

## WORKFORCE ALLIANCE DRAFT WIOA LOCAL PLAN - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Background

Workforce Alliance. Together with businesses, local elected officials, and community leaders, the Workforce Alliance creates a comprehensive, community-wide response to build a highly-skilled workforce in South Central Connecticut. Through the coordination and administration of a variety of employment and training initiatives, the Workforce Alliance has prepared thousands of individuals for jobs and assisted numerous employers with training and employee transition.

Economic Landscape & Priority Sectors. As of March 2016, South Central Connecticut had recovered 90.6% of the jobs lost as a result of the recession, higher than the state's rate of 76.7%, but below the national rate of 161.4%. Many of the jobs lost in the recession were high wage jobs. It is unclear to what degree the newly created jobs will pay "living wages."

**Table 1: Top Five Growing Industry Sectors 2012-2022**

| Industry Sector                       | Estimated '12 | Projected '22 | # Change | % Change |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------|----------|
| Health and Social Assistance          | 67,480        | 81,034        | 13,554   | 20.1     |
| Educational Services                  | 52,442        | 58,042        | 5,600    | 10.7     |
| Admin., Sup., Waste Man., Serv.       | 18,806        | 22,267        | 3,461    | 18.4     |
| Prof., Scientific, and Tech. Services | 14,154        | 17,068        | 2,914    | 20.6     |
| Construction                          | 11,492        | 13,793        | 2,301    | 20.0     |

*CTDOL Industry Growth Projections SC WIA 2012-2022*

Table 1 shows the top five growing industry sectors according to Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) employment forecasts for 2012-2022.<sup>1</sup>

The Workforce Alliance uses these projections and other factors to identify priority sectors.

- *Health and Personal Care.* Health care reform, an aging population, and other demographic and workforce shifts will continue to fuel growth in health and personal care jobs, many of which offer career pathways to higher-wage jobs.
- *STEM Occupations.* Occupations that require science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) competencies remain among the hardest occupations to fill including: computer and mathematical, architecture, and engineering occupations.
- *Information Technology.* The Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services sector represents one of the top five growing industry sectors, and drives economic growth.
- *Manufacturing.* The manufacturing industry has begun a resurgence, as manufacturing job postings in the region rose by 12% from 2014 to 2015.<sup>2</sup> Manufacturing jobs offer good wages and career pathways, and create a high number of jobs in other industries.

Workforce Challenges. The Workforce Alliance employs an array of strategies (discussed in the next section) to address several critical regional workforce challenges:

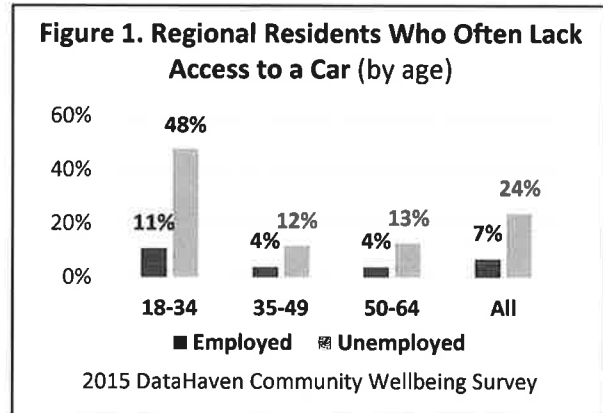
- *Skills Gaps.* Skills gaps represent the greatest single barrier to the achievement of the Workforce Alliance vision of a high-quality, highly-skilled regional workforce. The

<sup>1</sup> <https://www1.ctdol.state.ct.us/lmi/projections.asp>. These are the most recent CTDOL occupational projections.

<sup>2</sup> Source: A March 2016 report by Monster Government Solutions for the Workforce Alliance.

skills gaps referenced herein include academic gaps, functional gaps, occupational-specific gaps and what is commonly referred to as gaps in “soft” or “professional” skills. Employers in the region report shortages for qualified workers in priority sectors, including health care, manufacturing, and information technology.

- *Transportation.* Access to transportation remains an intractable barrier to education, training, and employment for many regional residents. Figure 1 shows that lack of access to a car when needed poses a barrier to employment.



- *Serving the Underemployed.* Underemployed workers represent a difficult population to engage deeply in workforce development services due to their work and family obligations. Underemployed workers who pursue education or training often drop out because they are forced – in order to make ends meet – to take part-time jobs or adjust their work schedules.
- *Reintegrating Ex-Offenders.* Efforts to reduce the prison population have increased the number of ex-offenders needing to be reintegrated into the workforce. Many ex-offenders have multiple barriers to employment beyond their criminal records.
- *Serving Youth.* Traditionally, the public workforce system has offered few viable options to help out of school youth advance in their career paths, as their needs are often too extensive for Adult Basic Education, but they are not prepared to succeed in occupational training. Additionally, those youth who are matriculating in school often lack good labor market information and experiential learning, as they seek out initial career choices.

**Vision, Goals & Strategies for 2016-2020**

Vision. The Workforce Alliance has a vision “*To collaborate with our partners to cultivate the skilled, high-quality workers needed for regional employers to prosper and grow.*”

This vision embraces the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) emphasis on partnership, alignment and systems integration, as well as WIOA’s dual focus on developing a supply of highly-qualified workers while meeting the hiring demands of employers.

Goals. The Workforce Alliance has four overarching goals for 2016-2020 that align with WIOA priorities and Connecticut’s Unified State Plan while addressing the region’s unique priorities.

1. *Make the regional public workforce system more customer-centered.* Customer-centered service involves restructuring the traditional service delivery process to make it more responsive to customer capacities, needs, desires, and rights to self-determination.

2. *Improve access to the public workforce system for residents throughout the region.*  
Three American Job Centers (AJCs) represent the main points of entry for most regional public workforce system customers. The Workforce Alliance will become more agile and flexible to increase access to services for people impacted by unemployment and underemployment across the 30-town region.
3. *Increase the level of coordination, integration, and responsiveness of Business Services.*  
The Workforce Alliance Business Services Team ensures that the regional public workforce system responds to the talent demands of area employers. The Workforce Alliance will improve coordination between Business Services and all other areas of the public workforce system and fully adopt a demand-driven mindset.
4. *Increase the level and accessibility of services for youth and persons with disabilities in the American Job Centers.* Through customer-centered case management and other strategies, the Workforce Alliance will move individuals with disabilities and young adult customers along appropriate career pathways.

Strategies. The Workforce Alliance will utilize several strategies to achieve its vision and goals.

- *Transition to a customer-centered case management methodology in American Job Centers.* To ensure that AJC customers receive the best in customer service to help them advance along their desired career pathways, the Workforce Alliance will transition to a customer-centered case management model within resource constraints. The model is based on a customer's strengths, not their deficits.
- *Utilize customer-centered practice to increase cross-system integration.* Communication among the agencies and systems that touch an individual represents a cornerstone of customer-centered practice. To accomplish this, the Workforce Alliance will increase communication and integration with its partners in – and outside – the workforce system. The partners will build on existing models through the Secure Jobs program, which seeks to provide integrated services to homeless individuals, as well as other local models.
- *Work with all stakeholders to address skills gaps.* Addressing skills gaps will require a coordinated response from every workforce stakeholder. The Workforce Alliance will work with local employers to understand skill gaps, and will convene its workforce system partners to develop coordinated, integrated strategies to address identified gaps, such as the Basic Skills Gap.
- *Develop innovative solutions to address transportation barriers.* The Workforce Alliance will expand its existing menu of transportation options, and will work with ride-sharing services (e.g., Uber) to pilot a first-in-the-nation customized menu of transportation services for AJC customers who lack public transportation options.
- *Reintegrate ex-offenders into the workforce.* The Workforce Alliance will build upon the success of its Next Steps Re-Entry program, which has resulted in over 1560 job placements for ex-offenders since 2003. In February 2016, the Workforce Alliance – in partnership with the City of New Haven and the Connecticut Department of Correction – opened a first-of-its-kind AJC at a Connecticut correctional facility. Working through this

new AJC will allow us to expand the number of services provided to this population while they are in the facility and upon their release.

- *Increase efforts to engage out-of-school youth in education, training, and employment services.* Customer-centered case management will help engage out-of-school youth by meeting them where they are and focusing on *their goals* rather than system or program goals. The Workforce Alliance will also train its vendors to better serve this population.
- *Improve responsiveness to the needs of underemployed workers.* The Workforce Alliance will continue to explore strategies to better serve the underemployed, such as expanding short-term customized training options and innovative transportation models.
- *Make Business Services more employer-driven.* We will establish an Employer Advisory Committee comprised of employers from priority sectors as well as from declining sectors. Business Services staff will participate in the Employer Advisory Committee, which will provide a venue for employers to regularly communicate their issues directly to the workforce staff responsible for responding to their needs.
- *Give individuals with disabilities the tools they need to achieve their goals.* AJC staff will work closely with partners who serve individuals with disabilities to better meet the needs of customers with disabilities. This process will involve concurrent service planning to ensure better service coordination and access to resources. As one of the initial steps, staff will proactively integrate individuals with disabilities into mainstream AJC programs and activities, to the fullest extent possible.
- *Develop continuous improvement measures to assure that goals are being addressed in a realistic timeframe.* In addition to the measures that will eventually be mandated by the final WIOA regulations, Workforce Alliance will develop initial measures to ensure continuous improvement of its work. These measures will include those relating to 1) customer-centered design implementation, 2) rollout of services to outlying areas, and 3) cross-training of a regional Business Services Team. These three measures will be initially benchmarks as of June 30, 2016.