

The **WorkPlace**
»» Think it forward.

Southwest Connecticut Local Workforce Development Plan

2020-2024





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Executive Summary

The WorkPlace helps people prepare for careers and strengthens the workforce for employers. We are a progressive, socially enterprising operation that is driven by innovation and entrepreneurial spirit. As Southwestern Connecticut's Regional Workforce Development Board, we administer workforce development funds and coordinate providers of job training and education programs that meet the needs of residents and employers.

We believe in the power of ideas to affect great change. We act as convener, catalyst, collaborator, and advocate for workforce development. We work with a wide scope of partners in the American Job Center system, business leaders, local officials, and other stakeholders to design innovative workforce development plans that identify and address the area's employment needs and interests.

The WorkPlace operates four American Job Centers (AJC) located in Ansonia, Bridgeport, Derby, and Stamford, Connecticut. Additionally, we operate the Southwest Region AJC Career Coach, which is a mobile computer lab that brings a training classroom to each of the towns in the region. These centers provide programs and services to job seekers, including career counseling, workshops, job search assistance, skills assessment, and occupational training. Customers using the centers have access to computers, internet, telephones, copy machines and materials to help them search for a job.

The WorkPlace works with business partners to address their future needs by creating opportunities to improve training and job readiness. Business customers can benefit from customized recruitment services, easy access to a large pool of pre-screened job applicants, and other resources. We collaborate with employers in several ways:

- Build strategic, industry-specific partnerships with education providers
- Mobilize Rapid Response Teams to help dislocated workers deal with company closings
- Train workers for Connecticut's essential industry clusters
- Upgrade the skills of existing workers to maintain a globally competitive workforce

The WorkPlace regularly shares ideas, best practices, and lessons learned with lawmakers, foundations, think tanks, and other workforce development organizations around the country. We pride ourselves on bringing new thinking to the workforce table. In all we do, our people "think it forward" – always looking for new ways to enhance the quality of life and standard of living of people in our region.

Purpose

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires each local workforce development board (LWDB) to develop and submit, in partnership with the chief elected official (CEO), a comprehensive four-year plan to the Governor. The local plan shall support the vision, goals, and strategy described in the State plan and otherwise be consistent with the State plan.

This four-year plan will be effective July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2024, and address future strategies and efficiencies for the continuing modernization of the workforce system and creation of a customer-centered system: where the needs of business and workers drive workforce solutions; where American Job Centers in the region provide excellent customer service to all job seekers and businesses; and where the workforce system supports strong regional economies, as well as alignment with state and local priorities.

I. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A. Chief Elected Official(s) (CEOs)

1. Identify the chief elected official(s) by name, title, mailing address, phone number, and email address.

See Attachment A: SWCT Workforce Development Area, Chief Elected Officials.

2. If the local area includes more than one unit of general local government in accordance with WIOA sec. 107(c)(1)(B), attach the agreement that has been executed to define how the parties will carry out the roles and responsibilities of the CEO.

See Attachment B: Local Chief Elected Officials Agreement

3. Describe the following:

i. The nomination process used by the CEO to elect the local board chair and members;

The CEOs will solicit nominations for Business and Non-Business representatives from appropriate organizations and agencies, as described in the process. The WorkPlace will assist the CEOs in allocating the categories for Non-Business appointments and in satisfying the requirements of WIOA.

Business Representatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Business representatives must be owners, chief executive officers, chief operating officers, small business or other individuals with optimum policymaking or hiring authority and represent businesses with employment, opportunities that reflect the employment opportunities of the LWDA;
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The Stamford Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Bridgeport Regional Business Council and the Valley Chamber of Commerce shall be the lead local business organizations for coordinating and submitting business nominations to the CEOs for final appointment;
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The CEOs may contact other local chambers of commerce and trade associations to advise them that they may submit nominations to the lead local business organizations;

Non-Business Representatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Representatives of educational entities, including Community Colleges, will be selected from among individuals nominated by state, regional or local educational agencies, institutions, or organizations representing such local educational entities:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Nominations for representatives of labor organizations shall be solicited from local labor federations;
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ CEOs may solicit nominations for representatives of community-based organizations, giving special consideration to organizations representing youth (including out of school youth), individuals with disabilities, and veterans;
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ CEOs may solicit nominations for representatives of economic development agencies, giving special consideration to private-sector economic development entities;
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Unsolicited nominations may also be considered.

ii. The term limitations and how the term appointments will be staggered to ensure only a portion of membership expire in a given year;

At each annual meeting, the then present Board of Directors shall elect Directors in accordance with Bylaws of The WorkPlace to serve for three-year terms to succeed the Directors whose terms are expiring. All Directors shall serve until their respective successors shall have been elected or qualified. The term of a Director may be extended by service as an officer of the Board of Directors.

iii. The process to notify the CEO of a board member vacancy to ensure a prompt nominee;

The WorkPlace maintains continuous, open communication with each of the CEO's. Notifications of vacancies occur through email correspondence, telephone, and in-person conversations.

iv. The proxy and alternative designee process that will be used when a board member is unable to attend a meeting and assigns a designee as per the requirements at §679.110(d)(4) of the WIOA regulations;

In the event that a Director is unable to attend or participate in a meeting of the Board of Directors, he/she may designate another person who holds a leadership or decision making position in the entity which the Director represents by filing a written authorization, including fax, e-mail, or other written electronic medium, delivered at or prior to a meeting with the Board of Directors. Such designee shall not be counted for the purpose of determining the presence of a quorum at the meeting and shall not be entitled to vote but may otherwise participate in the meeting.

v. The use of technology such as phone and Web-based meetings that will be used to promote board member participation;

Meetings of the Board of Directors, Executive Committee, and other subcommittees of The WorkPlace Board of Directors can be supported by technology to encourage and promote participation. Members may join meetings by using technology such as conference calls and web-based solutions such as Zoom or Go to Meeting.

vi. The process to ensure board members actively participate in convening the workforce development system's stakeholders, brokering relationships with a diverse range of employers, and leveraging support for workforce development activities; and,

The Board of Directors has the power necessary to carry out the functions and duties of the LWDB as well as formulate the policies and direct the affairs of the LWDB. Board members are approached to actively participate in standing sub-committees of the Board to assist in convening the workforce development system. These committees include the Executive Committee, By-Laws Committee, Human Resources Committee, and the Finance/Audit Committee. Additionally, board members participate in the execution and planning of community forums, which solicit feedback on workforce trends.

vii. Any other conditions governing appointments or membership on the local board.

There are no other conditions governing appointment or membership on the local board.

4. Provide a description of how the CEO was involved in the development, review, and approval of the plan

The CEO is regularly notified of meetings to review workforce trends, the responsiveness of the LWDB, and program performance. This included participation in a virtual town hall meeting through Zoom Meeting, attendance at WorkPlace program events, and community forums. This summer, his staff participated in virtual meetings seeking input and involvement in the planning process from a diverse range of community stakeholders.

The CEO confirmed the vision and provided guidance on proper steps to create the plan. Progress on the plan was presented to the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors and subsequently to the full Board of Directors after receiving approval from the CEO.

B. Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB)

1. Provide a matrix identifying LWDB members including the category each member represents and the term of service.

See Attachment C: WorkPlace Board of Directors.

2. Provide a description of how the LWDB was involved in the development, review, and approval of the plan.

Members of the Executive Committee of The WorkPlace Board of Directors received monthly updates on the development and progress of the planning process. During these updates, they provided guidance and feedback on the development of the plan. Two workgroups were established to assist in the planning process and allow for a wide variety of stakeholder input into the regional plan. The workgroups included;

- Service Coordination and Core Programing
- Customer Access and Employer Engagement

Members of the Board of Directors participated in each of these workgroups. The full Board of Directors received the plan before a regularly scheduled meeting where the plan was considered and approved by the LWDB.

3. Provide an organizational chart for the LWDB and administrative support.

See Attachment D: Organizational Chart of The WorkPlace.

C. Local Administrative Entity and Grant Sub Recipient

1. Identify the administrative entity.

The WorkPlace is the administrative entity as the LWDB.

2. Identify the entity selected to receive and disburse grant funds (local fiscal agent).

The WorkPlace is the LWDB and fiscal agent responsible for the disbursal of funds.

D. One-Stop System

1. General System Description

- **Provide a description of the local one-stop system, including the number, type, and location of full-service and other service delivery points.**

There is one (1) full-service and three satellite American Job Centers (AJC's) in the Southwest Region Local Workforce Delivery Area:

BRIDGEPORT (Full-Service) 2 Lafayette Square Bridgeport, CT 06604 Phone: (203) 333-5129 Open Mon - Fri, 8:30am - 4:30pm	STAMFORD (Satellite) 141 Franklin Street, 2nd Fl. Stamford CT 06901 Phone: (203) 353-1702 Open Mon - Fri, 8:30am - 4:30pm
DERBY (Satellite) 101 Elizabeth St. Derby, CT 06418 Phone: (203) 734-3443 Open Mon - Fri, 8:30am - 4:30pm	ANSONIA (Satellite) 4 Fourth Street Ansonia, CT 06401 Phone: (203) 397-6647 Open Mon - Fri, 8:30am - 4:30pm

AJC Location	On-site Partners	Services
<p align="center">BRIDGEPORT 2 Lafayette Square Bridgeport, CT 06604</p>	<p align="center">CT Dept. of Labor Career Resources, Inc. The WorkPlace BRS / DORS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ WIOA – Adult, DW, Youth ▪ Wagner Peyser (Labor Exchange Services), Veterans, Trade Act, UI Assistance ▪ TANF/JFES Services ▪ ABE / GED ▪ AJC Career Coach ▪ Dress for Success Mid-Fairfield County ▪ Community Resource Center / Food Pantry ▪ Mortgage Crisis Job Training Program (statewide) ▪ Platform to Employment (statewide) ▪ SCSEP ▪ Step Up (statewide) ▪ STRIVE ▪ ReEntry ▪ VITA site ▪ Business – hiring, recruiting, job posting, incentives, credits, training, (throughout SDA)
<p align="center">ANSONIA 4 Fourth Street Ansonia, CT 06401</p>	<p align="center">Career Resources, Inc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ WIOA – Adult, DW, Youth ▪ TANF/JFES Services
<p align="center">DERBY 101 Elizabeth Street Derby, CT 06418</p>	<p align="center">Career Resources, Inc. *CTDOL – as requested</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ WIOA – Adult, DW, Youth ▪ TANF/JFES – Services <p align="center"><u>Services delivered upon request:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wagner-Peyser (Labor Exchange Services) ▪ Veterans
<p align="center">STAMFORD 141 Franklin Street, 2nd Fl. Stamford CT 06901</p>	<p align="center">Career Resources, Inc. *CTDOL – as requested</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ WIOA – Adult, DW, Youth ▪ TANF/JFES Services <p align="center"><u>Services delivered upon request:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wagner-Peyser (Labor Exchange Services) ▪ Veterans

The Bridgeport AJC location is a full-service, comprehensive AJC, housing WIOA, Wagner-Peyser, and JFES staffing. Its central downtown location is near the public transportation hub and offers convenient access to individuals with transportation needs. This center also houses the Community Resource Center and the Assistive Services Center. The WorkPlace has veteran, ex-offender, youth, and healthcare programs all within walking distance of this center.

The Stamford, Derby, and Ansonia locations are satellite AJC offices. These satellites offer WIOA and JFES services. Wagner-Peyser services are made available by DOL on a scheduled basis at the Stamford and Derby sites. All four locations are on bus lines and have adaptive technology to assist customers with disabilities.

- **Identify the entity or entities selected to operate the local one-stop center(s).**

The WorkPlace procures and contracts with only one entity that serves as our operator/provider. The currently selected entity is Career Resources, Inc.

- **Identify the entity or entities selected to provide career services within the local one-stop system.**

Career Resources, Inc. and the Connecticut Department of Labor are the only entities providing career services in the SW AJCs.

- **Identify and describe what career services will be provided by the selected one-stop operator and what career services, if any, will be contracted out to service providers.**

Career Resources, Inc. delivers all career services provided at the SW AJCs. No career services are contracted out to providers, nor does The WorkPlace intend to contract out career services to providers.

Customers entering any of the Southwest Region American Job Centers are greeted and referred to the receptionists to determine the reason for the visit. All centers utilize the CTHires system to sign-in and track customers. All of our centers provide customer access to create user accounts in CTHires if they are not already in the system. Customers are then triaged to determine what program or service they are seeking.

Once registered into CTHires, customers may access career services. Available career services in the AJC's include:

- Eligibility for Title 1 Participants
- Outreach, intake, and orientation
- Skills and supportive services need assessment
- Program coordination & referral
- Labor market information
- Training provider performance & cost information
- Information about the availability of supportive services and referral to these services
- Assistance establishing eligibility for financial aid
- Employment Retention Services
- Follow-up services for Title 1 participants

- **Describe the roles and resource contributions of one-stop partners.**

Programs & Services	Description
AJC Career Coach	Mobile classroom that brings career services and computer training to you! The American Job Center Career Coach visits cities and towns every week, stopping at various community sites (public housing, libraries, community centers, churches, job fairs).
ABE / GED Preparation	Adult Basic Education, work towards achieving GED Diploma
Community Resource Center / Food Pantry	Assist in connecting to area/community resources (211 info line)
Dress for Success	Women's business attire, networking and career supports
ESL	English as a Second Language acquisition. Open entry classroom and virtual
Mortgage Crisis Job Training Program	Training funds, career/financial counseling & employment services for those with mortgages 60+ days past due
Platform to Employment	Long term unemployed- assistance re-entering the workforce

SCSEP	Low-income, unemployed adults aged 55+ can participate in part-time, paid community service providing training and job search assistance leading to unsubsidized employment. Title V (SCSEP) of the Older Americans Act, administered by the US Department of Labor
STRIVE	A unique three-week attitudinal job readiness course in a simulated work environment, emphasizing personal accountability; includes case management, job leads and two years of follow-up support
Reentry	Serving ex-offenders/ previously incarcerated in reentering the workforce as well as GED assistance
VITA site	Free, high-quality tax preparation assistance and filing, and connection to financial literacy services and all eligible tax credits. VITA is open to all families earning \$50,000 or less annually

- **Provide copies of executed Memoranda of Understanding and Infrastructure Funding Agreements.**

See Attachment E. Infrastructure Funding Agreements for the current year are still in progress.

- **Identify any non-required partners included in the local one-stop delivery system and respective contributions.**

We have no non-mandated partners in our one-stop delivery system.

2. Customer Access

- **Describe actions taken by the LWDB to promote maximum integration of service delivery through the one-stop delivery system for both business customers and individual customers.**

The Southwest American Job Centers utilize a holistic approach to servicing both job seekers and employers. Although there are multiple entry points for a job seeker to engage with us, all staff are cross-trained and provided with pertinent information regarding all the programs and services transpiring in the AJC.

We use a one voice system with employers. Our business services team works in coordination with CT DOL's business services to ensure we are providing the regions employers with the best set of services.

- **Describe how entities within the one-stop delivery system, including one-stop operators and one-stop partners, will comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act regarding physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs, and services, technology and materials for individuals with disabilities, including providing staff training and support for addressing needs of individuals with disabilities.**

In compliance with the provisions of the American with Disabilities Act, The WorkPlace has coordinated with all partners to provide access to program services for customers with disabilities through our Assistive Services Unit. The Assisted Services Unit provides access to a wide variety of equipment, technology, and partnerships. These enhancements are intended to increase accessibility to customers with visual, auditory, mobility, cognitive, or language impairments. Equipment available consists of computers available with large monitors, magnification capacity, audio enhancements, scanners, reader technology, speech recognition, and adjustable height workstations and telecommunication devices for individuals with hearing impairments. Staff is also available to assist with language translation and interpretation as well as access to the language line coordinated through the state. When an accommodation is necessary, staff works to align resources and services to maximize accessibility and participation.

The coordination of partners' services is critical to effectively and efficiently address the needs of customers to access services. The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) is also a partner in the one-stop system's efforts to provide services to customers with disabilities. The Assistive Services Unit coordinates with DORS (BRS & BESB) to create life plans for customers attached to the States Voc-Rehab system. Our Bridgeport AJC has dedicated space for our partner agencies to assist customers with disabilities to transverse the American Job Centers services. The one-stop system also relies heavily upon other community partners whose mission is to assist individuals with disabilities. Many of these organizations are available for contact through the United Way sponsored 211 System.

- **Describe how the LWDB facilitates access to services provided through the local delivery system, including remote areas, through the use of technology and other means.**

To provide one-stop services in areas where access to services may be a challenge to residents, The WorkPlace utilizes the mobile Career Coach. The Career Coach is a mobile technology vehicle offering ten computer workstations, high-speed Internet access, and a 42" plasma TV with SmartBoard overlay. Through the Career Coach customers have access to services and information such as outreach materials explaining services available in the LWDA, computers for self-directed job search services, resume writing, and digital literacy; job postings and informational sessions on how to apply to positions online; information on accessing support services; referrals to community programs; information regarding area employers; and comprehensive and specialized assessments of the skill levels and services needed of adult, dislocated worker, and JFES customers. Services of the Career Coach are available at various venues including but not limited to: housing projects, libraries, senior community centers, veteran centers, schools as well as community and faith-based organizations. In addition to the Career Coach, The WorkPlace has developed a cadre of online orientations and workshops to address the increasing need to triage customers quickly and effectively in a virtual setting. Moreover, due to COVID-19, we have formalized the eligibility, career counseling, and training referrals to be all virtual.

3. Integration of Services

- **Describe how one-stop career centers are implementing and transitioning to an integrated, technology-enabled intake and case management information system for programs carried out under this Act and programs carried out by one-stop career center partners.**

Customers seeking services through the one-stop system may visit one of the 4 Southwest AJCs directly or explore and register online for services wherever the individual may be located: home, work, or other gathering places where online access is available. First-time customers coming through the AJC doors receive an orientation to information and other services available through the AJC system. Customers are then guided through the registration process in CTHires. Once registration and assessments are complete, additional services are discussed, such as job placement, short- and long-term training, and additional supports.

We can also service customers virtually, following the same format mentioned above. Using CTHires WIOA pre-applications, customers can send sensitive documentation via a secure portal. Staff can complete eligibility and move the customers into individualized or training services completely virtually.

From the initial point of contact, staff provides customers essential career services, including orientation and intake. CTHires is used to capture intake and case management information that will be used to identify strategies that better meet the needs of individuals with barriers to employment, leveraging resources, and the capacity within the local workforce office.

The Southwest AJCs provides comprehensive career planning, referrals to occupational skills training, business services, and placement. Staff members emphasize raising customers' skill levels and returning individuals to work with skills to secure well-paying jobs appropriate to the individual's interests and abilities.

4. Competitive Selection of One Stop Operator

- **Describe the steps taken to ensure a competitive process for selection of the one-stop operator(s). Provide the name of the operator selected and contact info.**

The WorkPlace selected a one-stop operator through a competitive procurement process. In June of 2019, The WorkPlace issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) soliciting proposals for the one-stop operator. The RFP articulated the responsibilities of the one-stop operator, including the coordination of one-stop partners and service providers, an accurate description of the technical requirements for the services being procured, proposal submission requirements, and the factors to be used in evaluating proposals.

The process below articulates the competitive process utilized by The WorkPlace:

- A. The RFP was posted on The WorkPlace's website with legal notices published in the Connecticut Post, New Haven Register, and the Stamford Advocate upon the release of the RFP, notifying prospective bidders that the RFP was published on The WorkPlace's website. In addition, email notifications were sent to organizations on the bidders' list, directing them to the RFP posted on the website.
- B. A Bidder's Conference Call was held, during which time staff from The WorkPlace answered questions posed by prospective bidders. Prospective bidders were also allowed to submit questions, in writing, before the call. The WorkPlace published the questions and answers to The WorkPlace website following the call. Per The WorkPlace's Procurement Policy and Procedures, staff did not answer questions about the RFP after the call, unless the questions pertained specifically to the technical aspects of the RFP or the RFP format.
- C. Prospective bidders submitted confidential Letters of Intent to The WorkPlace prior to the proposal submission deadline.
- D. An initial screening of all proposals was conducted by staff of The WorkPlace to insure (1) the proposals were submitted on time, in the proper format and with the required number of copies attached; (2) the proposal were responsive to the RFP and all RFP questions and sections; and (3) all required signatures appear on the submitted documents. If a proposal did not meet the technical requirements of the screening process, it did not continue through the review and rating process and was returned to the proposer.
- E. Proposals that met the technical requirements of the screening process were then evaluated by The WorkPlace Proposal Review Team using a point system based on a Proposal Evaluation/ Rating Form. Proposals were scored and recommendations made to the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of The WorkPlace for approval of tentative funding. The decisions of the Executive Committee were then ratified by the full Board of Directors at the quarterly meeting in June of 2019.
- F. The final selection of the one-stop operator was primarily based on effectiveness, demonstrated performance, potential for meeting performance goals, costs, quality of training, and past workforce development experience and performance of the bidder.
- G. Following the Board of Directors meeting, the bidder selected as the one-stop operator was notified of the selection. Bidders whose proposals were not funded were also notified.

5. System Improvement

- **Describe the steps the LWDB will take to ensure continuous improvement of the area's one-stop system.**

The WorkPlace takes great steps to guarantee systemic, continuous improvement of the area's one-stop system. Continuous improvement is an ongoing cycle of identifying, planning, executing, and reviewing enhancements to service delivery.

Successfully serving the customers requires sustained collaboration and coordination over the long term with system partners, service providers, employers, and community leaders. The WorkPlace's commitment to continuous improvement is supported by the staff's constant awareness of evolving federal, state, regional, and local policies, as well as daily engagement with customers.

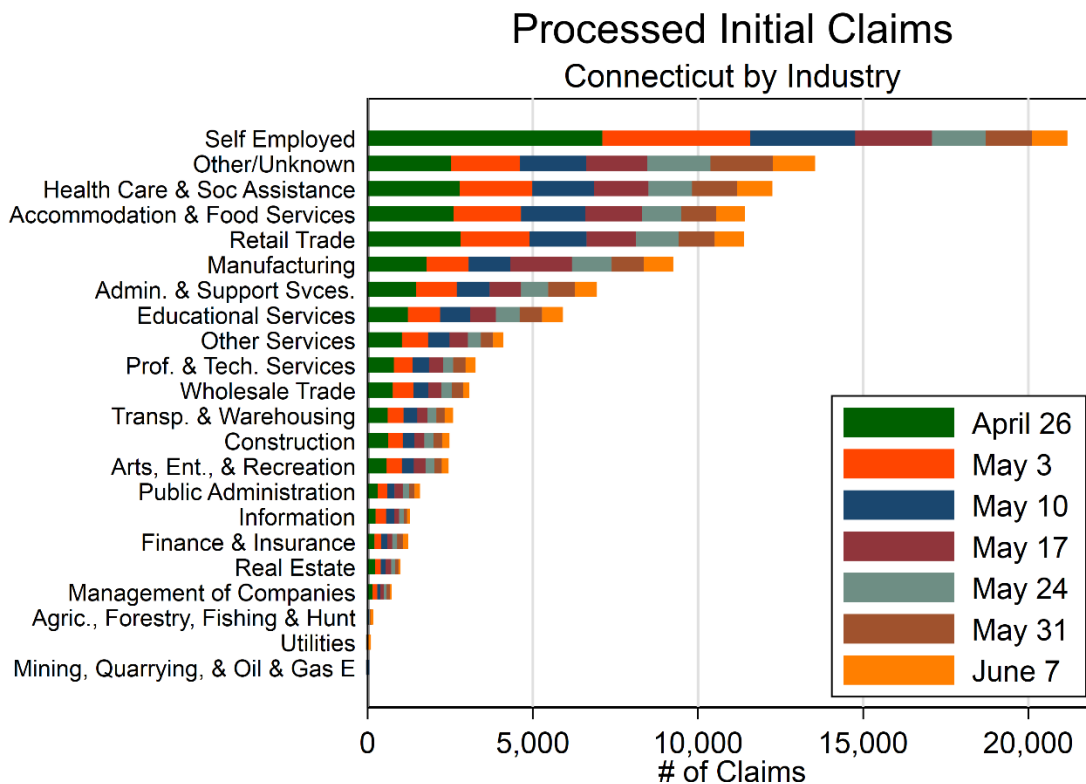
Information gathered from customer satisfaction surveys, employer feedback, provider feedback, and staff brainstorming will be used to identify inefficiencies, points of customer dissatisfaction, areas of customer need, unmet performance measures, and staffing challenges. For example, we utilize the human-centered design to engage staff, employers, and our community regarding our service delivery and design. The data produced by these sessions frame the customer process, and the staff training required to remain a highly functioning American Job Center.

Through customer contact and the collaborations mentioned above, The WorkPlace will identify successes, implementation barriers, and unsuccessful strategies. The WorkPlace will adjust existing service strategies as well as develop new, informed service delivery designs, which will then be continuously monitored, and outcomes evaluated to support better services going forward.

II. ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

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

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic became visible in our state’s unemployment data during the week of March 15. Unemployment claims dominated lower-wage industries with opportunities for entry-level positions, including Accommodations & Food Services, Health Care & Social Assistance as well as Retail. The economic downturn significantly impacted small businesses with over 20,000 initial unemployment claims filed by self-employed individuals between March 15 and July 6.



Unemployment rates in the COVID-19 downturn are lower among workers with higher levels of education. In our region, we can see that education pays as workers with a high school degree or less make up 52% of unemployment applicants who reported their level of education.

Individuals with a college degree or higher represent 26% of claims for unemployment benefits. A unique factor in the COVID-19 recession is the significance of teleworking in keeping people on the job. The option to telework varies considerably across workers, depending on their education level. Pew Research reported that those with a college degree are six times as likely to have the option as those without a high school diploma.

According to the May 2020 issue of the Connecticut Economic Digest, "Earlier this year and only a few months ago, expectations of where the US and global economies were heading were drastically different than the present outlook. Since then, a pandemic radically altered daily life and economic functions. The effects on the economy will be severe, but the question is for how long. A prolonged national recession will severely harm Connecticut. When the recovery comes, we expect long term Connecticut trends of growth in Health Care, Transportation Equipment Manufacturing, and Transportation and Warehousing to continue." It is far too early to determine how the pandemic will impact our region's economy, but some economists project modest growth in 2021 to be a best-case scenario.

Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the 20-town region of Southwest Connecticut economy generated 390,206 jobs as of March 2020, up 10,424 jobs from 2014 annual average.

Employment

One way to look at the economy in Southwestern, Connecticut, is by total job growth. The six leading industries by total jobs in the Southwest Region at the end of 2019 were Health Care and Social Assistance, Retail Trade, Government, Finance and Insurance, Accommodation, and Food Service and Manufacturing. All six sectors have over 25,000 jobs.

Job growth in the region's leading industries has been mixed. Jobs in The Health Care and Social Assistance industry have been growing rapidly and is currently the top industry by number employed in SWCT. At the end of 2019, there were 55,466 jobs, up 3,320 jobs compared to the 2014 average of 52,146. Careers in Health Care and Social assistance are expected to grow 32.9% over the next ten years. The most in-demand occupation is a Registered Nurse, followed by Nursing Assistant and Caregiver/Personal Care Aide.

Accommodation and Food Service is another industry that has had an increase in jobs. There was a total of 28,197 jobs at the end of 2019, an increase compared to the 2014 average of 26,929 jobs.

Jobs in Retail Trade have decreased since 2014 but the industry saw a small rise at the end of 2019. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic jobs in this industry were among the most in-demand in the region. These occupations include retail sales associates, retail store managers, and laborer/warehouse workers.

Finance and Insurance is another industry sector that had a decrease in employment over the years, but job postings in this industry are expected to grow by 23.8% over the next ten years. The most in-demand occupations are Personal Bankers, Insurance Sales Agents, Bank Tellers, and Sales Representatives.

Looking at in-demand occupations in the region gives incite on employment opportunities in Southwest Connecticut. The most in-demand occupations based on the number of job postings in the region are Registered Nurse, Retail Salesperson, Software Developers /Applications, Sales Representatives, Wholesale & Manufacturing, and Managers.

Wages

Another way to look at the economy is by wages. Wages increased between 2018 and 2014 in 5 out of the 6 top industries.

Manufacturing, a leading industry in the state which traditionally produces middle-class jobs, has had a decline in both wages and employment. However, it employs the most workers in Beacon Falls, Oxford, Seymour, Shelton, and Stratford. Wages in this industry peaked in 2014 and were down 7% in 2018.

The Finance and Insurance industry has the highest average wage of \$275,757. This industry had a steady wage increase since 2014, an average increase of \$10,429. In 2018, individuals working in securities, commodity contracts, and investments made up over half (16,431 of 30,591) of those employed in the Finance and Insurance industry. They also had the highest average salary of \$364,676.

Traditionally low-wage industries also experienced an increase in wages. Wages in health care and social assistance saw an average wage of \$56,411 in 2018, up 7% from 2014. Accommodation and Food Services saw the lowest average wage, \$25,962, but a trend of steadily increasing wages has taken place. Wages increased \$2,627 over the five years of 2014 through 2018.

Wage Change by Industry in Southwest CT

Industry	2014 Annual Avg. Wage	2018 Annual Avg. Wage	Change in Wage
Finance and Insurance	\$268,328	\$278,757	\$10,429
Management of Companies and Enterprises	\$234,177	\$221,160	(\$13,017)
Information	\$103,205	\$139,274	\$36,069
Utilities	\$97,858	\$130,371	\$32,513
Professional and Technical Services	\$116,066	\$126,628	\$10,562
Real Estate and rental and leasing	\$100,602	\$98,301	(\$2,301)
Manufacturing	\$95,726	\$89,149	(\$6,577)
Construction	\$61,686	\$69,547	\$7,861
Total Government	\$62,154	\$69,066	\$6,911
Health Care and Social Assistance	\$52,564	\$56,411	\$3,847
Educational Services	\$51,346	\$55,482	\$4,136
Retail Trade	\$41,250	\$43,337	\$2,087
Other services, except public administration	\$35,013	\$37,519	\$2,506
Arts, entertainment and recreation	\$33,013	\$35,459	\$2,156
Accommodation and Food Services	\$23,335	\$25,962	\$2,627

2. Provide an analysis of the employment needs of employers in those industry sectors and occupations.

There is an overall demand for jobs that require educational credentials such as a one-year certificate, two-year degree, and a four-year degree. Connecticut's Planning Commission for Higher Education has projected that 70% of all Connecticut jobs will require some type of postsecondary credentials by 2025.

The credentials that employers in Health Care and Social Assistance typically look for vary depending on the occupation. A Registered Nurse, one of the most in-demand professions in the region, requires either a bachelor's degree or associate degree. More than half of job postings (69.9%) look for applicants with less than two years of experience. A career as a Nursing Assistant or Home Health Aide requires a high school or vocational school diploma and certification in medical assisting.

Employers in Finance and Insurance typically look for candidates that have bachelor's degrees or higher. Of the 30,606 job postings in the last 12 months, 65.2% required a bachelor's degree. Employers typically look for applicants with experience, 44.4% of job postings over the previous 12 months call for someone with 3 to 5 years of experience. The top occupations in demand are Personal Banker/Banking Sales Staff, Insurance Sales Agent, Teller, Sales Representative, and Software Developer/Engineer.

Employers in Accommodation and Food Services look for candidates with at least a high school diploma. Of the 18,894 job postings in the last 12 months, 76% require a high school diploma, 8% associate degree, and 15.4% look for a bachelor's degree. Over half of the jobs posted seek applicants with less than two years of experience. The top occupations in demand are Food Service Team Member, Restaurant/Food Service Manager, Waiter/Waitress, Cook, and Restaurant/Food Service Supervisor.

Employers in Manufacturing are looking for candidates with at least a bachelor's degree. There were 27,975 job postings in the past 12 months, and 65.8% require a bachelor's degree. A little less than half, 42.7%, of the job postings are looking for someone with 3 to 5 years of experience. The top occupations in demand are Production Worker, Software Developer/Engineer, Manufacturing Machine Operator, Sales Representative, and Laborer/Warehouse Worker.

Employers in the Retail Trade industry look for candidates with at least a high school diploma and with little to no experience. 79.6% of job postings in the past 12 months call for a high school diploma and 0 to 2 years' experience. The top occupations in demand are Retail Sales Associate, Retail Store Manager/Supervisor, Laborer/Warehouse Worker, Cashier, and Customer Service Representative.

3. Provide an analysis of the knowledge and skills needed to meet the employment needs of the employers in the region, including employment needs in in-demand industry sectors and occupations.

Employers in the region generally expect workers to have specific baseline skills to qualify for a job. The top baseline skills requested by employers in the region are communication skills, teamwork/collaboration, organizational skills, problem-solving, and detail-oriented. Employers are also looking for a basic understanding of computer software such as Microsoft Office. The specialized skills and knowledge necessary to meet the employers' needs vary by the industry and occupation.

The top specialized skills that employers in Health Care and Social Assistance look for are patient care, scheduling, treatment planning, CPR, and customer service. Specific occupations within the industry look for different specialized skills. Registered Nurse is the most in-demand occupation, and employers look for applicants to be skilled at patient care, advance cardiac life support, treatment planning, and telemetry. Employers are also looking for candidates with skills in oncology, pediatrics, and acute care.

Finance and Insurance industry employers look for applicants with specialized skills in sales and customer service. The top requested skills are customer service, sales, project management, scheduling, and budgeting. The most in-demand occupation is Personal Banker/Banking Sales Staff, and employers look candidates to be skilled at product sales, cross-selling, and cash handling.

Employers in Accommodation and Food Services look for applicants to be customer service oriented and to have some knowledge and experience with the food service and retail industry. The specialized skills that employers look for are cleaning, cooking, scheduling, food preparation, and food safety. One of the most in-demand occupations is a Restaurant/Food Service Manager and requires specific defining skills such as restaurant management, cost control, and restaurant operations knowledge.

Retail Trade is another industry that looks for applicants to be customer service oriented and have some level of experience and knowledge of the retail sector. The top specialized skills that employers look for are retail sales, merchandising, and product knowledge. Laborer/Warehouse worker is an occupation that is in high demand and is expected to grow by almost 9% in the next ten years. Employers are looking for specific skills that differ from other Retail Trade occupations such as forklift operation, and shipment sorting & packaging.

Employers in Manufacturing are looking for candidates with a wide range of skills and vary depending on the occupation. The top specialized skills that employers in Manufacturing look for are project management, scheduling, repair, budgeting, and sales. Production worker is the most in-demand occupation in Manufacturing. Employers look for candidates to understand machine operation safety and to be able to operate a forklift, hand tools, and power tools.

4. Provide an analysis of the workforce in the region, including current labor force employment and unemployment data, information on labor market trends, and the educational and skill levels of the workforce in the region, including individuals with barriers to employment.

Southwestern Connecticut Workforce Development Area is made up of 20 towns with a labor force of 406,803 as of March 2020. Stamford and Bridgeport have the two largest labor forces in SWCT, Stamford currently has the largest at 70,234 and Bridgeport at 68,900. Bridgeport was previously trending as the largest labor force until 2017.

SOUTHWEST CT LABOR FORCE MARCH 2020			
Ansonia	9,253	Norwalk	50,923
Beacon Falls	3,546	Oxford	7,552
Bridgeport	68,900	Seymour	9,006
Darien	8,564	Shelton	22,013
Derby	6,688	Stamford	70,234
Easton	3,809	Stratford	27,062
Fairfield	29,260	Trumbull	17,760
Greenwich	28,760	Weston	4,315
Monroe	10,025	Westport	12,701

The Southwest Region (SWCT) saw an 8-year (2010-2018) population increase of 18,689 from 791,443 to 810,132. At the same time, Connecticut overall had a population decrease of 6,640 or -0.2%. Of the 20 towns in SWCT, 16 had a population increase while 4, Ansonia, Derby, Seymour, and Trumbull decreased in population. Stamford, Norwalk, Darien, and Westport were among the towns with the largest population increase.

In March 2020, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the region's unemployment rate was at 4.1%. The labor force in the region was 406,803. There were 390,206 people employed and 16,597 people unemployed. The number of people employed increased 27,021 from the average in 2014. Stamford had the most significant increase in employed workers, a rise of 5,210. Unemployment claims have skyrocketed since the coronavirus pandemic. This is the largest rise in claims seen by the Department of Labor since the Great Recession.

Providing opportunities for life-long learning needs to remain a priority as 31% of the population has a high school degree or less. Only 33% of the population has a bachelor's or advanced degree. In the middle are those with some college or certifications.

As with the rest of the state, the workforce in the Southwest Region of Connecticut is getting older. Over 48% of the population is over the age of 45. Meanwhile, the 22-45 age cohort makes up 46% of the population, and the numbers have been in decline. Additionally, the number of people over 65 years remaining in the workforce continues to grow. These individuals either wish to continue working or are unable to retire due to financial considerations.

Unemployment in the region had been improving slowly since 2014. Unemployment has dropped from 6.5% in 2014 to 4.1% in March 2020. Bridgeport has had the largest decrease from 9.7% average in 2014 to 6.1% in March 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the region's unemployment rates have risen, especially in the Bridgeport area.

Long-Term Unemployed

The long-term unemployed are people who have been out of work for more than half a year. Although the number of long-term unemployed continues to fall, thousands of workers have exhausted their six-month unemployment compensation and are still looking for work. Nationally, over 1 million people are long-term unemployed, 19.8% of the total unemployed population.

The chances of finding a job reduce the longer a person is unemployed. The long-term unemployed face many barriers on their search for employment that make it difficult to find work. The most prominent barrier to long-term unemployed individuals finding work is the shifting availability of job in the labor market. Some of the area's most prominent industries (Finance and Insurance and Manufacturing) have declined in jobs. Sometimes where new jobs have grown in the economy, long-term unemployed persons' skills no longer match. Another challenge is the employer's unwillingness to take a chance on someone who has been out of work for a long time. Studies have shown that the longer someone is out of work, the more difficult it is to find a job because of hiring bias.

The Southwest Region saw a 50% decrease in the number of people who exhausted unemployment benefits but we expect the numbers to rise due to unemployment caused by COVID-19.

Exhausted UI Benefits 2014	Exhausted UI Benefits 2018
8,812	5,878

Individuals with Barriers to Employment Recipients of Public Assistance

Changes in the economy have been key factors in the rise and fall of individuals and families receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) in the Southwest Region of Connecticut. The number of families on SNAP and TFA declined in the region.

In 2018, 90,954 individuals in the region received SNAP benefits, a decrease of 14% since 2015 (**see Attachment F**). Since 2015 The number of TFA recipients in SWCT decreased by 2,905 to 6,246 in 2018, a 31.7% decrease (**see Attachment G**). Most recipients for SNAP and TFA benefits live in Bridgeport, Stamford, and Norwalk. All towns in SWCT besides Wilton had a decrease in TFA recipients. Wilton had a small increase of 7 recipients from 2017-2018. Bridgeport had the most significant reduction in TFA recipients, a decrease of 1,702 recipients from 2015-2018. The decline in the region could be due to customers' benefits expiring, or customers finding employment and no longer need or qualify for services.

The re-entry population faces the same barriers shared by many "hard to serve" individuals and employment challenges due to criminal records and limited or interrupted work histories. The consequence of not addressing employment is that ex-offenders lack the means to secure a steady, livable income, supporting their families, and stabilizing their post-release lives. There is a clear need to ensure that ex-offenders have a pathway to employment as a key to supporting successful re-entry.

State-wide, 12,600 people were released from the Department of Corrections agencies last year. There has been a decrease in the number of adult offenders who have been placed on probation. Between 2012-2019 the number on probation in the region decreased by 1,765; most (1,187) live in Bridgeport. There has been a steady decrease in the prison population throughout the past five years in Connecticut. Statewide 12,600 people were released from the Department of Corrections agencies last year. Between April 2019 and 2020, discretionary releases have increased by 28%. The increase includes the DOC's efforts to transition people to the community during the public health emergency.

Need For Developmental Services

In 2018, 2,987 residents of Southwest Connecticut received benefits from the Connecticut Department of Developmental Services (DDS). This is an increase of 406 people since 2008. The highest number of DDS consumers live in Bridgeport, followed by Norwalk, Stamford, Stratford, and Trumbull.

There are fewer consumers of mental health and addiction services in the region compared with 2012. There were 15,736 consumers of the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) in the Southwest Region in 2019, down 3,180 consumers since a 2012 peak of 18,916 consumers in the region receiving DMHAS services. Most consumers are from Bridgeport, Norwalk, and Stamford.

Connecticut, like all states, has witnessed the devastating effects of the opioid epidemic. There has been a steady increase in total overdose deaths among residents from 357 deaths in 2012 to 1083 deaths in 2017. In 2016 Connecticut ranked 11th in the nation for the highest overdose rate, with 27.4 deaths per every 100,000 people. This increase was seen in every county in Connecticut, across all demographic groups.

The economic impacts of COVID-19 may contribute to a "perfect storm" of factors driving substance abuse rates higher than we have seen before—the combination of a pandemic, unemployment, and diminished personal/community supports. Previous post-disaster studies (e.g., 9/11, hurricanes, floods, and tornadoes), indicate that substance abuse generally increases following major traumatic events.

People with Disabilities

People with disabilities work in all industries and jobs, often closely matching the proportion of industries and jobs of those workers without a disability. According to census estimates, people with disabilities are slightly more likely to work in service occupations and twice as likely to work in production and material moving occupations than the general population. They are also somewhat more likely to work in the retail and manufacturing industries.

Experts often cite social stigma and a lack of information in the workplace about people with disabilities' abilities as a significant barrier to employment. Employers often have perceived notions of what duties a person with a disability can or cannot perform at the workplace, and these notions often do not match reality. Moreover, employers often do not have the right kind of information on assistive technology that is on the market to help people with disabilities perform at their highest level of ability. A final barrier can be employer concerns and uncertainty about compliance and regulatory issues with hiring, supervising, or terminating a person with a disability. These stigmas and information gaps often affect a person with a disability who is searching for a job. Through our American Job Center Assisted Services Center, we provide employment resources for job seekers with disabilities. Supportive, specialized equipment and software are available to program users to assist in your job search.

- 5. Provide an analysis of the workforce development activities (including education and training) in the region, including an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of such services and the capacity to provide such services to address the identified education and skill needs of the workforce and employment needs of employers in the region.**

Education plays a vital role in developing our current and future workforce system. With 31% of our population having only a high school diploma or less, this poses a large problem. With employers seeking better-qualified candidates, the career pathways for individuals with only a high school diploma or less become narrow. In the Southwest Region, 33% of the population has a bachelor's degree or more. Another 25% have an associate's degree or have completed some college, for a total of 58% of the population with some postsecondary credential.

The Southwest Region has always prescribed to the "Lifetime Learning" philosophy. Lifetime learning means that we are committed to assisting our customers as they progress through our products and even employment. We currently house an Adult Basic Education (ABE) and General Education Development (GED) class in our comprehensive Bridgeport AJC.

This allows us to begin addressing core educational skills enabling customers to attach to their desired trainings. We use a variety of workforce assessments to create customized career pathways for our customers. Our youth initiatives imbed educational skill attainment alongside occupational skills training. This approach allows for the delivery of educational services over a more extended period of time.

The Southwest Region works well with local adult education, community colleges, and for-profit providers of educational services to our customers. Our strength is in our system flexibility. We can customize approaches to assist our customer base with achieving their educational goals. A concern is that the time required for far too many of our customers to achieve a basic foundation of educational skills makes it difficult to achieve their career goals. Many of our customers with a high school degree or less are dealing with life issues that take away focus on training. Many are parents or need time to work to cover household expenses or cover the cost of transportation. This limits options on the types of careers that are available to them.

Moving forward, we are seeking to partner further with our employer base to better incorporate their educational requirements in preparatory programs. We will do this in partnership with the local adult education providers, the community colleges, and the community through targeted outreach.

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

Adults and dislocated workers in the Southwest Region service delivery area have a rich offering of services to consider. Beginning with orientations on accessing our services to assessments that align adults and dislocated workers with the proper information on selecting in-demand, high growth training opportunities. Positive recruitments in our AJC's and quality case management enables adults and dislocated workers to create the appropriate mix of services to reach positive outcomes.

For those adults and dislocated workers wanting training opportunities, they may choose qualifying training from the Eligible Training Providers Listing (ETPL). The ETPL provides access to over 110 certification and/or credentialing training programs. All these services are coordinated through case managers who are equipped to provide workforce development services to our customer base.

Additionally, adults may qualify for our Health Career Academy (HCA), which helps participants obtain a career in the growing healthcare industry. The HCA includes a broad partnership of healthcare providers, educators, trainers, and community-based organizations in Southwestern, Connecticut. The program is funded through the Federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

7. Provide a description and assessment of the type and availability of youth workforce investment activities in the local area, including activities for youth who are individuals with disabilities. The description and assessment must include an identification of successful models of such youth workforce investment activities.

The WorkPlace is dedicated to helping youth become valuable and self-reliant members of the community by offering skills training as well as job search and placement services. The WorkPlace also provides a platform for innovative partnerships between employers and school systems that seek to combat youth unemployment and promote career exploration for young adults living in Southwestern, Connecticut. The initiatives described below are available to youth with disabilities.

Youth workforce development services in the Southwest service delivery area are coordinated under our YouthWorks unit. YouthWorks is strategically designed to deliver workforce development services to youth ages 14-24. YouthWorks connects all relevant workforce development services a youth may need to become successful in one package.

YouthWorks has access to area vendors who have been selected under an RFP process to deliver assessments, financial literacy, entrepreneurial skills, educational advancement services, occupational skills training, and placement services. YouthWorks also collaborates with area businesses to develop and support internships and work experience opportunities for our youth.

Additionally, we operate a YouthBuild building program funded through the U.S. DOL that provides education, counseling and job skills to unemployed young Americans, typically high school dropouts, between the ages of 18 and 24 years old. YouthBuild is open to Bridgeport residents and is provided at no cost. The program is designed to help local youth learn job skills and serve the community by building affordable housing.

In the coming year, we will begin multiple youth apprenticeship programs, including one aimed at helping young adults pursue careers in manufacturing through collaboration with industry partners and Housatonic Community College. The program curriculum will produce graduates with industry-recognized credentials and training that will help them successfully transition into careers in manufacturing.

8. Identify gaps in service based on the above analyses.

There is a big challenge of addressing how to maintain the opportunity for highly educated workers in the region, while also increasing economic opportunity to a growing minority population. A focus on developing talent across the whole workforce is a critical area of intentional design. This includes talent creation, attraction, and retention and lends itself to region-wide collaborative efforts among employers, educators, and civic leadership.

The WorkPlace has initiated and supported good ideas among employers, communities, and educational leadership. Under WIOA, it may be possible to extend that leadership to focus more resources on critical intermediary functions of staffing sector partnerships and providing the glue required to accomplish and sustain innovation. Some essential areas of innovation are:

- Deepen employer engagement by sector. Sector-based partnerships have been developed in healthcare and manufacturing to engage employers more comprehensively.
- The WorkPlace has taken important steps to adapt employment services to new work structures. Yet, we have just begun to provide the kinds of services that many in the “new workforce” need from new sources if traditional attachments to jobs and the labor force are changing, as they seem to be. This includes job networks, support services like insurance and education, and helping groups of “new” workers craft a sustainable career while their dependence on and attachment to employers may be less and less.

III. LWDB VISION, GOALS AND STRATEGIES

1. Identify the vision, goals and strategies adopted by the LWDB and how these will affect the preparation of an educated and skilled workforce.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) presents an opportunity to improve job and career options for workers and job seekers through an integrated, job-driven workforce system that links diverse talent to businesses. It supports the development of a strong, vibrant regional economy where businesses thrive, and people want to live and work.

Vision

To establish innovative collaborations that inspire success and support an environment conducive to economic development, while providing opportunities for lifelong learning and personal growth, which contribute to building a vibrant economy through increased employment opportunities.

Goals

- To increase access to and opportunities for employment, education, training, and support services needed for success in the labor market, particularly for those with barriers to employment.
- To support the alignment of workforce investment, education, and economic development systems in support of a coordinated, accessible, and high-quality workforce development system.
- Develop and maintain a high-quality workforce system that supports and enhances the economic health of the business community and provides a prepared workforce with the skilled workers needed for businesses to succeed in a global economy.
- Increase opportunities for youth to participate in work-based learning through summer employment, apprenticeship, internships, and other similar experiences.

Strategies

The WorkPlace and the regional agencies responsible for the administration of the core WIOA programs propose and will support a set of broadly conceived strategies intended to achieve the vision and goals outlined above. These strategies will serve as a framework for implementation efforts, with corresponding detailed state actions to be developed.

Strengthen Current Workforce

- Promote the expanded implementation of effective, integrated employment and training/contextualized learning strategies to improve skills acquisition and employment outcomes for targeted low-skill job seekers, including adult education students and participants in time-limited public assistance. Expand proven best practices as feasible to include additional prospective participants, working closely with businesses/employers in key sectors seeking qualified, skilled workers. Maintain fidelity to rigorous program standards. Use the recommendations of the State Plan Addressing Contextualized Learning, Early College, and Career Certificate Programs as a framework.

- Maximize opportunities for success for all individual job seekers and workers in Connecticut's talent pool, promoting innovation, effective coordination, resource alignment, and integrated service delivery to advance the employability and career prospects for the broadest possible range of customers, including (but not limited to) veterans, the long-term unemployed, public assistance participants, individuals with disabilities, ex-offenders, homeless individuals, out-of-school youth, low-skilled adults, limited English proficient, etc.
- Promote and maximize opportunities to fulfill WIOA statutory language that adults receiving public assistance benefits receive priority access to services.

Support Business Growth

- Promote the implementation of **business/employer-led industry partnerships** at both state and regional/local levels, focusing on targeted sectors. The focus of these partnerships will be on high-priority, high-value, high-demand sectors, and occupations.
- Promote effective implementation of **regional/local sector-based initiatives** in targeted sectors, intended to address employers' priority needs, building on the achievements of existing successful regional sector initiatives. Strategically connect qualified jobseekers produced by the workforce system to job opportunities with employers benefitting from public investments, to strengthen the link between workforce development and economic development strategies.
- **Support local sector partnerships** through ongoing program initiatives that align with statewide policies related to sector partnerships. WIOA requires sector partnerships as a local workforce activity and requires states to use a portion of statewide discretionary funds to support local areas in the development, convening, and implementation of industry/sector partnerships.
- Continue efforts as an incubator of innovative and effective partnerships. For example:
 - The WorkPlace utilizes funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to implement the **Southwestern Connecticut Health CareRx Academy**, a regional partnership of hospitals, colleges, businesses, business groups, labor, and CBO's. The Academy addresses two significant needs of the region: providing low-income populations with core skills and supports to obtain employment and helping ameliorate healthcare industry workforce shortages. The Academy provides no-cost training and support to help participants get a career in the growing healthcare industry.
 - The **American Job Center Career Coach** is a career center on wheels and a mobile classroom designed to go where people are and deliver career services and training opportunities traditionally available in an American Job Center. Employers can provide customized training to their employees by reserving the American Job Center Career Coach to provide training on site.
 - The WorkPlace began exploring the challenges that long-term unemployed workers face searching for employment. A need to transcend traditional remedies for the unemployed became clear. **Platform to Employment** was created to address the unique challenges of returning the long-term unemployed to work while providing employers a new avenue to a skilled workforce. Businesses receive a risk-free opportunity to evaluate and consider hiring participants during a work experience funded by Platform to Employment.
 - The WorkPlace is committed to reducing unemployment and recidivism rates among the reentry population. We launched **Platform to Employment Re-Entry** as a statewide pilot program modeled after the nationally recognized Platform to Employment (P2E) program. Platform to Employment Re-Entry provides formerly incarcerated individuals with work readiness and career development training. The core of the training focuses on life skills and professional development training to enhance confidence and improve employment opportunities.
 - We recently launched **Center 180** to serve young adults between the ages of 18-24 with past or present criminal justice involvement. Center 180 provides career guidance, job search assistance, and educational support, including GED preparation. In the coming years we will seek to expand upon these initiatives to better support the re-entry population.

Transform System Capacity

- Re-imagine delivery of customer services to individual job seekers and workers in the American Job Center One-Stop system. Develop and implement streamlined service flow with efficiently aligned and integrated processes

implemented by coordinated service teams representing the full range of contributions from system partners and stakeholders.

- Develop and implement strong, effective cross-program, functional partnerships to enhance the efficient delivery of effective customer services. Develop consensus on unified, consistent messaging and communications to key audiences/market segments. Collaboratively pursue critical resources including grants and leverage available resources strategically. Implement consistent cross-agency/cross-program staff training on shared/common functions and responsibilities.
- Conduct ongoing research and analysis to identify opportunities for continuous system improvement and maximize system capacity, making strategic use of data to focus training efforts and align resources. Focus training investments and advocacy on clearly identified best practices for each targeted sector and each customer segment.

Develop Future Talent

- Develop pathways for academically low-performing at-risk students and out-of-school youth, leading to certifications and credentials that enhance their viability in the job market. Build on the year-round YouthWorks program to academically prepare at-risk high school students for college success. Build on and expand the opportunity youth coordinated career pathways model to help targeted out-of-school youth acquire valuable post-secondary credentials and get a job.

2. Describe the process used to develop the LWDB's vision and goals, including a description of the participants in the process.

As part of our strategic planning process, we hosted a series of workforce forums to explore topics such as service coordination, core programming, customer access, and employer engagement. The discussions focused on how the American Job Center system can better align available talent with the needs of the employers in the region. We included local and regional business associations in these events.

Each of these forums was open to the public and included contributions from Connecticut based public and private sector leaders. This was an appeal to the community for advice, support, and collaboration. Invited parties included members of local chambers of commerce and business associations, human resource departments, public & private education providers, transportation organizations, labor, human service agencies, government officials, and philanthropy.

Based on the feedback from these public forums, concepts for the LWDB's vision and goals were presented to the Executive Committee of the LWDB for initial input and guidance. Subsequently, the vision, goals, and entire plan document were presented to the Board of Directors of The WorkPlace for consideration and approval.

3. Describe strategies to work with entities that carry out the core programs to align resources available to the local area and to achieve the strategic vision and goals established by the local board.

Through our AJC partner meetings, we will continue to meet and review our service delivery system. At these meetings, we discuss the available resources and strategize on how best we can align our resources to have the most significant impact. The development of new Memorandums of Understanding (MOU's) has dramatically increased our efficiency as ensured we are not duplicating services while maxing resources to needed services.

4. Describe service strategies the LWDB has in place or will develop that will improve meeting the needs of customers with disabilities as well as other population groups.

The Southwest Region has done considerable work with integrating customers with disabilities into our centers. Our Bridgeport AJC houses our assisted services unit. This unit is designed to help customers with disabilities in navigating the American workforce system. We coordinate all disability-related services through our assistive services unit to address the needs in partnership with the Voc-Rehab system in our satellite offices.

5. Describe how the LWDB's goals relate to the achievement of federal performance accountability measures to support economic growth and self-sufficiency.

The federal performance measures are used as guiding principles in our strategic design. The federal performance measures are based around placement, credentialing, earning change, and retention. Our system is set up to provide access to employment and to credentials in high demand fields, which should result in earnings change. While our retention unit continues to assist our customers during the twelve months of follow up. Our goals are systematically aligned to increase access to and opportunities for employment, education, training, and support services needed for success in the labor market, particularly for those with barriers to employment. With the federal performance goals under standard measures, the attainment of a credential and movement into either employment or post-secondary schooling is designed into our process. We have business services staff as well as retention staff to assist our customer's into successful outcomes continually.

6. Indicate anticipated local levels of performance for the federal measures.

See Attachment H for a copy of SW WIOA performance goals for PY 20-21.

7. Describe indicators used by the LWDB to measure performance and effectiveness of the local fiscal agent (where appropriate), contracted service providers, and the one-stop delivery system in the local area.

In ongoing efforts to both monitor and improve upon our system delivery, we formally monitor our system. The monitoring of our partners is conducted against our Memorandums of Understanding (See Attachment E). Moreover, we will begin to use surveys with employers, customers, and partners to gauge our effectiveness better.

IV. COORDINATION OF SERVICES

1. Coordination with Partner Programs and Services

Describe how WIOA Title I services will be coordinated across programs/partners in the one-stop centers, including Vocational Rehabilitation, Adult Education and Literacy activities, and TANF. Specify how the LWDB will coordinate with these programs to prevent duplication and improve services to customers.

WIOA Title I services are coordinated in a manner that allows for the customer to attach to them seamlessly. Vocational Rehabilitation has an on-site presence in our comprehensive Bridgeport AJC. Our Bridgeport AJC houses our assisted services unit. This unit is designed to help customers with disabilities in navigating the American workforce system. We coordinate all disability-related services through our assistive services unit to address the needs in partnership with the Voc-Rehab system in our satellite offices.

We have an open entry Adult Basic Education (ABE) and a General Educational Development (GED) program at our comprehensive Bridgeport AJC. We refer customers to the existing ABE and GED programs available through the States Department of Education (SDE) programming in our satellite offices. We also have an open entry English as a Second Language (ESL) program in our comprehensive Bridgeport office. This ESL program prepares our non-English speakers onsite, reducing the number of trips they need to make to offices for case management and services. The ESL, as well as the GED, are also offered virtually.

We have fully integrated our Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) program in all our AJC's. This reduces duplication and allows for co-enrollment into WIOA if the customer requires additional services. Our work with the TANF/JFES program has been an ongoing program administered by The WorkPlace for several years.

In our MOU's, we define the career services, how to access them, and who is providing them to ensure we are not duplicating any services.

2. Coordination with Economic Development Activities

Provide a description of how the LWDB will coordinate workforce development activities carried out in the local area with economic development activities.

Economic Development (ED) representatives are integral members of our local boards. Our regional Business Services Representatives have regular communication with Eds to both listen and share information. Collaboration with Eds is a win opportunity for the workforce system and Eds because we have shared customers and shared interest in viable training solutions for a work-ready workforce.

We work with ED as a team alongside the Connecticut Department of Labor to inform new employers interested in coming into our region about the services available to them. During the coming year, we will continue to strengthen communication with Eds and continue to share the intelligence we gain from them with our training partners.

The WorkPlace regularly participates in meetings and forums with ED and local business leaders regarding the development of the regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) plans as part of our long-term strategic planning process. These planning sessions help us explore topics such as business growth, employment trends, and workforce evolution. Our participation with three different Regional Council of Governments in our workforce area serves to engage community leaders, leverage the involvement of the private sector, and establish a blueprint for regional collaboration.

3. Coordination with Education and Workforce Development Activities

Describe how the LWDB will coordinate education and workforce development activities carried out in the local area with relevant secondary and postsecondary education programs and activities to coordinate strategies, enhance services, and avoid duplication of services.

The two community colleges in our service delivery area have representation on our Board of Directors, enabling the colleges to receive and provide guidance that shapes our AJC system. Furthermore, both community colleges in our service delivery area attend our AJC partner meetings to discuss client flow, changes in programming, and overall labor market information.

The primary training vehicle in our area is the Individual Training Account (ITA). ITAs are issued to qualifying Adults, Dislocated Workers and Youth, via the statewide Eligible Training Provider Listing (ETPL). The community colleges have both credit and non-credit programs on the ETPL. We allow our WIOA eligible youth to select post-secondary training via the ETPL.

4. Coordination with Transportation and Other Supportive Services

Describe how the LWDB will coordinate workforce development activities carried out under this title in the local area with the provision of transportation, including public transportation and other appropriate supportive services in the local area.

We work with our local transit operators to maximize access to both employment and training. We train our counselors using the transit operator's transportation 101 curricula. We have transit operators at our AJC partner meetings. At these meetings, we discuss new routes and schedules. During the summer for our youth program, we coordinate public transportation access via bus passes. We cover transportation under our support services policy for Adults, Dislocated Workers, JFES, and Youth.

5. Coordination with Wagner-Peyser Services

Provide a description of plans and strategies for, and assurances concerning, maximizing coordination of services provided by the state employment service under the Wagner-Peyser Act and services provided in the local area through the one-stop delivery system to improve service delivery and avoid duplication of services.

Unemployment Insurance Services for prospective and current claimants.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE SERVICES	Responsible Party
Implementation of the provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) related to UI programs.	CTDOL
Provide in-person UI assistance (dedicated area) in the American Job Centers.	CTDOL
Provide UI assistance in the American Job Centers using a dedicated phone line that prioritizes calls to the front of the line to our trained UI Call Center staff.	CTDOL
Referring to UI claimants for training, education resources, and all other programs provided by DOL Employment Services and partner staff. Therefore, increasing the reemployment of UI claimants and providing employers with skilled workers matching the labor market needs.	CTDOL
Expose claimants to other UI programs offered by DOL. These include Short-Term Compensation/Shared Work, military and federal civilians' programs to veterans, Reemployment Eligibility Assistance, Enhanced Reemployment Services, Rapid Responses, etc.	CTDOL
Improve efficiencies in the UI process by answering in-person customer questions/inquiries in lieu of long wait times with the Tele-benefits line. Inquiries include assistance in filing appeals, on-line account assistance, provide UI status letters, identity verification, address changes, processing continued UI claims, and providing desk aids for web assistance.	CTDOL
Provide UI assistance, including new claims taking for individuals with special needs.	CTDOL

6. Coordination with Adult Education and Literacy

Describe how the LWDB will coordinate workforce development activities carried out under this title in the local area with the provision of adult education and literacy activities under Title II in the local area, including a description of how the local board will carry out, consistent with subparagraphs (A) and (B)(i) of section 107(d)(11) and section 232, the review of local applications submitted under Title II.

WIOA promotes coordination between the Local Board and adult education providers by requiring in section 107(d)(11) that the Local Board review a provider's application for AEFLA funds before the application is submitted to the eligible agency. The purpose of the Local Board review is to determine whether the application is consistent with the local workforce plan and to make recommendations to the eligible agency to promote alignment with the local workforce plan. We address this provision in our MOU's with both SDE and our local Adult-Education providers.

7. Cooperative Agreements

Provide a description of the replicated cooperative agreements (as defined in WIOA section 107(d)(11)) between the local board or other local entities described in section 101(a)(11)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29U.S.C 721(a)(11)(B)) and the local office of a designated state agency or designated state unit administering programs carried out under Title I of such Act (29 U.S.C. 721(a)(11) with respect to efforts that will enhance the provision of services to individuals with disabilities and to other individuals, such as cross-training staff, technical assistance, use and sharing of information, cooperative efforts with employers and other efforts of cooperation, collaboration and coordination.

As of this submittal, formal cooperative agreements have not yet been completed with providers of adult education and literacy, career technical education in the schools, and Vocational Rehabilitation system, but discussions are ongoing. They will result in agreements that address each of the areas identified above.

V. DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM SERVICES

1. System Description

Identify the programs that are included in the system and how the LWDB will work with the entities carrying out core programs and other workforce development programs to support alignment in provision of services.

The WorkPlace has strived to create a seamless one-stop customer experience. We have indoctrinated the universal aspects of a one-stop in both delivery and design. We seek to partner with government and community organizations to maximize resources and create impactful outcomes. Through our Memorandums of Understanding, we outline a delivery system that both maximizes resources and leverages our respected strengths.

The WorkPlace delivers Adult and Dislocated Worker program activities through the American Job Center system via comprehensive and affiliate centers and virtually. Career services are provided to a wide range of jobseekers, with specialty programs directed to returning veterans and individuals with disabilities. Services include career coaching, guidance on job search techniques, skill and interest assessments, advice and support through group sessions, individual employment planning, and job development and placement. Occupational training is provided through access to Individual Training Accounts. Business Services Teams engage employers and deliver recruitment and hiring assistance. The Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) business services and Southwest AJC business service staff are co-located in the comprehensive Bridgeport AJC.

2. Sub Grants and Contracts

Provide a description of the competitive process to be used to award subgrants and contracts in the local area for WIOA-funded activities and the services to be made available.

The WorkPlace utilizes an open and competitive process to award contracts in the local area. Requests for Proposals (RFP) are published in local newspapers with substantial distribution, on The WorkPlace website, social media, and notices sent to the organization, which has requested updates from The WorkPlace.

The WorkPlace conducts bidders' conferences to answer questions regarding published RFP's. All interested bidders are strongly encouraged to call into the meeting, as The WorkPlace staff does not answer questions about an RFP after a conference (unless the questions pertain specifically to the technical aspects of the RFP or the RFP format).

To be considered for funding, bidders must submit printed, hard copy proposals along with a USB flash drive, which contains an electronic copy of the proposal and any attachments before the published deadline. Bidders will be asked to submit proposals that comply with a set of standard presentation guidelines.

Deadlines for submission are published include the date and time. Proposals received after stated deadlines will not be accepted under any circumstances. Proposals may be hand-delivered or submitted by U.S. Mail or other mail carrier services, such as Fed Ex or UPS. Faxed and emailed proposals are not accepted.

The award of a contract for WIOA-funded activities is contingent upon 1) Favorable evaluation of the proposal in relation to other proposals; 2) Approval of the proposal by The WorkPlace Board of Directors; and 3) Successful negotiation of any changes to the proposal.

An initial screening of all proposals is conducted by staff of The WorkPlace to insure (1) the proposal was submitted on time, in the proper format and with the required number of copies attached; (2) the proposal is responsive to the RFP and all RFP questions and sections; and (3) all required signatures appear on the document. If a proposal does not meet the technical requirements of the screening process, it will not continue through the review and rating process and will be returned to the bidder.

If the proposal meets the requirements of the screening process, it will then be evaluated by a program review team. Proposals will be scored, and recommendations made to the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of The WorkPlace, which will approve tentative funding. All decisions of the Executive Committee must be ratified by the full Board of Directors at its quarterly meetings.

3. **Expanding Access to Employment**

Describe how the LWDB, working with entities carrying out core programs, will expand access to employment, training, education and supportive services for eligible individuals, particularly eligible individuals with barriers to employment, including how the local board will facilitate the development of career pathways and co-enrollment, as appropriate, in core programs, and improve access to activities leading to a recognized postsecondary credential.

Our AJC's are designed to assist customers in identifying what program or product is suitable to achieve their desired goal. From the moment a customer walks into our centers, our process is open and informative. All our AJC's have an agreed-upon schedule of possible orientations. These orientations are coordinated with our partners to leverage resources and reduce the duplication of services.

We have a dedicated space to assist customers with disabilities in navigating the American Workforce System. Our Assistive Services Unit blends adaptive technology with qualified staff to provide a rich experience for our customers with disabilities. Furthermore, we work alongside the State's Vocational Rehab system to create life plans with employment eligible customers. We will continue to build upon this promising practice.

4. **Key Industry Sectors**

Identify how the LWDB plans to better align its resources to support and meet the training and employment needs of key industry sectors in the local area. Describe policies adopted or planned for aligning training initiatives and Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) to sector strategies and demand occupations.

The Southwest Region uses ITA's to make customers marketable in today's jobs market. We have a benchmark system that pays ETPL vendors for success. We prioritize high growth in-demand certifications and credentials. We utilize customer choice if the program is on the ETPL. Customers must complete program research as well as labor market information to support the training.

In the Southwest Region, we have always had healthy career pathways for our customers. We have operated healthcare, manufacturing, and construction pathways. Our future pathways will address educational advancements for our academically low-performing at-risk students and out-of-school youth.

5. **Industry Partnerships**

Describe how the LWDB will identify and work with key industry partnerships where they exist within the local area, and coordinate and invest in partnership infrastructure where they are not yet developed.

We will continue to develop our Healthcare sector through our HHS funded Healthcare Academy. In contrast, our partnership with Housatonic Community College under the Connecticut Advanced Manufacturing Initiative (CAMI) program continues to deliver positive results. In the next year, we will launch three apprenticeship training programs with funding from the state and the U.S. DOL. These programs are aimed at helping Southwestern Connecticut's workforce remain competitive in the Manufacturing and Health Care industries

6. **In-demand Training**

Describe the process utilized by the LWDB to ensure that training provided is linked to in-demand industry sectors or occupations in the local area or in another area to which a participant is willing to relocate.

The WorkPlace conducts a comprehensive analysis of labor market information to ensure that training provided is linked to in-demand industry sectors or occupations in the local area or in another area to which a participant is willing to relocate. Specifically, the AJC staff is trained on the use of Labor Market Information to assist our customers in making in-demand career training choices. The ETPL is the primary vehicle from which our customers choose qualified trainings. We currently have an industry focus on Healthcare and Manufacturing.

7. Employer Engagement

Describe the strategies and services that will be used in the local area to:

A. facilitate engagement of employers, including small employers and employers in in-demand industry sectors and occupations, in workforce development programs;

The engagement of employers is the primary focus of the Board. We are consistently meeting with employers and bring employers through our AJC's to discuss our process and services. Our business services team frequently meets with employers to ascertain their needs for both current and future growth. We convene forums and work through our local chambers to get information out to our business community.

To support employer engagement, we produced a video series about how a business can benefit from using the American Job Center. The series is available on ajcswct.com and answers questions about available services, recruitment, registering for CTHires.com, and several other areas of interest.

B. support a local workforce development system that meets the needs of businesses in the local area; and

We are consistently asking our employer base about their needs. We work closely with our business services reps to package products and services to meet employer needs. Employers are readers for our Request for Proposals, which gives them a voice in the types of trainings we are securing for our customers.

C. better coordinate workforce development programs and economic development.

Economic Development (ED) representatives are integral members of our local board. Our regional Business Services Representatives have regular communication with EDs to both listen and share information. Because we have shared customers (employers) and shared interest in viable training solutions for a work-ready workforce, the collaboration with EDs is a win-win for the workforce system and the employers.

We work with ED as a team alongside the Connecticut Department of Labor to inform new employers interested in coming into our region about the services available to them. During the coming year, we will continue to strengthen communication with our economic developers and continue to share the intelligence we gain from them with our training partners.

The WorkPlace regularly participates in meetings and forums with ED and local business leaders regarding the development of a regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) plans as part of our long-term strategic planning process. We work with three regional planning groups, and these connections help us explore topics such as business growth, employment trends, and workforce evolution.

8. Priority for Services

Describe the local policy and procedures that have been established to give priority to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient in the provision of individualized career services and training services in the Adult program.

With respect to funds allocated for adult employment and training activities, priority for career and training services is given to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient. (WIOA § 134(c)(3)(E)).

Under WIOA, priority must be provided regardless of funding levels (see NPRM § 680.600(a)). Veterans and eligible spouses continue to receive priority of service for all DOL-funded job training programs, which include WIOA programs. See priority of service policy in attachment I. However, as described in TEGL 10-09, when programs are statutorily required to provide priority for a group of individuals, such as the WIOA priority described above, priority must be provided in the following order:

- A. First, to veterans and eligible spouses who are also included in the groups given statutory priority for WIOA adult formula funds. This means that veterans and eligible spouses who are also recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, or individuals who are basic skills deficient would receive priority for services provided with WIOA adult formula funds.
- B. Second, to non-covered persons (that is, individuals who are not veterans or eligible spouses) who are included in the groups given priority for WIOA adult formula funds.
- C. Third, to veterans and eligible spouses who are not included in WIOA's priority groups.
- D. Last, to non-covered persons outside the groups given priority under WIOA.

9. Training Services

Describe how training services will be provided, including if contracts for training services are to be used, how such contracts will be coordinated with the use of ITAs.

In the Southwest Region delivery system, we utilize Individual Training Accounts as a primary vehicle for training. Once a customer completes WIOA eligibility, they are shown how to access the Statewide Eligible Training Providers List (ETPL). We enter into contracts with the ETPL vendors when a WIOA customer selects their training from the ETPL. We currently do not contract out for training services under Adult and Dislocated Worker funding.

For our WIOA Youth program, we follow our procurement process for the following services: Occupational Skills Training (OST), Career Pathways. Contracts are created for each agency selected.

10. Customer Choice

Describe processes utilized by the LWDB to ensure customer choice in the selection of training programs.

A customer may select any WIOA approved education and training program in the state, as listed on the current ETPL if the customer meets all other criteria relating to the initial and subsequent eligibility for such educational and/or training services. Individuals seeking WIOA funded assistance have the freedom of "customer choice" in selecting the educational and training program that best fits their personal and career needs. The American Job Center staff assists customers in making informed choices regarding their career path by disseminating appropriate labor market information in targeted industries and in

occupations that are in demand. We use a variety of assessments and labor market information customized to the customer to illustrate the pathway. Ultimately, if the customer meets the requirements of their desired training, they may evoke their rights under customer choice, and they will be approved for that training.

11. Individual Training Accounts

Describe the process and criteria for issuing Individual Training Accounts (ITAs).

Operator/provider counselors' issue ITA's. Using the prescribed eligibility process under WIOA regulations, they first determine if a customer is eligible. The customer must take the CASAS test and score above the agreed-upon scale scores to consider a selected training tract. The customer will also conduct program research, labor market analysis, and a financial worksheet.

Once the counselor approves training, the file is sent electronically to a supervisor. The supervisor must approve for the customer to be placed in that training.

A. Describe any ITA limitations established by the board.

We currently pay a maximum of \$3,000 per ITA. We have a local cap of \$2,000 for the Certified Nurses Aid certification.

B. Describe any exceptions to the use of ITAs.

Not applicable

12. Enhancing Apprenticeships

Describe how the LWDB will enhance the use of apprenticeships to support the local economy and individuals' career advancement. Describe how job seekers are made aware of apprenticeship opportunities in the area's career centers.

We have seen a steady movement toward the expansion of apprenticeship programs and have worked hard to prepare for these opportunities. In the next year, we will launch three apprenticeship training programs with funding from the state and the U.S. DOL. These programs are aimed at helping the Southwestern Connecticut workforce remain competitive in the Manufacturing and Health Care industries.

Job seekers are made aware of all products and services in three primary ways. The first is through a general orientation. These general orientations cover multiple offerings and provide instructions on how to gain further information on each program's eligibility requirements. The second way a customer can receive information is through our counselors. Counselors are cross trained to have requisite program knowledge on all of our products and services. The third way is from our recently re-launched American Job Center website, which provides a customer with quick access to pertinent contact information for all of our programs.

13. Other Program Initiatives

Describe the services to be provided that may include the implementation of initiatives such as incumbent worker training programs, on-the-job training programs, customized training programs, industry and sector strategies career pathway initiatives, utilization of effective business intermediaries, and other initiatives in the support of the board's vision and strategic goals.

The Southwest Region will continue to deliver career pathways to all WIOA adults, dislocated workers, and youth through its service delivery model. These pathways illustrate clear attainment to a living wage in our area. We have effective business partnerships in healthcare, manufacturing, and service sectors.

14. Service Provider Continuous Improvement

Describe the LWDB's efforts to ensure the continuous improvement of eligible providers of services, including contracted services providers and providers on the eligible training provider list.

We go out under our procurement process every two years. This keeps our programming current and removes any provider(s) that is not meeting the performance outcomes. We pay our contracted vendors on performance-based contracts. If providers do not achieve the negotiated performance, their contracts are closed.

The Connecticut Department of Labor oversees the Eligible Providers List. We provide information on the training entities in our service delivery area.

15. Youth Program Design

Describe the design framework for youth programs in the local area, and how the 14 program elements required in §681.460 of the WIOA regulations are to be made available within that framework.

Youth in the Southwest service delivery area are supported through YouthWorks. YouthWorks serves as the framework for providing both our youth and vendor base a single gateway to multiple programs and a consistent connection. Through YouthWorks, individuals can access our year-round services, summer employment program, YouthBuild, and Center 180, which supports youth who have been involved with the juvenile justice system.

YouthWorks serves as the “glue,” keeping our youth engaged in services while monitoring our vendors for compliance. It’s a symbiotic relationship where the Youth Workforce Specialist seeks to provide our youth with access to any services, they might need to be successful.

Per Section 129(c)(2) of the Act, the following fourteen (14) elements must be included in youth programs. These services listed must be accessible to participants (based on need) and can be offered through collaborative partnerships with community resources. The chart below illustrates the WIOA youth element and the responsible party for delivering the service.

1. Tutoring, study skills training, instruction, and evidence-based dropout prevention and recovery strategies that lead to the completion of the requirements for a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent (including a recognized certificate of attendance or similar document for individuals with disabilities) or a recognized postsecondary credential;	All educational advancement services are secured through contracted vendors. For youth eligible to attend Adult-Ed, we shall refer them. We also work with our two community colleges to assist with the matriculation into their programs.
2. Alternative secondary school offerings;	Referrals through School systems
3. Paid and unpaid work experiences that have as a component of academic and occupational education, which may include:	Coordinated through YouthWorks in partnerships with employers and contracted vendors
a) summer employment opportunities and other employment opportunities available throughout the school year;	Coordinated through YouthWorks in partnerships with employers and contracted vendors
b) pre-apprenticeship programs;	Secured through contracted vendors
c) internships and job shadowing; and	Secured through contracted vendors
d) on-the-job training opportunities;	
4. Occupational skills training, which shall include priority consideration for training programs that lead to recognized postsecondary credentials that are aligned with in-demand industry sectors or occupations in the local area involved;	Secured through contracted vendors
5. Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster;	Secured through contracted vendors
6. Leadership development opportunities, which may include community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility and other positive social and civic behaviors, as appropriate;	Secured through contracted vendors
7. Supportive services;	Coordinated through YouthWorks in partnerships with contracted vendors
8. Adult mentoring for the period of participation and a subsequent period, for a total of not less than 12 months;	Secured through contracted vendors
9. Follow-up services for no less than 12 months after the completion of participation, as appropriate;	Coordinated through YouthWorks in partnerships with contracted vendors

10. Comprehensive guidance and counseling, which may include drug and alcohol abuse counseling and referral, as necessary;	Secured through contracted vendors
11. Financial Literacy Education;	Coordinated through YouthWorks in partnerships with contracted vendors
12. Entrepreneurial Skills Training;	Secured through contracted vendors
13. Services that provide labor market and employment information about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in the local area, such as career awareness, career counseling, and career exploration;	Coordinated through YouthWorks in partnerships with contracted vendors
14. Activities that help youth prepare for the transition to postsecondary education and training.	Secured through contracted vendors

A. Definition of the term “a youth who is unable to compute or solve problems, or read, write, or speak English at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual’s family, or in society.” Describe how the local board defines whether a youth is unable to demonstrate these skills well enough to function on the job, in their family, or in society and what assessment instruments are used to make this determination. 20 C.F.R. §681.290.

YouthWorks uses standardized assessments such as the Comprehensive Adults Student Assessment (CASAS) to arrive at a youth’s current math and reading levels. We have established that a twelve-grade reading and math level are in line with our employer needs. Youth scoring below this twelfth-grade level are provided with additional educational advancements to bring their scores in line with employer expectations.

B. Definition of “requires additional assistance.” Describe how the local board defines the term “requires additional assistance” used in determining eligibility for WIOA-funded youth programs.

A youth who “requires additional assistance” for the purposes of WIOA youth eligibility is defined as follows: Is an at-risk youth who requires additional assistance to:

(1) complete an educational program: a youth who is at risk of dropping out of high school as documented by his/her school or a youth who previously dropped out of an educational program or a youth with poor attendance patterns in an educational program during the last twelve calendar months;

OR

(2) secure and hold employment: a high school graduate (or equivalent) who has not held a full-time job for more than three consecutive months and lacks work readiness skills necessary to obtain and retain employment as documented by the youth objective assessment and described in case notes;

16. Rapid Response

Provide a description of how the LWDB will coordinate workforce development activities in the local area with rapid response activities.

For companies and their workers, the effects of closing a facility or layoff can be devastating. Companies may be at a loss to prevent a closing, perhaps unaware of the help available to weather a downturn without having to lay off employees. Workers are also left shocked and discouraged by sudden layoffs finding themselves unsure of how to get back on their feet. The WorkPlace seeks to ease the impact of layoffs and to assure that workers are offered a full range of benefits and services in coordination with Connecticut’s Rapid Response Team, headed by the State Department of Labor. The Team is made up of representatives from the Labor Department, The WorkPlace, and other state agencies, including the Department of Economic and Community Development and the Department of Social Services.

The Rapid Response Team is available to conduct, prior to layoffs, “*Early Intervention*” sessions where employees can learn about unemployment benefits, job search assistance, and training opportunities. Information is also made available on community services and local agencies that provide help, advocacy, and support to dislocated workers and their families.

Examples of information provided in this coordinated response include:

- Overview of the Unemployment Insurance Program, Separation Packet and FAQ’s
- Details on free career transition services
- Orientation to state-supported websites where employers post jobs
- Career transition networking groups
- Important Information Workers Need to Know to Protect their Health Coverage and Retirement Benefits
- Information on companies with approved individual major medical insurance policies
- United Way’s “Where to Turn in Connecticut When You Become Unemployed”
- Connections to community service representatives

VI. RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Please address the following in response to the COVID -19 public health emergency.

1. Describe the economic and workforce impact this event has had on your local area.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the lives of Connecticut residents. Many of the top industries have been affected negatively by the Stay at Home order. The impact on Fairfield County has been devastating and continues to grow as the region reports the highest number of coronavirus cases and deaths in the state. Health Care and Social Assistance leads unemployment claims tracked by industry followed by Retail Trade, Accommodation and Food Services. Those who are self-employed make up a new, and the largest, category of individuals collecting benefits.

In the Health Care and Social Assistance industry, offices of dentists, physicians, and child care services have been the most affected and have the highest number of unemployment claims. Bridgeport, the second largest labor force in SWCT, has had the highest number of claims in Connecticut, followed by Hartford and Stamford.

The economic impact of COVID-19 is widespread. Employers have encouraged their workers to telecommute, and a number of colleges are moving to online instruction. Industries that provide better-paying jobs and require higher educated employees are more likely to have telecommuting opportunities. However, industries that depend on people being in a particular location

in order to make a product (manufacturing) or enjoy an experience (retail, hotel, dining) there has been a more substantial negative impact,

2. Describe any new service delivery strategies and partnerships you have implemented or have plans to implement following this crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic halted traditional service delivery in March of 2020. Operations in the Southwest Region quickly mobilized to move all services into a virtual format. We started with making sure our staff had all the appropriate technology to deliver services. Secondly, we contact our customer base via telephone and assessed their technology capacities. From there we moved the following services/activities into virtual offerings.

AJC Services	In-Office	Virtually
Basis Career Services		
Eligibility determination	X	X
initial assessment	X	X
Referral to partner agencies	X	X

Labor Market Information	X	X
Informational orientations	X	X
Informational Workshops	X	X
Individualized Career Services		
Comprehensive Assessments	X	X
Employment Plan Development	X	X
Individual and Group Counseling	X	X
Career Pathways	X	X
Workforce Preparation Activities	X	X
Referral to training Providers	X	X
Follow-up Services	X	X

3. Describe any new related training and supportive services needs you have identified in your region and highlight any plans to address these needs.

We have seen an increase in requests for appropriate technology to attend virtual classes. We have also seen a rise in demand for internet access to support video conferencing and learning. We are revising our local policies to support these requests better.

4. Describe the steps and partner coordination that will be taken to reopen the American Job Centers in your region to staff and customers.

Through our partner meetings, we have asked all system partners to present their reopening plans. This will allow other agencies to fully understand what services are available and how their customer base can access them. Moreover, this will ensure that referrals are done correctly and minimize customers from getting inaccurate information.

SIGNATURE PAGE

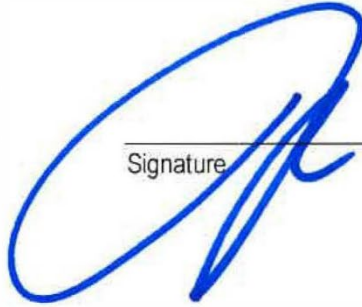
This plan is submitted on behalf of The WorkPlace to implement the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act in Southwestern Connecticut.

Workforce Development Board Chair

Chief Elected Official



Signature



Signature

Leon Bailey

Name (printed or typed)

Joseph Ganim

Name (printed or typed)

Sep 9, 2020

Date

9/24/2020

Date