

POCONO COUNTIES WORKFORCE INVESTMENT AREA

THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

July 1, 2001 – June 30, 2004

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COVER SHEET AND SIGNATORY FORM

(1) Local Workforce Investment Area:

Pocono Counties WIA - NE 135

If the Strategic Plan covers more than one local workforce investment area above, indicate the multiple local areas included by this Plan:

(2) Term of Plan:

July 1, 2001 – June 30, 2004

(3) Contact Person for the Strategic Plan

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(4) Authorized Signature(s). Name, Title, Date and Signature(s) of Individual(s) Authorized to Sign for fulfillment of the activities listed in the strategic plan.

Name	Title	Date
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Anthony Manzione	Chairperson, Pocono Counties Workforce Investment Board	
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Wayne Nothstein	Chairman, Local Elected Officials	
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Joseph J. Sebelin	Executive Director, Pocono Counties Workforce Investment Area	
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Section 1. Executive Summary

The Pocono Counties Workforce Investment Area is comprised of the Counties of Carbon, Monroe, Pike and Wayne. Located in the northeastern corner of the state, New York and New Jersey form two boundaries bordering the Workforce Investment Area. Regionally, Pocono Counties is aligned with Luzerne-Schuylkill and Lackawanna Counties to form the seven counties of the Northeast Economic Development Region.

This plan has been developed to address the Workforce and Economic Development issues, both within our Workforce Development Area and regionally, through interaction with the seven counties of Northeastern Pennsylvania. We also believe in the need to initiate a working dialogue concerning Workforce Development issues with our counterparts in the adjoining states of New York and New Jersey.

The Board Chairperson and the Executive Committee directed the Strategic Planning Process. A Series of Strategic Planning Sessions were held throughout the Workforce Investment Area. A minimum of one planning session was held in each of the four counties. All Board Members, Local Elected Officials, and Staff to the Board were invited to participate in the planning process. Local involvement was achieved by sponsoring informational sessions with the private and public sectors of the community. Additionally a workforce development questionnaire was developed and distributed to seventy (70) different agencies and businesses within our workforce area. Forty-seven percent (47%) of the questionnaires were completed and returned. The questionnaire ranked local workforce and economic development most pressing issues over the next three years and recommended areas we should concentrate our training dollars on. It should also be noted, that much of the information that appears in this Strategic Plan was obtained from related planning efforts that are ongoing in our region. Such efforts include county wide strategic planning groups such as the Carbon County Visioning Committee, the Monroe 2020 program, the Wayne County IDC planning group, and Pike County's Visioning Committee.. In all 4 counties, individuals from government, business, education, and private citizens have formed a local Visioning organization. The purpose of these groups is to assess the resources, needs, and goals of the counties and to develop action plans to facilitate the local communities' efforts to achieve their long-term goals. The issues being addressed include education, economic development, workforce development, quality of life, and related issues. These groups have been active for over a year, conducting focus group discussions, surveys, etc. Most of the Pocono Counties WIB members and other individuals who participated in the development of this plan are leaders in these groups. They also have a history of involvement in local Employer Advisory Boards, Interagency Councils, Chambers of Commerce, Team Pennsylvania Business Calling Program, and related groups. In short, much of the groundwork for this Strategic Plan was

already in place due to the longstanding and ongoing involvement of our WIB members and other community leaders.

On a Regional Basis, a Joint Workforce Summit entitled, “The Pocono Northeast Regional Workforce Development Summit 2000”, was jointly sponsored by the Pocono Counties Workforce Investment Area, Luzerne-Schuylkill Workforce Investment Area, Lackawanna Workforce Investment Area, the Economic Development Council of Northeastern Pennsylvania and the Team PA Foundation. The Summit provided a forum for multi-regional cooperation and interaction with Workforce Development and Economic Development and also provided information that was integral to the development of this plan.

The plan was modified at each planning session and made available to the entire membership via e-mail and hard copy. The “Draft” Version of the plan was made available for public comment on November 15, 2000. Copies of the Draft Version were distributed at CareerLink Sites in Carbon, Monroe and Wayne Counties. Copies were also provided at the Administrative Office in Jim Thorpe and the Pike County Job Training Office. Copies were also available via e-mail. All comments received were reviewed by the Executive Committee and were incorporated into the plan. Upon completion of the comment period, the final plan was forwarded to the Workforce Investment Board and the Local Elected Officials for approval.

The Workforce Investment Board will deploy aspects of the Strategic Plan through the CareerLink System. A One Stop Delivery System is in place in all four counties. The CareerLinks that have been developed by the WIB are the keystones of the Workforce Development system in our region. Because the area is largely rural in nature, all of the region’s workforce development resources, including schools, state and county government, and key private sector business leaders are active partners in the CareerLink system in our area. The Board also plans to implement and oversee the coordination of services through a strengthened relationship between Economic Development entities and other Workforce Development partners in our region. The Board recognizes the need to reach out to other Workforce Development entities in the region who are not represented on the Board. This interaction will provide for an integration of services capable of offering a comprehensive package attractive to private sector development. The Board will encourage integration of these two key segments by aligning the existing workforce with the needs of the business community, and by preparing the emerging workforce to meet the needs of the new economy of the 21st Century.

The mission of the Pocono Counties Workforce Investment Board is:

- Economic Opportunity for all.
- Economic self-sufficiency for all.
- An educated workforce with relevant skills.

- A skilled labor force for area/regional businesses.
- Interaction of Workforce Development and Economic Development.

The Pocono Counties Workforce Investment Board is committed to a comprehensive One Stop Delivery System, that is customer focused, market driven and links Workforce Investment and Economic Development, to provide quality workforce and training opportunities to adults, youth, dislocated workers, incumbent workers and the employer community. The Board's vision will be accomplished through a systematic plan for the integration of workforce and economic development. The process will be based on cooperation and the sharing of data and resources both locally within the Workforce Investment Area; regionally with our neighboring Workforce Investment Areas and on a Tri-State level to interact with our adjoining labor market areas.

Employers, job seekers and individuals requiring training will be served through a state of the art delivery system that capitalizes on the efficient use of technology. This is extremely important due to the rural nature of the Workforce Investment Area.

Section 2 Assessment of Current State

The current economy of the Pocono Counties is, to a large extent, comprised of small to medium sized businesses. The region is fairly rural in nature and, because of its' proximity to the major urban areas of New York, New Jersey, and Philadelphia, has a well developed travel and tourism sector. It has also become, to some extent, a bedroom community to the larger urban areas surrounding the Pocono region. Those areas include the Allentown/ Bethlehem labor market to the south, the Scranton/ Wilkes-Barre area to the west, and the New York/Northern New Jersey labor markets to the north and east.

Based on current data from the State's Center for Workforce Information Analysis 31% of the workforce is employed in the public non-profit sectors of education, health services, and government. Other sectors that make up a major portion of the region's economy include general retail services, hotels, resorts, restaurants, business services, general construction, and the garment industry. The growth in the regional economy has been due in large part to an influx of new residents from outside the region. According to the most recent Census projections, the Pocono region is the fastest growing area in Pennsylvania. This growth in the local population in the past decade has resulted in an expansion of the elementary and secondary educational facilities and a corresponding increase in the number of teachers and educational support positions in the region. It also fueled the increase in the construction, retail, and restaurant sectors of the economy.

The growth rate of both the population and the above mentioned sectors of the economy is expected to continue, albeit at a slightly lower rate than during the past

decade. The only sectors of the economy that are projected to decrease are the garment industry and farming occupations. The garment industry continues to struggle to compete with the competition from foreign trade, and will likely continue its' decline as a percentage of the workforce in the region's economy. Because many of the largest sectors of the regional economy are tied directly to the increase in the population growth, there should be little drop off in the growth rate of these sectors of the economy. Even those occupations that aren't projected to increase in absolute numbers, such as the restaurant, hotel, resort, and retail industries, will still place demands on the local workforce development systems, since they have historically experienced a high rate of employee turnover.

Another key aspect of the region's economy, is the fact that approximately 40% of the local population commutes outside our region for work. Occupational demands for business sectors in the New York, New Jersey, Scranton, Hazleton, and Lehigh Valley have historically had a great impact on the occupational skills that are needed by our residents.

The economic development efforts of the region have been, and will continue to be, centered on increasing the region's base of small to medium size manufacturing, business services, and information technology companies. At the same time, efforts will continue to foster and develop the businesses tied to the travel and tourism industry that continue to represent a large part of the region's economy. The efforts to attract new businesses to the area must be balanced with the need to preserve the natural beauty and resources that support the travel and tourism industry. Business services, including information technology, light manufacturing, transportation, and warehouse industries are seen as sectors of the economy which can provide the types of employment opportunities desired without negatively impacting other sectors of the economy.

The region's workforce development systems and suppliers are capable of meeting the demands of our customers. This ability to meet and adapt to the changing workforce needs of our region has been demonstrated by 2 recent events. The Lehigh and Northampton Community Colleges, in conjunction with the Carbon & Monroe Vo-Tech schools, have developed an accelerated Electronics Technician Program to address a skills shortage identified by the region's expanding electronics industry. This collaborative effort was supported financially through a combination of funds from the Department of Community & Economic Development, the schools, and Title I WIA funds through the CareerLink system. The community college also developed a training program to address a shortage of workers with the electrical skills necessary to perform vehicle assembly jobs for a truck manufacturing company in the area.

Among job seekers, the region has a sizeable customer base of transitional workers. They include workers dislocated due to restructuring of the banking and financial services industry, the continuing decline in the number of workers involved in the garment and heavy industry sectors of the economy, and those who find themselves out of work due to a lack of transferable skills. Those who have little or no skills include

emerging workers such as youth, displaced homemakers, and individuals moving from welfare to the workforce. The needs of the incumbent workers in our region, including those who commute outside the region for work, center around their desire to upgrade their skills in order to maintain their employability and to move on to higher skilled positions.

The needs of these various groups of jobseeker groups vary a great deal. The emerging workers need basic employability and workplace literacy skills necessary to meet the needs of local employers. The needs of the transitional and incumbent workers vary from a simple upgrade of their skills, including computer literacy skills, to complete retraining for those whose occupational skills are no longer in demand.

The needs of employer customers are just as varied. In the travel, tourism, and restaurant businesses of the region, the challenge continues to be able to find sufficient numbers of employees with customer service and basic workplace literacy skills, in an industry noted for high turnover and low earnings rates. Other entry level, low skilled industries in the region are also experiencing difficulty in recruiting and retaining employees lost to higher paying employers in the region. Similar problems are also starting to show up in industries with traditionally higher earnings such as general construction and related trades. These needs are based on feedback from employers who are on the Pocono Counties WIB, who participate on the local Employer Advisory Committees, County wide Visioning Committees, and from data collected by the Team Pennsylvania Business Calling Program. Based on this data, if the labor market continues to stay relatively tight, employee retention strategies and services may become a more pressing issue to our local employers.

The Workforce Investment services provided by the current delivery system are tied to the customer needs identified in the prior section. For job seekers, they include basic labor market information to identify skills that are in demand, retraining opportunities for those in need of such services, information on continuing education opportunities in the region, access to information on current job opportunities, and supportive services to assist with literacy skills, employability skills, and other specialized needs. These services are provided by the partner agencies in the 4 CareerLink centers. These include Workforce Training, Bureau of Employment and Career Services, the local vocational-technical schools, the local community colleges, and other private proprietary training schools in and surrounding the region.

For employer customers, the services include basic labor market exchange assistance with recruitment, screening, and referrals of job seekers, access to information on training opportunities and training resources available in the region, and coordination of services from the various partner agencies involved with the CareerLink system. Besides partners involved in labor exchange services such as BECS and Workforce Training, partners such as Manufacturers Resource Center and the local community colleges and vo-tech schools have staff devoted to addressing the training, upgrading, and retention needs of our regions employers.

The key suppliers of services in the region include the 4 comprehensive CareerLink sites, the Carbon and Monroe County Vocational-Technical Schools, the Lehigh and Northampton Community Colleges, East Stroudsburg University, and 35 additional vocational technical schools, colleges, and private proprietary technical schools in our region who provide workforce development services. These training services include adult literacy, GED, and ESL services, vocational and technical training programs, post-secondary education programs, and other continuing education options.

The Pocono Counties WIB requires that the suppliers of services provide timely, professional, and cost effective services to both job seekers, and employers. The board looks to suppliers who are performance oriented, committed to the process of continuous improvement, and are responsive to the workforce development issues and concerns of our customers. The Board also expects that the suppliers will work to coordinate their resources in order to avoid duplication and maximize their effectiveness in meeting our customers needs.

The suppliers expect that the Board will serve as a conduit to facilitate communications with customers in need of their services, and provide feedback that will allow them to improve their services' effectiveness. They also expect realistic performance standards, appropriate referrals of customers, flexibility in the design of services, and an effort to streamline and simplify the workforce development systems of the region.

The Workforce Investment Board will utilize the existing occupational/academic standards and credentialing requirements used by area suppliers as a benchmark in evaluating other training services, where appropriate. Suppliers whose standards have proven their effectiveness will be used as models of "best practices" in an effort to improve the design of services to our customers.

The current state of the region's workforce can be summarized as follows. The region's workforce totals approximately 123,000 workers, with an estimated 5,900 workers who are unemployed as of August 2000. The unemployment rate varies with Pike County at 3.1%, Wayne County at 4.9%, Carbon County at 4.7% and Monroe County at 5.4%. The most recent data on the welfare caseload as a percentage of the population indicates that the roles have dropped significantly since the Welfare Reform Legislation went into effect. The percentage of the population receiving cash assistance varies from .8% to a high of 1.4%, food stamps vary from 3.5% to 6%, and Medical Assistance recipients varies from 8.2% to 12.1%. As a whole, the population in the region is older than the state average and has lower educational levels. This fact reflects a community concern that many younger residents who complete higher education are moving out of the area to pursue better employment opportunities.

The educational profile of the region's population, based on the 1990 census data, shows the percentage of individuals 25 and over with a high school diploma varies from 69.4% to 79.2% compared to the statewide average of 74.7%. This, despite the fact that the high school dropout rate for the areas 15 public school districts is lower than the state average. The percentage of those 25 and older who are college graduates is

lower than the state average of 17.9%. It varies from a low of 8.4% to a high of 17.6%. Although a high percentage of high school graduates pursue post secondary education, a significant number of these post secondary graduates are moving out of the region due to the limited demand in the local economy for workers with their educational background.

Although the area's unemployment rate is low from a historical perspective, it is still higher than many of the surrounding metropolitan areas. This has made it possible to meet most of the labor needs of the local business sectors that are expanding. However, the current surplus labor pool is lower than at any time in recent history, and is spread out over a large 4 county area. The current number of unemployed workers in the region is estimated to be 5,900, a relatively small number in a labor force of approximately 120,000. Increased labor demands from the larger urban areas surrounding our region, such as the Lehigh Valley and Northern New Jersey, are already impacting on our ability to meet the demands of our local employers. Tight labor markets surrounding our region have led to an increase in the wage differential between our region and these urban centers. Local employers who cannot keep pace with the surrounding area's wage scale are starting to experience difficulty in attracting and retaining workers in some skill areas.

The areas vocational-technical schools and community colleges have been, and continue to be very active in promoting the concept of life-long learning and skills enhancement in the region. They have historically been very receptive to the demands of both the job seekers and the employers. They have adapted their programs to reflect the current needs of the employer community in the region and play a primary role in providing continuing education opportunities to the population. Other partner agencies, including the Team PA Business Calling Program, the Economic Development Council of Northeastern Pennsylvania, Manufacturers Resource Center, and the Northeastern Pennsylvania Industrial Resource Council (NEPIRC) are also actively promoting services geared to upgrading the skill levels of the region's workforce.

The training demands for the areas of identified growth in the region are not beyond the capabilities of the current training providers. This has been demonstrated by the examples sited earlier in this section, and by the fact that all of the workforce development system providers are active partners through the WIB and the region's established CareerLink system. Many of the local employment opportunities require only basic workplace literacy skills, a high school diploma, or a post secondary education of an associate's degree or less. Higher levels of training will be required, as the region is able to attract new employers with higher level training needs. Again, this does not reflect the training requirements for local residents who are pursuing employment opportunities in the surrounding, more urban labor markets. The major concern of the local employers is finding employees with basic workplace literacy and workplace maturity skills, both of which can be addressed with our current delivery system. The second priority of the employer community is how to retain their current employees and increase their skill levels to make them more productive. This need is

being addressed through the WIB and the collaborative efforts of the area's workforce development partner services.

The services designed to meet the needs of our area's youth are varied and growing. Lead by the WIB's Youth Council, youth resources are being assessed to determine what gaps exist, what resources can be coordinated more effectively, and what other resources may be tapped to meet those needs. School-to-Work services are available, or are being developed in many of the school districts within the 4 county region. Most of the school districts, especially the vocational-technical schools, have co-op programs funded by Carl Perkins to help prepare youth for the transition from school to work, or to assist with the students' preparations for post secondary education. Besides the efforts of the school district guidance offices, agencies such as the Educational Opportunity Center are available to assist youth in the development of educational plans and financial aid guidance.

The school districts also have specialized services for youth with disabilities, and alternative education services for those with special needs. The school districts have also established transition teams to provide support and guidance to students, and their families, who have disabilities and who will be exiting the school system. These transition teams are comprised of agencies such as Vocational Rehabilitation, and other CareerLink partners who can assist these youth in developing a transition plan for further education and training, or job skills development and placement assistance.

The CareerLinks throughout the region also have services to assist youth in developing educational or employment plans. They include registration for full and part-time work through the CareerLink system, general career guidance information and services, and linkages with other regional agencies and services that may meet the needs of local youth. Other services include basic literacy assistance, GED and Alternative Education programs, summer employment programs, job search workshops, Job Corps and Pennsylvania Conservation Corps opportunities, and financial aid services to assist with their training plans.

The Workforce Investment Board, through the Pocono Counties Youth Council and the CareerLink partner agencies, has also established close working relationships with other agencies that provide specialized services to youth. They include organizations such as the Pocono Academy, Bethesda, Spectrum Community Services, juvenile probation departments, single parents programs, drug & alcohol counseling, and facilities working with adjudicated youth.

The needs of incumbent workers in the region are being addressed through a variety of services. The first approach is by marketing and coordinating the delivery of training services to the employer community. These work based learning services include information and access to Wed-Net training funds, Customized Job Training grants, and both state and federal tax credit programs that can assist employers in the costs related to training and upgrading the skills of their employees. The local community colleges, vocational-technical schools, and economic development agencies, and CareerLink

partner agencies are working very closely with local employers to develop a plan to address the training needs of their incumbent workers. Information on these services is provided to employers through our CareerLink marketing materials, employer outreach efforts, and through the Team Pennsylvania Business Calling Program visits conducted by local economic development staff.

Incumbent workers may also be eligible for training services through the Workforce Investment Act. The Pocono Counties WIB has recognized the importance of assisting incumbent workers to acquire the skills necessary to move up to higher skilled jobs, both within their company, and with other local employers. Incumbent workers who are assessed to have 2 or more WIB recognized barriers to employment may be eligible for training assistance to help them move to higher paying employment opportunities capable of sustaining their family.

Worker support services available include multi-county agencies to provide Drug & Alcohol services and Mental Health services throughout the region. Childcare services are available through a wide variety of providers. They include public non-profit, private, and institutional day care services such as schools. There are very few employers in the region that provide day care services to their employees, due to the small number of employers who are large enough to handle the costs of such services. In addition, the Department of Welfare offers subsidies to assist with the day care costs of their customers moving into employment opportunities. The availability of quality, affordable day care services is very limited in certain parts of the Pocono region.

Transportation services are very limited. The areas of the Poconos that are served by a fixed route transportation system are very limited due to the low population density throughout the region. Monroe County is the only area that has sufficient population density to support a fixed route system that may be of some use to job seekers in getting to work. In most of the region, personal transportation or proximity to the employer is the method utilized by most workers.

Section 3 Desired State – Future (3-Years)

Labor market projections indicate that our region's health services, hospitality/tourism, and retail sectors will continue to grow. The Health Service industry has been experiencing tremendous growth and is expected to expand even further. Our rapid population influx, retirement communities and an aging population will require more services. The number of entry level positions such as personal care aids and nurse aids continue to grow. In addition, the region's health care facilities expect to need increasing numbers of LPNs, RNs, and other allied health occupations to replace many of their current employees who are nearing retirement age. During the past decade younger workers were not attracted to these occupations, due to the occupational demands and the restructuring that took place in the health care industry.

The hospitality industry has been and will continue to be one of the region's largest employers. The growth experienced in the economy tied to tourism is expected to continue because of our proximity to major metropolitan areas. This industry, as well as the retail sector, also places heavy demands on the region's labor exchange system due to their above average employee turnover rate.

Economic development efforts are focused on attracting information technology firms, light manufacturing and the business service industries. These industries are seen as positive additions to our region's economy because they have higher wage rates and because they don't negatively impact on the area's environmental resources that are vital to the hospitality/tourism industry

Prediction indicators show an increasing need for tool and die makers, machinists, graphic arts/web design personnel, electronic technicians, teachers, and LAN administrators. The demand is also expected to increase for bench assembly workers, customer service representatives, hospitality workers, truck drivers, material handling laborers, clerical workers with advanced computer skills, and machine operators with setup skills. Within this group of 14 job categories, the largest gaps between future demands and current availability are machine operators with setup skills and bench assembly workers.

The 2 sectors of the region's economy that are projected to decrease are the agricultural/farming industry and the garment industry. Overseas pressure in the garment industry has and will cause a decline in the number of positions available in this industry. Retraining of these workers will be necessary.

The region's Workforce Development Systems are positioned to meet the demands of both the growing and declining sectors of the economy. As in the past, workers in the declining industries have been attracted to occupations in the growth industries of health care services, retail, and hospitality/tourism. This is due to the fact that these positions require minimal training, are located close to the population centers, and provide similar or better wages and benefits compared to their previous occupations.

The region's employer and job seeker needs can be described as follows. For employers, their needs will center on attracting and retaining employees with basic work maturity skills, good interpersonal/customer service skills, workplace literacy skills, and basic computer literacy skills. The Workforce Development system, including the CareerLinks, will work with secondary and post secondary schools in the region to ensure that these employer needs are emphasized in their curriculums, so that our emerging workforce is prepared to meet employer expectations. These needs can also be addressed through school-to-work programs, area literacy councils, and workshops and services provided by the CareerLink partners. The key suppliers of employer services in the region include the community colleges, vocational-technical schools, BECS, Title I Program Operators, Manufacturers Resource Center, and Adult Literacy

Councils. Training requirements for the occupations expected to be in demand in the future requiring 2 years or less to complete. Many are less than 6 months. The region's training providers, both public and private, offer a wide variety of occupational training options and have an excellent record of adapting to the needs of our employers. As mentioned in earlier sections, both the vocational-technical schools and community colleges have been able to adapt their curriculums to meet the demands of local employers. These efforts include accelerated training schedules, training hours in the evening and weekends, distance and Internet based learning, and on site training. The Pocono Counties WIB will continue to support the efforts of any current or emerging training providers in our region who are committed to meeting the needs of both our employers and job seekers. This support will take the form of financial support, coordination of services through the CareerLinks, and information on projected training needs for our region. The WIB will also review the occupational/academic standards of the region's training providers to ensure that they meet the needs and expectations of the employer community.

The needs of our region's job seeker customers will also expand. Services such as accessibility to more detailed, self-assisted, labor market information are needed to educate our customers on the training requirements and projected increases in job opportunities available in our region. The CareerLinks established by the WIB and the services they provide are the centerpiece of this effort. The coordination of services, easy access to a wide variety of partner agencies, and Internet based access to labor market information for the unemployed, emerging, and incumbent workers are essential to helping them prepare for the labor demands of the future. Other funding streams will have to be accessed for these expanded services. Diverse community organizations and private sector employers will be asked for more involvement.

Clearly, the projected shortage of workers with production skills is one of the area's most pressing problems. While programs offered by technical schools in the area are well thought of by employers, the number of graduates are not meeting their needs. Efforts to boost enrollment in vocational-technical training, especially at the post-secondary level, must be intensified. Students who are not likely to enter college should be strongly encouraged to pursue this avenue of training. They should be informed of both the challenges and opportunities that vocational-technical training offers.

Life skills (budgeting, job application completion and interviewing, employer expectations, appropriate attire and establishing priorities) and basic business skills (customer service, customer expectations and basic math) are mandatory to be successful in the workplace. These services will be provided through the local school curriculums and CareerLink workshops.

The CareerLink will be the conduit through which job seeker customers can access all the educational streams necessary to keep abreast of the current technologies. Life long learning is fundamental for continuous acquisition of skill

enhancement and knowledge. Community colleges, technical schools and private sector training providers are available to provide flexible, non-traditional schedules in order for jobseekers to be able to access training and retraining opportunities.

The Workforce Investment Board will work closely with private sector employers, education and training providers to insure that the needs of the community are met. This Board has been formed with that goal in mind. Training providers will provide and be accountable for the performance and success rates of their training services. These suppliers will be monitored by the WIB to ensure that they meet the performance expectations established by the Pocono Counties WIB.

A point of concern for our WIB is our youth and younger worker population. The 18-34 age group accounts for a below-average share of the population in the Pocono Counties Northeast region. The 18-34 age group consists of individuals who are just entering the workforce or developing their careers. It is an area's future labor supply. Thus, it is advantageous for an area, looking towards future economic growth, to have a high proportion of its population in this age group. The 18-34 year olds of the area account for 20.4% of the total population, compared to 23.4% for the nation. Although the statistics are for a broader age group, it is apparent that our youth are leaving the area to seek employment elsewhere. The general consensus is that many students who leave the area would stay if opportunities existed. A youth council has been established in accordance with the act. This council is a key element in the future of our youth and will be utilized to assist in the development of these opportunities.

Diverse customized training programs and more workshops geared toward youth will be implemented in the areas of pre-employment, employability/work maturity and life skills. Vocational training opportunities will be highlighted and emphasized, particularly in the areas of computers and information technology.

As the population and economic communities increase, there will be a need to improve support services to the workforce. Services such as childcare, adult basic education, English as a second language classes, mental health services and drug and alcohol counseling are expected to increase in demand. Transportation systems issues will also emerge in conjunction with the population growth and the anticipated business development.

The Pocono Counties Workforce Investment Board, through their oversight of the CareerLinks in our region, has a longstanding relationship with community partners (community-based organizations, organized labor, private industry, public agencies, educational institutions, and faith-based organizations). These organizations were an integral part of the local steering committees used in the development of the CareerLinks and this Strategic Plan. They will continue to be consulted and involved regarding the WIB's workforce investment strategy and it's implementation in our region.

Services for incumbent workers will need to be expanded in order for us to properly service this segment of the population. Skills previously learned will need to be updated in order for participants to remain competitive in the labor market. Most area companies have not utilized state funding for training programs, mainly because they are not aware of the availability. One of the tasks of the Workforce Investment Board is to educate the business population as to the resources available to them. These resources could take the form of distance learning, on-site customized training, workplace literacy services, and Internet based learning available through the State's CareerLink Learning Institute.

Section 4 – Gap/Barrier Identification

The gap of primary concern identified by employer customers in our region is their ability to recruit new employees, and at the same time, retain and improve the skill levels of their current incumbent workers in an increasingly tight labor market.

The low unemployment rate has forced employers to step-up recruiting efforts by offering benefit packages and increased wages to attract workers. In addition, this labor market environment has placed job seekers with good work histories and marketable skills in a position to be selective regarding what employment opportunities they wish to pursue. It has become, in some industries, a seller's market, and one that many employers have never experienced. It has also provided the incumbent workforce with more opportunities to move into higher skilled, or higher paying jobs. This puts many employers in the position of either competing for experienced or skilled employees, or tapping into the remaining labor pool. The remaining labor pool includes a high percentage of job seekers who have less marketable skills, have a less extensive work history, or who have other employability barriers. Employers also face the need to upgrade the skills of their workers to remain competitive in a technology driven workplace. A large proportion of the established workforce still lacks the basic computer literacy skills that many employers consider essential. Projected skill shortages in production, electronic, and health care sectors is also emerging as one of the region's areas of concern.

The gaps in services needed by incumbent workers are also tied to the need to market the information and services of the CareerLinks in our area. One of the major advantages of the CareerLink System's website is its ability to provide access to information and services that are helpful to individuals who are already attached to the workforce. But until the CareerLink system's capabilities become common knowledge, incumbent workers will still face challenges in accessing the services that they need.

The issues faced by employers in our region are not due primarily to a lack of training suppliers or services in our area, although a need exists for more

vocational-technical opportunities in both Pike and Wayne counties. At the present, residents of these counties must travel long distances to access training services. The only other gaps in training services that were identified were Adult Literacy and English as a second language services in parts of our region. Efforts are already being made by some of the local training providers such as the vocational-technical schools and community colleges to meet these needs. The labor exchange system that is part of the CareerLink services in the Poconos is capable of addressing the employee recruiting concerns expressed by the employers. Efforts by the CareerLink to more aggressively market their services to employers and job seekers can have an impact on many of these issues. There still exists a lack of awareness by many members of the employer community and the general public as to the existence, purpose and services of the CareerLink System. By attracting more job seekers, both unemployed and incumbent workers, and employers to utilize CareerLink services we can meet the needs of both customer groups.

The local training providers, including vocational-technical schools and community colleges, must continue their ongoing efforts to develop flexible scheduling, and short-term training options that are responsive to the needs of incumbent workers. The training programs and schedules developed for youth that are just preparing to enter the workforce are far different from those needed by workers who need to support their families while pursuing educational opportunities. Employers must also be shown the value and increased productivity that they can achieve from supporting the continuing education needs of their workers, whether in the form of in-house training, financial assistance to attend area schools, or flexible scheduling that allows workers to participate in training opportunities.

The second priority issue identified in our region involved providing better assessment, education, and workforce training for our region's youth.

Our youth need to learn how to access the information and services available through the CareerLink system. Enhanced life skills curriculum, at all levels of education, is also needed for success.

The needs of youth can only be met if the CareerLink partners can develop a close working relationships with the schools in the region. Students must be shown that the curriculum, including workplace maturity skills, offered by their respective schools is an important and necessary part of their future employment goals. Likewise, the schools must learn how to use the local CareerLink system to better prepare the regions' youth to meet the expectations of our employers. Efforts to educate both students and parents regarding the demand occupations in our region, and their respective training requirements, are necessary to help our youth make informed decisions regarding their occupational goals.

The third workforce development issue relates to improving the existing network of supportive services available to job seekers. The needs are easy to identify, but more difficult to address.

Due to the rural nature of the region, gaps in supportive services such as quality, affordable childcare, limited transportation services, affordable housing, and access to drug & alcohol and related services have been longstanding issues in our area. Customers can more easily access information on the supportive services available in the region through the CareerLinks, but the resources necessary to fill any identified gaps are still in short supply.

Gaps in the availability of quality, affordable day care must be addressed in order to allow single parents, as well as 2 wage earner families, to pursue the employment and training opportunities available in the area. Increased numbers of workers involved in retail and production occupations will result in more demand for day care services during non-traditional hours. The expansion of operational hours for both new and current providers is necessary to meet this need.

Gaps in transportation services will be difficult to fill. Economic development and planning efforts must focus on developing employment opportunities in areas that are in close proximity to the available supply of workers. Educational efforts to increase and coordinate carpooling may bridge some of the transportation gaps in the region. The low population density of the region will continue to make fixed route transportation needs very expensive in most areas of the Poconos.

Gaps in the availability of supportive services for workers are related to the issue of transportation barriers. The CareerLinks can serve as a centralized location for information and referrals to the supportive services available in the region. Gaps also exist in affordable housing. As the CareerLink system improves its capability to provide comprehensive services, and increases the number of partner agencies involved with the system, it will assist in bridging many of the gaps faced by workers in reaching the services necessary to meet their needs.

To summarize, The major workforce issues that need to be addressed to achieve the desired state can be described as follows. How can we leverage the resources, including those outside WIA, to improve the skill levels of the current and emerging workers in the region to meet the demands of the 21st century workforce? The second issue is how, and for what occupations, do we retrain those workers who are being dislocated by the rapid changes in today's labor market. The WIB also identified the following issues that are related to those described above. They involve labor market information gaps, continuous improvement issues, and what indicators the WIB will utilize to assess progress towards closing the gaps identified in this section.

One gap in information is the unavailability of labor market information and commuter patterns from New York and New Jersey. Because of the proximity of both states to our region and the fact that many of our workers seek employment, or are employed, in these states, access to their labor market demands is vital to our workforce. Information on surrounding WIA areas within Pennsylvania is available, and short-term projections on occupational demands are helpful, but are still not sufficient to address the rapidly changing nature of the workforce in our region. Closer ties to employers and the economic development community are needed to keep abreast with the workforce development needs of our region. As stated earlier, some of the information gaps exist because the data is based on the 1990 census. As the Census data from 2000 becomes available, we will have a better picture of the changes that have occurred in our region during the past decade. It is hoped that PALMIDS will continue to improve both the timeliness and accuracy of its' projections. Also, Pennsylvania's negotiations with neighboring states will address our needs relative to those labor market demands. Local information will rely on a closer working relationship with employers, economic development agencies, and the Center for Workforce Information. This relationship must be far more extensive than past efforts so that we can respond to the nature and the speed of changes. Employers must understand as well that our ability to meet their needs depends on their input and active involvement in the CareerLink system. The CareerLink sites must work to improve their relationship with local employers in the region. Feedback received from all customers, and the completion and refinement of the tracking and reporting sections of the CareerLink Operating System Website are vital to the continuous improvement efforts of the CareerLink partners. Feedback from employers on the services they receive, and which services are needed is critical to the development of a system capable of meeting the needs of both employers and job seekers in the region.

The most important continuous improvement issues relate to the region's efforts to market and refine the CareerLink services in our area. Some of the CareerLink partner staff and services are not yet fully integrated in the system. There are still legislative restrictions and administrative issues, at the State and Federal level that inhibit the ability of the CareerLinks to address the workforce development issues in our region. Each of the CareerLink partners that are active in the Pocono region makes a significant contribution to workforce development. But at times these individual partners seem to be working at cross purposes, each with its own agenda and unique set of priorities. A cohesive program of both economic and workforce development requires a continuous effort to promote greater coordination between these entities. The Pocono Counties WIB will continue to work with State Administration, Legislature, and State WIB to identify and address these types of barriers.

The Pocono Counties Workforce Investment Board (WIB) believes that the federally established Title I WIA performance measures, when measured by the state, will provide our area with sufficient data to evaluate our system. Program operators will be able to modify and reconstruct their delivery of services in order to enhance required performance levels in specific categories.

For Adult, Dislocated Workers and Youth ages 19-22, the following indicators will be measured:

- Entered Employment Rate
- Average earning change in (6) months
- Six month retention rate
- Educational credential and occupational skill credential rates.

For Youth ages 14-18, the following indicators will be measured:

- Skill attainment rate
- Diploma and equipment attainment rate
- Placement rate

In addition to these standards, Customer Satisfaction Indicators have been established for both participants and employers.

The State Workforce Investment Board has also developed five key indicators that will be utilized to identify gaps, on a system wide basis, to enhance accountability. They are:

1. Percent of employers using services coordinated through the LWIB
2. Percent of individuals using services coordinated through the LWIB
3. Percent of jobseekers who receive intensive or training services and obtain employment
4. Median cycle time to fill a job
5. Percent of individuals that used CareerLink services and entered employment in jobs with wages

Through careful analysis of the information received from the state in relation to these indicators, we believe the local and regional system will identify any gaps we are currently not addressing, and refine the services we are providing to better meet our workforce development needs.

Section 5 – Gap Closure

The gaps to be closed in the first three years in order of priority are as follows:

1. **To establish a structure for addressing the needs of our employer community that will provide our job seekers and incumbent workers with the resources that will allow them to develop the skills they need to be competitive for employment.**

Action Steps

1. Identification of employer needs through local Employer Advisory Councils, Team PA Business Calling Program, PALMIDS, and employer visits conducted by CareerLink partners.
 2. Provide access to this labor market information, via the CareerLink system, to staff, job seekers, incumbent workers, secondary, and post-secondary training providers in the region. This information will be used to improve current training services, expand services needed to meet current demands, or assist in the development of training programs that are more concentrated, provide flexible scheduling, and address the education and training needs of both our customers and the local employer community. These training services can include Adult literacy skills, English as a Second Language, computer literacy skills, and vocational training programs.
 3. Educate employers and job seekers on the resources available to meet their training needs. These resources include information on training programs in the region, the Web-Net program, Manufacturers Resource Center services, distance learning options, customized training services, Title I WIA funding, the E-Learning Institute, and other training resources.
 4. Marketing directed at both employers and job seekers, regarding the services available through the local CareerLink system and the State website. These efforts will be aimed at increasing the percentage of employers and the labor force, including incumbent workers, who are familiar with the CareerLink services and who use the services available to them.
- 2. To address the needs of our youth by creating an infrastructure for recruiting, assessing, educating and training them to be competitive for positions in the local job market.**

Action Steps

1. The Youth Council will serve as the focal point for community outreach efforts to the local school districts, non-profit agencies, and other community organizations involved with youth services and activities.
2. Information gathered from employer visits will be used to assist schools in enhancing their curriculums aimed at workforce related skills.

3. Develop close working relationships between the CareerLink system and school district guidance counselors. Market the CareerLink website as a resource for all students to explore career and training options and prepare for their initial entry into the workforce.
 4. Inform both students and parents regarding the projected demand occupations and the advantages and opportunities available to students involved in secondary vocational training and community college programs.
 5. Foster the development and expansion of School-to-Work, Alternative Education, and co-op programs between local schools and employers.
- 3. To improve our network of supportive services focusing on transportation and childcare that will enable us to assist our job seekers to eliminate barriers that prevent them from being more employable.**

Action Steps

1. Provide CareerLink staff with information on all supportive service agencies, services, and resources available to customers in our region and how to access these services.
2. Support efforts to expand quality day care services and expand operational hours to meet the needs of workers involved in non-traditional work hours.
3. Support economic development and planning efforts aimed at developing employment opportunities close to population centers to decrease transportation barriers.
4. Support educational efforts aimed at increasing the use of carpooling.
5. Support local government and community agency efforts to secure grants and other types of financing for transportation, drug & alcohol services, and housing assistance.

The partners involved in addressing the 3 issues identified in this plan are varied and comprehensive. The WIB, the Youth Council, and the Partner agencies in the local CareerLink system will take the lead in coordinating these efforts.

The first issue will involve the CareerLink partner agencies, including BECS, Title I Program Operators, the local community colleges and vocational training institutions, local Employer Advisory Councils, local Chambers of Commerce, Economic Development Council of Northeastern Pennsylvania, Team PA Business Calling representatives, Manufacturers Resource Center, and county economic and industrial development agencies. The Center for Workforce Information Analysis, PALMIDS, and local planning bodies will assist in providing the labor market information described in this plan.

The second issue will involve the CareerLink partner agencies, community colleges and vocational training institutions, Youth Council members and agencies, secondary school administrators and guidance personnel, School-to-Work committees, the PA Parent Information and Resource Center, and PA Job Corps.

The third issue involves CareerLink partner agencies and their staff, Child Care Information services and local day cares, county assistance offices, county housing authorities and transportation agencies, Head Start, and members of local Interagency Councils.

The CareerLinks and their staff are an integral part of the issues the WIB is focused on. Because of this, staff development efforts will concentrate on the capacity and capabilities of the CareerLink staff. The CareerLink staff will need guidance and direction to perform their duties effectively. Accordingly, training for frontline staff will be instituted and will focus in two areas. First, the Pocono Counties Workforce Investment Area's priorities and goals as stated in this document will be communicated to them clearly so they will have a full understanding of the role they will play in their achievement. Second, training in the most important aspects of their duties will allow them to better serve the needs of their customers. Critical training areas will include customer service, career development strategies, teamwork, better use of technology, and labor market information.

The technology requirements related to the WIB's goals are twofold. The first need is to work closely with the State to ensure that the CareerLink Website and Operating System is fully functional as soon as possible. The Operating system must be capable of providing the information frontline staff needs to perform their roles and allow them to report their activities and results. This reporting system is critical in order to provide the WIB and the CareerLink staff with feedback on the effectiveness of the services provided as well as to provide performance indicators that will document the WIB's efforts to achieve the goals outlined in this Strategic Plan. The second issue concerning the technology needs identified in this plan relates to local employers needs. Employers must be provided with information on how to utilize computer technology in their businesses, and how to utilize technology to access training resources for their employees.

The first customer issue is recruiting the customers, both employers and job seekers, into the CareerLink system. This includes efforts to provide the customer with accurate and timely information that will give them a clear understanding of what the system offers. We must also provide our customers with a level of courteous and professional service that will motivate them to see the system as their principal resource for fulfilling their employment and training needs.

Our timetable for addressing these gap areas follows:

Year One - Begin closing our three most important gaps immediately by instituting the procedures stated above as soon as possible. The goal is to have our infrastructure in place and begin addressing these gaps by the end of the first year. The infrastructure includes staff development and training, training and feedback on the CareerLink Operating System, and continuous improvement efforts at the CareerLink sites approved and chartered by the Pocono Counties WIB. The first year efforts will also concentrate on the marketing, community awareness, employer outreach, and networking requirements necessary to achieve our goals.

Year Two- Conduct review and analysis of our first year's accomplishments and focus on those areas that may be in need of improvement. Continue to improve our relationships with the education and employer communities as well as those organizations that can assist us in developing a better support network with the goal of significantly increasing overall efficiency and performance.

Year Three – All three of the major gaps identified in this section are capable of being addressed by the end of the third year. Close working relationships with local employers and workforce development entities will provide the feedback necessary to evaluate the success of the WIB's plan. This information will allow the WIB to adjust its' Strategic Plan if necessary, or to focus on new priorities. The Pocono Counties WIB will continue to conduct monitoring and oversight of existing operations to track performance and redefine specific goals as necessary.

The Workforce Investment Board will be responsible for setting the general priorities, goals, and policies for the Pocono Counties Workforce Investment Area as reflected in this document. In addition, they will direct the administrative staff to the WIB and the CareerLink Managers to implement these goals and priorities according to the timetable described in this section. Each CareerLink Manager will be responsible for the performance goals as stipulated in their individual plans of service, with Pocono Counties Workforce Investment Area administrative staff being available to provide technical assistance, information and support as necessary. A system of oversight will also be developed to monitor the progress of stated goals. The system will include a procedure for

self-evaluation for each CareerLink as well as administrative monitoring procedures that will encompass both the progress toward goals and conformity with WIA rules and regulations.

Leadership begins with the Workforce Investment Board. First, Board Members must enthusiastically endorse the priorities and goals. Second, they must act as the public relations arm for the CareerLink system within their respective sectors of the community. Third, they must work with the Pocono Counties Workforce Investment Area administrative and management staff to develop marketing strategies for getting the word out to the entire community. Once this challenge is met, a level of enthusiasm will filter down through all levels of the organization, including the frontline CareerLink staffs and their customers.

The key process issues are those which have already been stated in this section. We must develop closer working relationships with local business, economic development, education and community leaders by bringing them to the table and getting them on board. Training and development of the local CareerLink staffs will enable them to provide better and more efficient services to our potential customers for the purpose of recruiting them into the system.

All of these issues must be addressed by providing top down leadership from the Workforce Investment Board. Effective leadership will serve to alleviate these fears and create a positive environment for staff at all levels. Under the leadership of the Workforce Investment Board, a monitoring and reporting system will be developed that focuses on continuous improvement and provides information on progress toward closing these gaps at regular intervals. Progress reports will be distributed to all WIB Members as they are compiled for their review and comment. If progress in closing one or more gaps is not being achieved according to the projected timetable, suggestions for corrective action will be discussed.

Section 6 – Critical Measurements of Success/Continuous Improvement

The Pocono Counties Workforce Investment Board will align the Title I Operational Plan with the strategic vision through a cooperative process based on the sharing of data and resources by both local and regional partners. Paramount to this process is a state-of-the-art delivery system that utilizes technology to provide employment and training opportunities to job seekers and economic development opportunities and a skilled workforce to employers. The CareerLink sites within the Pocono Counties Workforce Investment Area have been developed with this vision in mind. Workforce and economic development information is available and continually updated on the CareerLink website. As the chartering entity for CareerLinks, the Workforce Investment Board must oversee the growth of area CareerLinks.

In addition, Community partners were instrumental in the development of our strategic vision and are committed to the success of the area CareerLinks.

Partners who are not co-located at the CareerLinks, are accessible via telephone or the Internet. Services provided by all community partners are delineated in the Title I Operational Plan and will be used as required based on individual customer needs. As outlined in the Workforce Investment Act and as stated in the Title I Operational Plan, the Workforce Investment Board will encourage cohesion among community, economic, and workforce development strategies. The composition of the board requires representatives from the community, economic development, the private sector, organized labor, and human service agencies. The focus of board meetings is the development of the one-stop delivery system for workforce training, the exchange of economic and workforce development information, and strategies for growth and success. The sharing of this information among board members, local elected officials and the community will assist in the reduction of duplication of efforts by all partners.

Through education of the benefits available in the CareerLink System, the consortia of firms and community partners within the workforce investment area will be encouraged to work together. As firms and community partners are introduced to the CareerLink system through employer contacts, community meetings and local marketing efforts, they will be asked to support the area's strategic vision. Initial support from employers and community partners was obtained during the CareerLink implementation phase. Continued involvement of these partners will help to insure cohesion within the workforce investment system.

The Workforce Investment Board will insure fact-based decision making by utilizing up-to-date verifiable statistics from economic development agencies, county planning departments, chambers of commerce, workforce investment programs, and the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis. From these statistics present programs can be evaluated and projections can be made for future needs. In addition, good practices can be identified and expanded upon while areas needing improvement can be remedied. The Workforce Investment Board is committed to utilizing the Malcolm Baldrige Principles as its fundamental evaluation tool for assessing progress in implementing the goals and objectives of the Workforce Investment Act. A sub-committee of the board will work to provide quality assurance and continuous improvement in the performance of the Workforce Development System.

The Workforce Investment Board will work with the Economic Development Council of Northeastern Pennsylvania, Team PA, county economic development agencies, county planning offices, chambers of commerce, and other local partners to receive input concerning predictors and projections of what is needed. This information will be shared among the workforce investment partners and educational providers in order to prepare the workforce for emerging employment opportunities. Preparation would include, but not be limited to, new educational programs, tax incentives, and adaptation of community infrastructure to meet employer needs.

Activities within local CareerLinks will provide the impetus for involvement of community leaders and citizens in identifying and responding to the region's workforce issues. Periodically communities will be surveyed regarding employer needs and economic growth; and all customers at CareerLinks, both job seekers and employers, are asked to evaluate the ability of the CareerLink to provide needed services. Results of these assessments will be major indicators for the Workforce Investment Board to base the effectiveness of the Workforce Development System.

Evidence of community consensus about the identified priority workforce issues is a continual process through the Team PA Calling Program which provides data on the key workforce issues effecting county and state businesses. In Wayne County, for example, 83% of the companies surveyed have stated that workforce training is the #1 workforce issue locally. Future economic and workforce development summits are planned within the counties to identify and address local needs. In addition, local and regional planning meetings, questionnaires, planning documents, and evaluations completed at the CareerLinks will contribute to community identification of priority workforce issues.

The process to evaluate the Strategic Plan, make adjustments, and gather consensus from community partners regarding the adjustments will be inclusive. All partners within the Pocono Counties Workforce Investment Area are cognizant of the Title I Operational Plan and their respective CareerLink Combined Business Plan/Agreement. Community members are encouraged to become involved through their participation in the CareerLink and also their attendance at community meetings and their response to surveys. The Malcolm Baldrige Principles will be the basis for the evaluation procedures. A sub-committee of the Workforce Investment Board and community partners will develop an assessment document to semi-annually evaluate the Strategic Plan and to recommend adjustments.

Pocono Area Workforce Investment Board
CareerLink-Business-Local Elected Officials-Community Partners

**Incumbent
Workers**

**Displaced
Workers**

**WIB Goals for
Strengthening Workforce
and Economic
Development**

**Emerging
Workers/Youth**

- Access to Education & Training
- Identified Company Needed Skills
- Standards & Learning Tools
- Attract New Businesses
- Expand Employment
- Improved Economy

**Funding
Resources**