Workforce Alliance
CETC REGIONAL PLAN

I. *REGIONAL ECONOMY*

The South Central Connecticut region is comprised of 30 municipalities with a total population of 723,575 individuals. Nearly half of the region's population lives in New Haven, Meriden, Hamden, Milford and West Haven. It is a region of great economic disparity: Yale University and a cluster of health care, research and and biotech firms which produce some of the highest incomes in the area, contrast with the City of New Haven which ranks as the seventh poorest city in the country. The City has a population of 124,001 and 24.4% of individuals living in poverty. The region has a workforce of 273,100 and a current (April 2009) unemployment rate of 7.7 %, up from 4.8% a year ago. From March – April, 2009, the New Haven LMA lost 3,100 jobs, the greatest share of job loss in the state.

Nearly half of the jobs in the South Central Region are in the communities of New Haven, Middletown, Milford and Wallingford. These towns, when combined with Meriden, Hamden, North Haven, West Haven and Branford make up 80% of all jobs in the region.

The region's economic engine is driven by the Health Services, Education and Professional/Technical Service sectors. These industries all experienced an increase in employment between the third quarter of 2007 and 2008. Health Care grew by 836 jobs. Educational services by 1,179 and Professional/ Technical by 600 jobs. All other industries experienced a decline in employment levels for the same period, the greatest being in Construction, which lost 1,207 jobs.

There are 3,479 individuals in the region who are state supplement (TANF) recipients classified as "participants" in the Jobs First Employment Services program. This number represents a 23% share of the total number of TANF recipients in the state. Of this group, 3,071 participants have been engaged in services through CT Works this year.

The region has an unusually high number of incarcerated individuals who list their home addresses as within the region. Of the 12,196 adult probationers in the region, 4,571 (37%) reside in New Haven, and 7,904 (65%) live in New Haven, Meriden, West Haven and Hamden. The comprehensive treatment of ex-offenders is a major priority of the City of New Haven, and is included in the and the current capacity within the One-stop infrastructure is insufficient.

II. *STRATEGIES*

1. **Address Basic Skills Deficiencies-** We have identified basic skills deficiencies in our customer population as the greatest challenge in building a highly skilled workforce. It is a challenge that has been identified by the Governor as well, and is included in her workforce priorities. A recent finding by a CT Community College that for all entering students for the semester revealed that 84% tested into developmental level math courses; 54% tested into developmental level reading courses, and 38% tested into developmental writing courses. The following table shows the academic assessment results for 4,382 South Central CT One Stop customers and the correlation between basic skills deficiencies and earnings potential:

Funding Source	% Below Basic *	% H.S. diploma/ GED	Average Hourly Wage
WIA Dislocated Workers	62.0%	89%	$15.07
National Emergency Grants	68.9%		$14.79
WIA Adult Programs	71.9%	83%	$12.64
WIA Youth Programs	78.4%	25%	$10.21
Jobs First Employment Services (TANF recipients)	89.1%	Data not available	$9.67

Many of our customers are not able to meet the basic skills level requirement for entry into Individual Training Account programs or other vocational skills training. If they do enter such programs without remedial assistance, there is a strong likelihood of frustration and failure. This is particularly important when considering the goals of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which is to quickly move individuals into competitive employment. With our local adult education provider, we have launched a Basic Skills center where individuals are quickly remediated prior to entering training. Launched New Haven in May, 2009, the Basic Skills Center will move individuals through contextual remediation in reading, writing, math and problem solving in 120 instructional hours

2. **Promote Family Economic Success -** Workforce Alliance has been working with the Family Economic Success Funders' Group, shepherded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. This group seeks to improve the employment, earnings and overall quality of life for low-income working families in the region. A major element in this strategy is the creation of Workforce Pipelines, which are similar to the Governor's concept of Jobs Funnels.

3. **Encourage Successful Engagement of Youth in the Workforce** – Our Youth Council will continue to be aggressive in developing the capacity of our partners and vendors to more effectively serve at-risk youth, beginning in middle school and through age 24. The federal STEM grant will enable better labor market information, Experts in Schools and one-on-one coaching within the One-stops. The YouthNet Info Xchange will be expanded into other regions to improve overall capacity. Our summer youth program will provide employment opportunities and a look into the world of work for 1,000 youth with barriers to employment.

III. *AMERICAN RECOVERY AND REINVESTMENT ACT*

Transparency and Accountability - We have incorporated the four guiding principles of ARRA into all of our planning and programming efforts. Since January, our executive staff has been documenting every meeting and decision made with respect to ARRA implementation. This "diary" is available and serves as documentation of our deliberations, partnerships and preparation for implementation. In early May, we were one of two WIBS chosen to be monitored by the US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, to assess our readiness for ARRA implementation. As part of this monitoring, we had to complete a readiness guide (attached). In addition, we will communicate major outcomes and decisions through our online newsletter, "*Workforce Developments*."

Timely spending of funds – We have prepared an operational plan which outlines the apportionment of funds under ARRA. Because we have exhausted WIA-Dislocated Worker ITA

funding for PY08, we have been charging off ITA's to ARRA-DW and will continue to do so until July 1, In addition, we have successfully negotiated eight classes with our two Community Colleges and other providers, to operate classroom-based training under ARRA-Adult and Dislocated Worker funding. Most of this training is in the Health Care area, as current demand exists for those workers. We are fortunate to have received a large number of WIA youth proposals, and have set aside some additional ARRA funding to support high risk youth. This, as supplementary to the extensive summer youth program which will soon be underway using ARRA funds will ensure that our expenditures will be in line with state and federal expectations.

ARRA funding will be spent concurrently with WIA formula funding. While we apply ARRA dollars to primarily fund classroom-based training, on-the-job training and associated support services, WIA formula funding will support Individualized Training Accounts (after 7/1/09), customized projects, incumbent worker training, and the One-stop infrastructure and technology. The majority of youth funding under ARRA will support summer employment and high-risk youth (such as youthful offenders), while WIA youth formula dollars will support our more traditional program menu of services to younger and older youth.

Increasing workforce system capacity and service levels – We have experienced an increase in customer flow in the One-stops of 40% over the past year, and desperately needed to increase system capacity. ARRA has enabled us to do so. As a result, our One-stop Operator has hired one additional full-time staff person to work in the One-stop in New Haven. In addition, existing front line staff has agreed to work overtime, so we did not have to hire and train staff who would ultimately be temporarily employed. On May 4, we began operating extended hours in our New Haven and Meriden One-stop Centers. We are now open Monday-Thursday from 8:30AM – 8:00 PM, and Saturdays from 9:00 AM – 2:00 PM to accommodate additional volume generated through enrollment in ARRA programs and general increase in participation. As a result of this capacity increase, we project a significant increase in numbers served and increase in numbers receiving training over what we have previously enrolled with formula funding alone.

Using data to guide strategic planning and service delivery – We have utilized a combination of in-house data and data generated through Data Core partners, the Connecticut Department of Labor, and other regional and national sources to guide our planning and service delivery. We examine data on a monthly basis to determine any change in strategies, operational adjustments or focus.

As regards **the use of technology to support services to employers and job seekers**, we will be currently employing two technology-based strategies. The first, we are currently in partnership with EWIB, in an e-learning project which enables One-stop customers to obtain a license to take on-line skills assessments and instruction through the Metrix Learning. Customers can quickly move through the learning modules and enhance their occupational skill levels. This product can also be marketed to employers who wish to upgrade employee skills or test competencies in potential hires, and will be expanded using ARRA funding.

The second strategy involves implementation of *Earn*Benefits, a "benefits screening tool" being promoted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. We have been working with Casey in their Family Economic Success (FES) initiative. This product is complimentary tool for this body of work. Access

to work supports is an integral part of a "bundling of services strategy" to build family economic success. The goal is to supplement income earned from wages with income from work supports in order to grow overall household income. We expect to begin employing *Earn*Benefits with our customers in January, 2010.

Emphasis on job retention and job creation - We have operated a vibrant incumbent worker training program with state and federal resources, supplemented with our own formula funds for the past six years. Because of funding limitations, the demand for this activity has always exceeded the number of interested employers, and has been limited to the health care and manufacturing sectors. We have recently met with all of the major hospitals in our region and the need for incumbent worker training in health care occupations continues to escalate. Additionally, manufacturers request incumbent worker training dollars all year round and long after funding has been exhausted. ARRA presents an interesting opportunity to engage these employers in customized training programs which will focus on job retention and skills upgrade.

We are in support of a statewide effort to expand incumbent worker training with the state set-aside 15% funds, and would hope to expand the scope of target industries to include sector-based training for renewable energy (including green jobs), broadband and other high-demand industry sectors.

In addition, we will support job creation by making extensive use of On-the Job Training Contracts to support new hires in these industries and others where the addition of even a person or two can greatly catapult a company's productivity and capacity. While the region has seen a decline on job orders of 75% over the past year, we are confident that the opportunities offered through an aggressive OJT program will provide a much needed incentive for local employers – especially small businesses – to create sustainable jobs. Our local Chambers of Commerce will play an integral part in assisting to identify small businesses within their respective memberships which may be ripe for growth.

Focus on low-income, displaced and under-skilled adults, disconnected youth and veterans – These populations have always been a priority for Workforce Alliance. ARRA will enable us to expand services to these groups in a more comprehensive manner, and the use of service bundling we believe, will produce exponentially greater economic outcomes. Supportive services and needs-related payments will to be made available to support employment and training needs of priority populations, and any eligible customer who demonstrates a need. Transportation remains the greatest barrier to employment in our region. We have set aside ARRA funding to expand our Regional Growth Connection transportation to work program to address increased demand.

Connection to and coordination with other agencies receiving ARRA funding - The Stimulus Act gives workforce boards the opportunity to examine our existing partnerships in the One-stop Career system, and look to ways to improve and expand those partnerships. Projects such as the Weatherization initiative will enable us to strengthen our relationships with two CAP agencies in our region, and work to further program development with our Community Colleges and DECD. The Homeless Prevention ARRA funding provides greater opportunity to further our region's family economic success agenda, and WIBS can play an important collaborative role in providing employment services to the target population. In addition, we will coordinate with municipalities who will receive ARRA funding through the Regional Economic Development Forum (REDFO) which operates in our region. These are just examples of new or better coordination. We suspect that others will follow.

IV. *GOVERNOR'S VISION AND PRIORITIES*

We support the Governor's vision that a talented workforce and a culture of innovation are key to improving Connecticut's competitive posture. Our Basic Skills projects and WIA and ARRA - supported Youth programs will allow youth and adults to be put on a pathway to master core skills in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, language proficiency, problem-solving and communication, by facilitating access to Community College programs (for adults) and encouraging youth to stay in school and providing up to date labor market information on high growth, high wage jobs in the region, and in Connecticut.

I. Education

Much of the work around the Governor's education priority will be tasked to the Youth Council and Planning Committee. We have embraced the STEM emphasis through our Experts in Schools and plan to expand with the federal grant and through WIA programming. Our Workforce Pipeline strategy will address the work of the P-20 Council and further promote lifelong learning. We are working with this group on the statewide STEM project.

Wherever possible and practical, we will support the Community Colleges and Vocational Technical schools' credentials as a minimum employability standard in the state. We will work with both entities to connect them to employers who can offer hands on feedback and input on program development.

II. Workforce

Green Jobs – We are currently conducting extensive research about the nature and skill requirements of Green Jobs in the region. We believe that the efforts of including Green Jobs in an Incumbent Worker Training and On-the-Job Training Initiative will greatly assist Governor Rell's goal that 25% of jobs created with ARRA funds be green. In addition, staff will participate in the Casey Foundation "Green Jobs Boot Camp" in mid-July.

Implement Jobs Funnel strategies – As we indicated earlier, our FES Workforce Pipeline strategy is essentially the same as concept as a Jobs Funnel, and we support this strategy. We believe that there is a potential to do such a project in Health Care in the region.

Reintegrate ex-offenders – Given the discussion on page 1, we plan to expand our efforts to serve this group. See attachment for special project request.

Promote adult education strategies that emphasize acquisition of skills needed to succeed in the workplace, including contextualized instruction tied directly to competitive industry sectors and employment opportunities – See attachment for special project in Meriden and discussion, pages 1-2.

III. System

The priorities articulated in the system have been addressed elsewhere in this plan. Please refer to discussion under Strategies and ARRA.