of Business Services Representatives; they are active members of the PA CareerLink® Business Service Teams. There have never been greater efforts toward disability inclusion. OVR and other PA CareerLink® staff have been coordinating the development of joint workshops and career fairs and the regional OVR office has set benchmarks for customer participation in these events. A 'consent form' has been implemented to allow greater sharing of customer information and improve communication between the vocational rehabilitation counselors and WIOA Title I career planners. Much has been accomplished and OVR, Board leadership, and PA CareerLink® staff will continue to identify ways to expand and enhance workforce services to individuals with disabilities.

The 2020-2024 Memorandum of Understanding/Infrastructure Funding Agreement (MOU/IFA) between the LEOs, SAWDB, Fiscal Agent, and One-Stop Partners (mandated and non-mandated) represents the most significant and collaborative cooperative agreement established for and by the public workforce system. It clearly lays out the 'who,' 'what,' 'when,' 'where' and 'why' of the region's public workforce system and takes the earlier One Stop Partner and Resource Sharing Agreements to a much higher level. It lays out in detail, the following:

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

- Vision and Mission of the SAWDB
- Partner services, roles, and responsibilities
- Service integration to include data sharing, confidentiality requirements, referrals, accessibility and outreach
- Dispute resolution
- Monitoring
- Special terms and conditions
- Operating budget and outlines PA CareerLink® costs

This agreement serves to bind the Partners together programmatically and fiscally and creates the commonly accepted and approved governance document. The Infrastructure Funding Agreement is included in the MOU and further outlines and defines the financial contributions of each partner, whether they are cash or in-kind contributions.

## *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 SAWDB and Fiscal Agent staff conduct regular monitoring of services and fiscal operations to ensure that sub-recipients provide services to eligible participants and that financial operations comply with the SAWDB Cost-Reimbursement Contract for Title I Services, Workforce System Policy (WSP) No. 3-2015, dated 12/22/15, and ultimately the OMB Uniform Guidance. If/when disallowed costs are identified, the SAWDB and the SAP&DC, as Fiscal Agent, will utilize its aggressive debt-collection process to recoup these costs.

If disallowed costs are identified, the sub-recipient will be notified in writing of the miss-expenditure, including the nature of the disallowed cost, contract/governance citations, the amount due to be returned, and the process for the return of the misspent funds. The SAWDB and Fiscal Agent expect that restitution will be made in a single lump sum repayment from the agency's General Fund or other non-restricted accounts. If the sub-recipient petitions to make payment in short-term installments, the SAWDB will contact the Bureau of Workforce Development Administration (BWDA) to confer on the matter and seek approval to accept short-term installment repayments. However, as noted in WSP 3-2015, immediate lump sum repayment of the debt is mandatory, and funding will be immediately returned to the BWDA if local monitoring has determined:

- 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.

In the event the sub-recipient is not able to make restitution, the Chief Local Officials are considered liable for repayment of the disallowed costs. This repayment of disallowed costs is also referenced in the Southern Alleghenies Local Elected Official Agreement, dated, November 18, 2015.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

The SAWDB and Fiscal Agent maintain strict monitoring processes and offer and provide considerable technical assistance to reduce the likelihood of disallowed costs being incurred by a sub-recipient.

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

The SAWDB has set high performance expectations for its PA CareerLink® sites, OSO and WIOA Title I providers but even higher expectations for itself as the leader of the region's public workforce system. It considers the outcomes achieved by the system a direct reflection on the SAWDB and its strategic direction and investments.

The SAWDB looked to the Commonwealth's Combined Workforce Plan as it identified its strategic goals and objectives. The Governor's goals were reviewed considering local conditions, and regional goals and objectives were established to support the Commonwealth and at the same time address unique challenges present in the region. Likewise, the region's goals were established with an eye on meeting and exceeding the negotiated federal performance measures. Greater detail on the SAWDB's goals and their alignment to and support for the Governor's goals and federal performance measures are found in sections 2.3 and 2.4 of the Plan.

The SAWDB places significant importance on its monitoring responsibilities and likewise places great importance on receiving clean monitoring reports from the BWDA monitors. The Fiscal Agent employs knowledgeable staff who seek out professional development opportunities to be well-grounded in state and federal accounting requirements, especially the Uniform Guidance. The SAP&DC prides itself on having strong internal controls in place and regularly receives clean Commonwealth and independent audits, free of issues or concerns.

The Fiscal Agent has developed several 'best practice' accounting reports that are designed to provide the Board with a 'snapshot' that illustrates where the Board and region stand regarding the training expenditure targets, 20% youth work experience requirements, 75% out-of-school youth service requirements, and 80% expenditure/obligation requirements. This allows the SAWDB to be proactive and make fiscal adjustments throughout the year to meet these state and federal expenditure requirements.

The SAWDB is constantly engaged in best practice identification, both within the region and across Pennsylvania and the United States and looks to its Title I providers, OSO, PA CareerLink® partners and system stakeholders to be constantly identifying new and improved methods of service delivery. Its strong connection with its PREP partners has led to many joint initiatives such as ENGAGE, the successful region-wide assessment of employer workforce needs and incumbent worker training to POWER-supported program to the Southern Alleghenies Entrepreneurial Ecosystem- Startup Alleghenies.

With SAWDB support, two of the region's comprehensive one-stops have co-located into the area's largest public libraries. This has garnered the attention of workforce leaders from across the country and can serve as a model for other one-stops.

# Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

SAWDB leadership has set the bar even higher regarding one-stop benchmarking with the enhancement and regular review of the PA CareerLink® Scorecard. This tool allows the SAWDB, PA CareerLink® partners, system stakeholders and other interested parties to view one-stop performance at a glance. With increased emphasis on serving individuals with significant barriers to employment, this tool measures the percentage of WIOA Title I customers who have a targeted barrier to employment. This tool is also being used effectively to gauge employer market penetration and customer satisfaction by measuring the percentage of returning employer customers. Under the guidance of the OSO, the PA CareerLink® site administrators, Management and Business Service Teams have established goals around jobseeker and employer services and satisfaction including placements, training participants, and employer outreach and service utilization.

The SAWDB looks forward to the opportunity to work with the Bureau of Workforce Development and Administration in the development of high-performance standards, a role it played many years past when the PA Department of Labor and Industry first created the designation 'High Performance Board.' It remains committed to being the leader and active partner in the region's workforce development system and the SAWDB will take actions necessary to maintain or obtain that important designation.

#### *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?*

During the drafting of the initial local plan, communication with key stakeholders took place throughout the planning process. Meetings, including those publicly advertised, where the plan was discussed prior to posting, were held on November 10, 18, December 8, 17, 2020, and January 12, 20, and February 9, 2021.

The LEOs, SAWDB members, OSO Consortium, PA CareerLink® Site Administrators, PREP partners, Local Management Committee, and other stakeholders were given copies of the Regional and Local Plan Guidelines and asked to provide input into the draft document. SAWDB members and stakeholders, particularly members of the PREP consortium with expertise in specific areas, were asked to and provided narrative for inclusion in the plans. Plan development was discussed at the following venues:

- Chief LEO bi-monthly meetings - included commissioners from the six member counties. Copies of the guidance and the draft plans were shared, and input sought prior to the release for public comment and then submission of the plans. The planning process and information was shared during the January 20, and March 17, 2021, LEO meetings.
- Local Management Committee - guidance was shared and input sought. The plan was also discussed during its December 17, 2020 meeting. The draft plan was also shared prior to release for comment so that further input could be collected as well as during the public comment period prior to submission.
- SAWDB and SAWDB Executive Committee Meetings - guidance was shared and input encouraged and sought, especially from the private sector and organized labor representatives. The draft plans were shared prior to the release for public comment. The SAWDB approved release of the plans for the 30-day public comment period on February 9, 2021.

## Southern Alleghenies Program Years 2021-2024 Local Area Plan

Local Workforce Development Area name: Southern Alleghenies

Effective Date: July 1, 2021

- OSO/PA CareerLink® Site Administrators monthly meetings - guidance was shared and input sought. The plans were also shared prior to the release for public comment and prior to submission.
- The Plans were placed on the SAP&DC and posted for the 30-day public comment period. Stakeholders were notified of the release of the plans along with their request for comments. Hard copies of the Plans were also made available at each of the PA CareerLink® sites that serve the Southern Alleghenies region and at the offices of the SAP&DC. Legal ads noting the SAP&DC web address were placed in the region's newspapers of record.

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

Following approval by the SAWDB to release the Plans for public comment, the Plans and all accompanying documents were placed on the SAWDB/SAPDC website. At the same time, notifications were sent to stakeholders directing them to the website and encouraging their review and comment. The Plans were also referenced during meetings with stakeholders and participants were encouraged to review the posted plans and submit comments. Public notice was posted in the region's newspapers of record. This notice directed interested parties to the SAWDB/SAPDC website and electronic copies of the Plans. Hardcopies of the Plans were placed in each one-stop as well so that PA CareerLink® customers and partners would have the opportunity to review and comment on the document. All comments were to be submitted in writing and directed to Susan Whisler, SAWDB Director, via email at [whisler@sapdc.org](mailto:whisler@sapdc.org). No comments were received during the public comment period.