

NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA REGION

REGIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN 2002

Presented to the Public
September 6, 2002

Rich Heffron, Executive Director, NE075 - Luzerne County Human Resources Development Dept.

Joseph Sebelin, Executive Director, NE135 - Pocono Counties Workforce Investment Area

Fred Lettieri, Executive Director, NE055 - Scranton-Lackawanna Human Development Agency, Inc.

I. REGIONAL PLAN OVERVIEW

This document has been developed as a result of the joint efforts of key staff members of the three local workforce investment boards. A series of planning sessions were held within the region, during which goals were identified and strategies for achieving these goals were developed. The plan is designed to address key regional Workforce and Economic Development issues, both within our seven county region and through interaction with our counterparts in adjacent Economic Development regions of Lehigh Valley and the Northern Tier as well as the adjoining states of New York and New Jersey.

The goals and strategies outlined in this plan were developed by the three Workforce Development Boards and the existing CareerLink System. All of the region's workforce development resources, including education, State and County Government and key lessors in the private sector are active partners in the CareerLink system in our area. The nine CareerLinks are the gateway. This interaction will provide for an integration of services capable of offering a comprehensive package attractive to private sector development. The plan encourages 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 regional employer community.

The economic development efforts of the region will continue to focus on increasing the region's job base. These efforts, however, 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, manufacturing, transportation, finance, health care, and warehousing and distribution industries are seen as sectors of the economy which can provide the types of employment opportunities desired without negatively impacting other sectors.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORKFORCE AND IT'S DEVELOPMENT

Job seekers include workers dislocated due to restructuring of the traditional banking and financial services. The continuing decline in the number of workers involved in some manufacturing sectors of the economy, and those who find themselves out of work due to a lack of transferable skills. Those having 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 and attain self-sufficiency.

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, and information on continuing education opportunities in the region. It also offers access to information on current job opportunities, and supportive services to assist with literacy skills, employability skills, entrepreneurial opportunities, and other specialized

needs. These services are provided by the partner agencies in the nine CareerLink centers. The principal partners include Workforce Investment, Bureau of Employment and Career Services, vocational-technical schools, community colleges, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Welfare, Office of the Aging and private proprietary training schools in and surrounding the region. These training services include adult literacy, GED and ESL services, vocational and technical training programs, post-secondary education programs, and many other continuing education options.

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, coordination of services from the various partner agencies involved with the CareerLink system.

III. GAPS IN THE DELIVERY OF SERVICES

The lack of availability of quality, affordable day care must be addressed in order to allow single parents, as well as two wage earner families, to pursue the employment and training opportunities available in the area. Increased numbers of workers involved in retail, production, services, and hotels and resorts are creating an increasing 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.

As indicated in attachment VI, some of this demand in the rural and urban counties is now being met by “unregulated” day care facilities in the local neighborhoods. The combination of non-traditional work hours and the growing population is resulting increased pressure on the child care network.

We believe that the demand for nontraditional day care service is greater than it appears, but the available services are not being sufficiently marketed to unemployed and incumbent workers who are most in need. Our network of CareerLinks can play a significant role in filling this gap by becoming a central clearinghouse of information on available services.

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, however, low population density will continue to make fixed route transportation needs very expensive in most rural areas. Attachment V represents a more detailed analysis of the problems facing unemployed and incumbent workers who must rely on public transportation. The major problem facing our local transit authorities is not funding but a lack of ridership. We believe the low ridership is due, at least in part, to a lack of coordinated effort to market these services directly to those in need.

The CareerLinks can serve as a centralized location for information and referrals to the supportive services available in the region. As the CareerLink system improves its marketing capability and increases the number of partner agencies involved with the

system, it can become a focal point of information to bridge many of the gaps faced by workers in reaching the services necessary to meet those needs.

IV. KEY INDUSTRY CLUSTERS

The information in attachments II and III indicates, that there are four major industry clusters in the region where the demand for skilled workers is steady and consistent. Medical Services has a steady and consistent demand for skilled personnel. The Warehousing and Distribution industry, which is experiencing rapid growth as a result of the network of major highways in the region. In the manufacturing sector, where employment is still a major factor in the area's economic profile, we anticipate a significant replacement need for skilled machine operators and fabricators, due to technological upgrades and the age of the existing workforce. Finally, the region has become a focal point of Financial Services resulting in an increasing demand for skilled personnel in back office operations.

During this coming decade growth in these industries will account for the majority of the need in the local workforce. Accordingly, we feel that assisting our local residents to develop the skills necessary to work in these industries is key to the area's workforce development and the most important role we can play in the process.

V. COORDINATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES

The Workforce Investment Board will continue to work with the Northeastern Pa. Alliance, The Great Valley Technology Alliance, Team Pa. Industrial Development organizations, chambers of commerce, Manufacturer's Associations, Industrial Resource Centers, Northeast Career Opportunities, Stay Invent the Future and all regional partners to receive input concerning projections of what is needed. This information will be shared among the workforce investment partners, educational providers and the private sector in order to prepare the workforce for emerging and existing employment opportunities. Preparation would include, but not limited to existing and new educational programs, tax incentives, and pursuing federal and state grant opportunities to meet regional objectives.

Future economic and workforce development summits are planned both within and outside the region to identify and address 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.

VI. GOALS TO BE ACHIEVED

Based upon data as indicated in the attachments, we have identified the following goals upon which the three Workforce Investment Boards can cooperate for the benefit of the unemployed and incumbent workers in our region.

A. MATCHING OUR WORKFORCE WITH OUR INDUSTRY CLUSTERS

To develop a regionally coordinated system to encourage CareerLink customers to explore opportunities in the major industries listed above. This process is currently underway and is ongoing.

1. Training of CareerLink staff to educate customers regarding the abundance of opportunities available in these industries.
2. Encourage our unemployed and incumbent workers to obtain the critical skills necessary to meet the qualifications for skilled positions in these industries.
3. Implement these goals and strategies in cooperation with our training providers and encourage them to design programs that offer these critical skills to our customers on a flexible schedule.

B. BROADENING THE SCOPE OF INDUSTRY CLUSTERS TO INCLUDE ADJACENT MARKETS

To increase the level of coordination with workforce investment staffs in Lehigh Valley, Berks County, Northern Tier, Central New Jersey, and Southern New York to allow our commuters who are willing to commute to these areas to be aware of the most abundant job opportunities. This process is currently underway will be on going. See Attachment IV for more information.

1. Improved exchange of information among the Workforce Investment Boards regarding job opportunities on either side of the region and border states.
2. Develop a more structured referral system to allow customers to come in contact with regional companies that need personnel.

C. CLOSING THE GAPS IN OUR TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

To develop marketing strategies and best practices over the next twelve months that will allow our CareerLink network to act as a clearinghouse of information for all customers who need transportation services. Specific steps will include the following:

1. Increase awareness among CareerLink staff about the services that are available and the importance of making customers aware of these services.
2. Improve the quality of marketing information and institute provisions to insure that it gets into the hands of all eligible customers.

3. Develop a better working relationship with the local transportation providers and initiate joint efforts to increase ridership among the eligible population.
4. Encourage the local transportation authorities to become a partner in the CareerLink system.

D. INCREASE CUSTOMER AWARENESS OF CHILD CARE SERVICES

This twelve to twenty-four month process will begin as follows:

1. Increase coordination between the CareerLinks and the local Child Care Information Services and Head Start. For example, encourage CareerLink staff to become more involved in local childcare planning councils.
2. Develop a closer working relationship between CareerLinks and Child Care Information Services and Head Start staff and encourage C.C.I.S. to have a presence in the CareerLinks.
3. Work with C.C.I.S., Head Start and the local planning councils to expand the availability of services and increase the level of referral of customers who are in need of those services.
4. Develop public/private partnerships with business and regional economic development groups to coordinate the delivery of day care services with the demands of the employer community.

E. GREATER COOPERATION BETWEEN BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC/ INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT GROUPS

Significant levels of cooperation already exist between the Workforce and Economic Development structures. Two members of the regional WIA staff serve on the Executive Board of the Northeastern Pa. Alliance (NEPA). Some of our nine CareerLink managers are active in local Chambers of Commerce and Industrial Development organizations. The Workforce Investment Boards have active representation from both the local Industrial Resource Centers and the Manufacturing Associations.

Goals to immediately expand these levels include:

1. Identifying the critical skills and education needs of both established and emerging companies to assist them in meeting their workforce development needs;
2. Increasing regional involvement by workforce and economic development staff in designing and implementing regional strategies.

F. IMPROVE LINKAGES BETWEEN AREA WOKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARDS

This document is representative of the cooperation currently existing in the region. As stated earlier, it is a product of numerous work sessions and discussions between key regional operatives throughout the region. As a result of these joint sessions, goals have been developed for increasing levels of cooperation. They include the following:

- 1. Form closer linkages between program staffs for the purpose of identifying best practices to improve customer service.**
- 2. Exchange updates of local strategic plans to identify common needs and areas where resources can be shared.**
- 3. Establish a regional “hot line” where customers can call for information about services offered within the region. This is a twenty-four month goal.**
- 4. Employ a regional grants coordinator, as needed, who will be responsible for researching and identifying available funds and then acting to solicit those funds by submitting grant proposals.**
- 5. Create a cross referencing system among the various websites from the regional economic and workforce development organizations by “linking” them to one another.**

ATTACHMENTS

- I. Regional Map and Demographic Profile of the Area.
- II. List of Industry Clusters for the Pocono Counties and Luzerne/Schuylkill Areas.
- III. Ten Year Employment Projections (1998-2008) for Lackawanna and Luzerne/Schuylkill Counties.
- IV. Ten year Employment Projections for Southern Tier New York and Morris County, New Jersey.
- V. Inventory of Resources and Existing Funding for Transportation Services in the Region.
- VI. Inventory of Resources and Existing Funding for Child Care services in the Region.
- VII. Staffing Levels by SIC Code – Analysis of Skills, Knowledge and Abilities Required to Qualify for Priority Occupations.
- VIII. Excerpts of Web Pages for NEPA, Penn’s Northeast, and The Great Valley Technology Alliance.
- IX. Letters of Support.