



Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board

LOCAL PLAN 2020-2024

Danbury, Waterbury &
Torrington, Connecticut

p. 203-574-6971
f. 203-573-8951

info@nrwib.org
www.nrwib.org

I. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A. CHIEF ELECTED OFFICIALS (CEOS)

The NRWIB encompasses 41 municipalities, covering a population base of over 594,000. A complete listing of the current Chief Elected Officials is attached in Appendix A. The local area includes more than one unit of general local government and therefore in accordance with WIOA Sec. 107 (c)(1)(B), an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) among the Municipalities is in place that defines how the parties will carry out the roles and responsibilities of the CEOs.

The IGA (attached in Appendix B) sets forth the following:

1. The nomination process used to appoint local board members, the term limitations and duration of term appointments.
2. The process to notify the CEO of a board member vacancy to ensure a proper replacement,
3. The proxy and alternative designee process that will be used when a board member is unable to attend a meeting and alternative designee as per the requirements at §679.110(d)(4) of the WIOA regulations
4. The policy for the use of technology for participation, such as phone and web-based meetings, that will be used to promote the board member participation.

The Bylaws of the Local Workforce Development Board (Appendix C) articulate the detailed committee structure, as well as the process to ensure that board members actively participate in convening the workforce development system's stakeholders, brokering relationships with a diverse range of employers, and leveraging support for workforce development activities.

Utilizing the regional Council of Government structure, the CEOs of the region were invited to participate in the development and review of the Local Plan. A public hearing was held on August 25, 2020 to solicit public comment on the updated version. CEOs in each of the three areas were invited to attend to hear public comment. The public hearing yielded no additional input nor comment. The Board of Directors voted to approve the Plan and the Chair formally executed the required signature page contained herein.

B. LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD (LWDB)

1. *Provide a matrix identifying LWDB members including the category each member represents.*

See Appendix D

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

The LWDB was involved in the development, review and approval of the plan as follows:

- Established an Ad Hoc Planning Committee of Board members;
- Convened strategic planning sessions of LWDB members, workforce partners and other interested parties to discuss priorities in relation to state plan; and
- Once the plan was drafted, an Ad Hoc Committee reviewed the draft and provided input. After the Ad Hoc review and changes, the Draft plan was forwarded to the Full LWDB and released for further comment.

The locally elected officials (LEOs) were provided a copy and invited to the public hearing which was held on August 25, 2020. At the September 2020 Board of Directors meeting, the WDB approved the Plan and its submission to the Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL).

3. *Provide an organizational chart for the LWDB and administrative support.*
See Appendix E

C. LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE ENTITY AND GRANT SUBRECIPIENT

1. *Identify the administrative entity.*


As is set forth in the Intergovernmental Agreement, the City of Waterbury is the grant recipient.

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

The entity designated to receive and distribute the grant funds acting as the local fiscal agent is the 501(c)3 Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board, as is articulated in the Intergovernmental Agreement.

D. ONE STOP SYSTEM

1. *General System Description*


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

The local one-stop system is composed of three (3) AJs, each certified: one comprehensive center in Waterbury and two affiliate sites in Danbury and Torrington. All three centers house case management services for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) clients and business services to employers.


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

Career Resources, Inc. (CRI) currently provides all career services under the consortium agreement with staff located at the three offices in Waterbury, Danbury and Torrington. CRI was selected through a competitive procurement process. A legal advertisement was posted in the Danbury *News Times* and the Hartford *Courant* on December 13, 2016, and December 14, 2016, with instructions on where to access the Request for Proposals (NRWIB website) and the deadline to submit a Letter of Intent (December 22, 2016). Interested bidders were instructed to include a timeframe for the completion of tasks along with a budget. The procurement process was open for 30 days, providing sufficient time to respond as outlined in TEG 15-16. NRWIB received four proposal submissions - from ResCare, Eckerd, New Opportunities, Inc. and Career Resources, Inc. These were evaluated and scored during a meeting of the One-Stop Committee. Following careful evaluation of each proposal, the One-Stop Committee selected Career Resources, Inc. for recommendation to the Board of Directors. During the June 8, 2017, meeting of the Board a motion to approve CRI's proposal to become the Title I Service Provider for PY17, beginning July 1, 2017, was made and passed unanimously.


As the current contract will soon expire, the Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board intends to put the contract out to bid for the career services entity, with an award to be announced in April of 2021.

 *Identify the entity or entities selected to operate the local one-stop centers*

The Northwest Connecticut Chamber of Commerce is the operator of all three one-stops, located in Waterbury, Danbury and Torrington. As the current contract will soon expire, the Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board intends to put the contract out to bid for the one-stop operator entity with an award to be announced in April of 2021.

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

NRWIB has separated the duties of the career service provider from those of the one-stop operator. All career services as outlined in the WIOA Regulations are provided by Career Resources, Inc. These include both basic and individualized career services and follow-up services. Services range from labor market information and information on partner programs to comprehensive skills assessment, career planning and the development of individual employment plans. Training will be made available to participants after assessment and evaluation determines that the individual requires training in order to obtain employment or remain employed. At this time, it is not anticipated that any career services would be contracted out to other service providers.

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

The NRWIB has Memoranda of Understanding and Infrastructure Funding Agreements with several partners. The Manufacturing Alliance Service Corp. agrees to assist with the provision of career services such as short-term pre-vocational services, workforce preparation activities and job training. The Workplace- Services for Veterans Families partnership allows for the joint promotion of coordinated service delivery for veterans and/or their families. MOUs have been executed with Naugatuck Valley Community College and Northwestern CT Community College to ensure the delivery of relevant employment-related workshops and training while making efforts to eliminate unnecessary content duplication, increase efficiency and reduce any perceived confusion among customers. New Opportunities, Inc. (NOI) assists with the provision of referrals to and coordination of activities with other programs and services, including programs and services within the one-stop delivery system, and in appropriate cases, other workforce development programs; NOI also provides the Meals on Wheels, Head Start, Weatherization and Fuel Assistance programs to which we refer eligible customers. Connecticut Dept. of Labor and NRWIB work together to provide seamless delivery of services to regional jobseekers and employers. Department of Aging and Disability Services agrees to provide consultation, technical assistance and support services to the One Stop service region including disability awareness, employer accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and guidance on the use of assistive technology that is available at the American Job Centers for individuals that require alternate modes of communication. The CT Dept. of Social Services agrees to coordinate services in the implementation of a workforce development system that is committed to a customer-focused comprehensive delivery system and; ensures the needs of adults, youth and dislocated workers and individuals with barriers to employment, including individuals with disabilities, are addressed, including access to technology and materials, are made available through the American Job Center. The NRWIB works with the CT State Board of Education to provide College and Career Pathways programs under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, and align such programs with the occupational and industry demands described in the WDB's local WIOA plan. New Haven Job Corps assists with the provision of training in career skills that may include business technology, construction trades, culinary preparation, plumbing and carpentry, service and technical industries and water/wastewater certification. This is a brief summary of the resources contributions these partners provide; for a comprehensive understanding of partner roles please refer to Appendix F for copies of executed Memoranda of Understanding and Infrastructure Funding Agreements.

Other service delivery partners include the Community Action Programs (CAP) throughout the region and other community-based organizations. The NRWIB also contracts with the Greater Danbury Chamber of Commerce, Waterbury Regional Chamber, Northwest Connecticut Chamber of Commerce and Resource Development Associates to increase business access to services and resources available throughout the AJCs.

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

See Appendix F

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

Manufacturing Alliance Service Corp.

2. *Customer Access*

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

Businesses: In order to promote maximum integration of services the Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board has staff dedicated to the Business Services Unit which is a system-wide coordinated effort. The mission of this team is to provide assistance to registered Connecticut businesses regarding programs and services which will support them throughout their business cycles. The Business Services Unit comprises multiple partner agencies, local chambers and other interested parties.

The Business Services Specialist provides the following:

- Coordinating recruitments held in the American Job Center offices
- Providing assistance to employers in posting their jobs to the CTHires website
- Connecting employers to CTDOL Career Fairs
- Providing business consultations and assessments
- Providing customized Labor Market Information to employers
- Visiting employers at their business location to determine the employer's needs
- Providing information on tax credit and tax incentive programs
- Writing Manufacturing Innovation Fund Incumbent Worker (MIF IWT) contracts
- Providing information on the Shared Work and Rapid Response programs to employers who may be contemplating or engaging in laying off workers

The NRWIB has also instituted a dedicated Communications Coordinator to keep both individual customers and business customers informed as to the program services and updates that are available to them. Our Communications Coordinator is in charge of managing our website content to ensure that information provided is up to date and accurate; this individual also creates promotional campaigns for our programs which are disseminated through our Instagram, Twitter and Facebook feeds. These accounts continue to garner followers.

Customers: The NRWIB provides an integrated delivery service to customers by co-enrolling participants in partner programs that provide the maximum level of services available. These efforts are based on a multitude of factors, namely, the participant's specific barriers to employment. Objectives include: increasing multiple opportunities for career exploration and planning; grow work-based learning and employment opportunities through employer engagement that lead to viable career pathways; support retention in and completion of secondary and post-secondary credentials, including non-traditional training opportunities; map existing and potential workforce partners to ensure service alignment and coordination; develop programs that will enable youth, especially those who are disconnected, to successfully enter career pathways; and leverage resources, funding and services across the workforce development system to provide comprehensive services.

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

Entities within the one-stop delivery system (including the One-Stop Operator and one-stop partners) will comply with the American with Disabilities Act by implementing the following policies, procedures, protocols and practices:

Programmatic Accessibility of Facilities, Programs, and Services:

The AJC's will comply with the A.D.A. by promoting inclusion, choice, and accessibility. Job Center staff assure that jobseekers with disabilities have programmatic access to all services. The resources offered at the AJC are:

- Information about the Americans with Disabilities Act and practical ways of applying its provisions
- Promotion of the blending, leveraging and braiding of resources in way that benefits jobseekers with disabilities
- Providing information to staff and customers regarding reasonable accommodations
- The wealth of workshops and seminars available through the job center
- Assisting customers in convening Integrated Resource Team efforts
- Increased use of the career resources area
- Awareness and utilization of the job center's assistive technology
- Information about the array of resources outside the job center
- Referrals to appropriate service providers
- Referrals to the national Job Accommodation Network
- Asset development resources
- Customized Individual Training Accounts
- Provision of supportive services
- Coordination and implementation of the Social Security Administration Ticket To Work program

Physical Accessibility of Facilities, Programs, and Services:

The AJC's offer physical accessibility, including:

- Automatic entrance door, wide doorways
- Parking reserved for persons with disabilities
- Customer accessible bathrooms / accessible drinking fountain
- Service Guide Dogs are welcomed
- Adjustable wheelchair access computer station

Technology and Materials for Individuals with Disabilities:

The AJC's offer the following and will continue to improve assistive technology resources:

- Magnifier, Zoom Text, and Scan and Read Pro
- Dragon-speak software
- Sign language and oral interpreters
- Flatbed scanner (perfection 4490)
- Talking Typing Teacher
- J.A.W.S.
- Lexington Expert Trackball Mouse

In-Service Training:

The AJC will continue, as funding permits, to provide staff with in-service training opportunities, such as seminars on the following topics:

- Serving customers with autism
- Universal design and accessibility
- Importance of programmatic as well as physical accessibility
- Serving the 'difficult' customer
- Serving customers with mental health diagnoses

- Disability etiquette and sensitivity
- Assistive technology

Technical Assistance to All Staff:

AJC staff are provided with technical assistance, resources and collaborative services to assist them in working with jobseekers who have a disability.

Section 188 of WIOA:

Key components of the AJC's compliance with Section 188 (re non- discrimination) of WIOA are:

- Equal Opportunity Officers have been designated by both the Workforce Development Board and the Department of Labor
- The AJC's general marketing and recruitment materials (including photos and ad copy) mention people with disabilities as one of the groups served and contain positive images of persons with disabilities
- The AJC makes every effort to provide universal access, reasonable accommodations, reasonable modifications to its program, and programmatic, architectural and communication accessibility
- The Center honors its obligation not to discriminate based on disability
- Staff at the AJC do not stereotype persons with disabilities when evaluating their skills, abilities, interests and needs, taking into consideration the availability of reasonable accommodations, reasonable modifications, and auxiliary aids and services
- The Center provides reasonable accommodation for individuals with disabilities
- It is made clear that disclosure is voluntary and information regarding disability will be kept confidential and maintained in a separate file
- Staff working with persons with disabilities obtain permission from the individual before discussing information about his or her disability with other staff and other agencies
- All discussions between staff and customers are conducted in a manner that ensures the preservation of confidentiality
- Staff provides appropriate assistance to individuals with disabilities so that they can effectively benefit from such services (including assistance in using computers and other forms of technology)
- The AJC publicizes the availability and provides American Sign Language interpreter services upon request
- Core services include providing or planning (including referral to other entities) for the provision of benefits counseling for persons with disabilities, particularly those individuals currently receiving/eligible for SSI or SSDI benefits and Medicaid or Medicare
- Reasonable modifications are made to eligibility criteria for intensive and training services to ensure that individuals with disabilities have an opportunity to benefit from such services that is as effective as that provided to customers who do not have a disability
- The center administers programs and activities in the most integrated setting appropriate
- The staff endeavor to communicate with persons with disabilities as effectively as with others
- The center provides programmatic and architectural accessibility for persons with disabilities
- The center and the board have established complaint processing procedures and have made customers aware of them

Collaboration with the Department of Aging and Disability Services:

NRWIB has established a Partnership Plus agreement with the Department of Aging and Disability Services. Both entities frequently refer clients back and forth and collaborate in streamlining services. The Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) and the AJCs collaborate for in-service training and ADS/Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is co-located in Waterbury. Both entities emphasize inclusion, choice and integration. Furthermore, the regional ADS Director is a member of the WDB. The NRWIB has partnered with ADS to offer a two-day (8 hour) Work Readiness boot camp. Facilitated by Career Navigators, the boot camp addresses a number of soft skills that have been noted as "lacking" by every employer spoken with.

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

The Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board has contracted with Career Edge for services to provide an online application portal through our website; this has enabled the board to collect applications for our WIOA Summer Youth Employment program along with WIOA Adult and WIOA Dislocated Worker including virtual submission of both application and eligibility documentation. Contracting of these services has ensured the board is able to continue providing innovative solutions to complex social challenges such as closing the opportunity divide, reducing

unemployment, and eradicating poverty in the virtual world that has been created as a result of the pandemic crisis. Efforts continue to develop processes and procedures to provide these services across all programs. A Post Pandemic Crisis Management team has convened in order to expand virtual accessibility across all programs and assure access to online platforms by providing support services in terms of technology, equipment and connectivity.

Considering recent events due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the NRWIB has implemented virtual eligibility determination capabilities via CTHires and our website. These measures have ensured ease and convenience for its customers while allowing the agency to remain in compliance with WIOA federal guidelines and regulations. Virtual WIOA Information sessions are hosted on a weekly basis with customers registering for them through the NRWIB's website or by direct call. Virtual information sessions are also being conducted for each of the WDB's durational grants. Potential participants who are interested in moving forward with enrollment are given explicit instruction regarding how to fill out the pre-application and securely upload eligibility documentation (e.g. driver's license, birth certificate). The NRWIB intends to maintain these virtual features as part of its standard method of operation in the future.

Technology limitations can pose a challenge in the NRWIB region. Since the transition to CTHires, jobseekers, employers, and workforce professional staff have identified its navigational ease as cumbersome; however, once they become familiar with it, its value is appreciated. Each participant will have access to a variety of tools within the system that can merge employment data into resume templates and track job searches. Additional data sharing agreements among agencies will streamline information sharing and ease access for customers.

Program staff seeks to implement a communication strategy that allows staff to interact participants via text. All programs should also consider text alerts for those who do not have internet access at home.

Client hardware and accessibility needs also present a challenge. Each career center is equipped with computers to enable online job search and online employment applications. Many residents lack the resources to bring the internet into their homes and rely on the technology in the AJC's and their cellular devices. In many cases, computer literacy to navigate both the CT Hires and other online sites is a barrier. When surveyed, jobseekers identified the resource area (54.90%) and CT Hires (49.02%) as the services most utilized in their visit.

Due to current office closures brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the NRWIB has and will continue to provide customers and program participants with the technology needed (i.e. Chromebook, laptop, tablet, internet) to ensure access to online application processes; career navigators and case management staff will schedule one-on-one appointments and will follow protocol as outlined in the NRWIB Pandemic Plan.

3. Integration of Services

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

As the NRWIB continues its Career Navigator-driven approach in its AJC, it is strengthened by an integrated, technology-enabled intake and case management information system. In the meantime, a model of train-the-trainer has been adopted. Currently, NRWIB utilizes the state-wide web-based case management system, CT Hires, operated by Geographic Solutions. CT Hires contains four of the six core programs within it, including: WIOA Adult, WIOA Dislocated Worker, WIOA Youth, and

Wagner-Peyser programs. This system also currently has within it the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program. CTDOL has expanded the management information systems for the core programs interoperable to include the Jobs First Employment Services (JFES), Foreign Labor Certification program, and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit programs.

NRWIB is eager to provide input and support to CTDOL as it plans the expansion of CTHires to adapt to a virtual experience. NRWIB supports the expansion as the future system would provide for electronic intake and data collection across multiple agencies and programs as it would: 1) improve service delivery to individuals by enabling data to be collected through an online portal and shared by service providers and 2) foster communication and collaboration among service providers. Until this is completed, the NRWIB will continue to use Career Edge to augment the current CTHires software.

4. *Competitive Selection of One-Stop Operator*

- ✚ Describe the steps taken to ensure a competitive process for selection of the one-stop operator(s).

On January 17, 2017 NRWIB released a Request for Quotation to procure a One-Stop Operator for the region. A legal advertisement was published in the *Danbury News Times* on January 17, 2017, and in the *Waterbury Republican American* on January 18, 2017. The procurement was open for 30 days, however, an extension for the submission headline was made due to the lack of proposals received. A second legal advertisement was posted in the *Danbury News Times*, *Waterbury Republican American* and the *Hartford Courant* on March 2, 2017, informing interested bidders of an updated March 30th deadline. NRWIB received two proposals in total. Upon review and discussion, the One-Stop Committee selected the Northwest Connecticut Chamber of Commerce for recommendation to the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors met on June 8, 2017 and voted to move forward with the selection.

The NRWIB intends to put the contract out to bid for the one-stop operator entity with an award to be announce in April 2021.

5. *System Improvement*

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

Customers- Integrated Service Delivery: pertains to the delivery of NRWIB services to customers in a manner that braids the resources and services of workforce partners to seamlessly address the training and employment needs of system customers- both jobseekers and business. The key components of Integrated Service Delivery include: co-enrollment of customers, organization of staff around functions and customers' needs, functional leadership and supervision to support functional teams, continuous quality improvement based on customer data and feedback. For staff, this means: the customers (jobseekers and employers) and their needs are at the forefront; every customer is everyone's customer; staff development and training to support transition to new roles under functional teams; meeting customers where they are physically and in the career development process and serving as navigators to ensure customers access the services they need from various partners. Under Integrated Service Delivery, customers will experience: "value-added" interaction during each visit and seamless transition between staff/programs and/or services.

Business Services: The NRWIB serves as the convener of industry representatives from the targeted industry sectors: Manufacturing, Healthcare, Information Technology, Construction, Human Services, Retail Trade, Transportation & Warehousing and Accommodation & Food Services. We convene a robust business service unit that consists of business intermediaries (Chambers of Commerce), AJC partners (Voc-Rehab, Adult Ed). These representatives understand more about what is needed from service providers, how the WDB and other workforce entities can do more to prepare workers for their jobs and understand their emerging skill needs.

Following the lead of the Governor’s Workforce Development Council, the NRWIB is engaged in Next Generation Sector Partnerships strategy models and is currently coordinating with its three major regional Chambers of Commerce in developing a core team whose mission will be to bring these partnerships to an active and impactful existence. Further detail regarding these efforts can be found in Part II. Sec. 3 of this Plan.

Strong collaboration exists among workforce partners and those business intermediaries, but as always, continuous improvement and honing a more strategic plan when working with businesses will be a focus of the NRWIB. The state has a well-rounded, diverse database detailing job openings and skills needed. Developing a well-defined strategy to connect employers with available talent is needed.

Staff Training: In an effort to assure continuous improvement, training for peer-to-peer collaboration and networking between agencies is ongoing. Additional training will help build relationships and improve referral processes. Staff knowledge of partner agencies’ services and their availability to clients, is paramount to help clients navigate the system efficiently and effectively co-enroll customers. Understanding timelines for each process is critical, so customers have reasonable expectations.

The NRWIB continues to pride itself in its delivery of a customer-centric case management approach to WIOA programs. The Career Navigator (formerly known as Case Manager) leverages his/her skills in strengths-based assessments and motivational techniques to help the customer overcome barriers to improvement. The results of the approach have led to:

- Career Navigators developing customer-centered service plans by partnering with clients;
- Clients gaining access to more coordinated and integrated services; and
- Clients making progress toward self-sufficiency through employment/income, housing, childcare, and life skills.

WIOA Career Navigators are trained in building a customer-centric case management practice. Core trainings are delivered and multiple coaching sessions for the staff and supervisors are provided.

II. ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

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

The State of Connecticut’s economic conditions, along with the world-at-large, have been devastatingly impacted by the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. The landscape of existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors as has been understood from a workforce development perspective changed dramatically and overnight. Labor Market Information and unemployment data change by the hour; given what is currently available, the Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board will consider additions to currently deemed in-demand industry sectors and will customize strategy to meet employer and job-seeker needs. Current in-demand industry sector strategies include: Construction, Healthcare, Human Service, Information Technology,

Manufacturing, Retail Trade, Transportation & Warehousing and Accommodation & Food Services. The following table reflects the impact COVID-19 has had on in-demand sectors and depicts the amount of initial unemployment claims that have been **processed** (as opposed to **filed** which is an important distinction) between January 2020 and July 2020:

Construction	Manufacturing	Retail Trade	Healthcare & Social Assistance	Accommodation & Food Services	Transportation and Warehousing
19,622	34,013	59,688	62,574	70,520	16,717

Information from CT Department of Labor, Labor Market Information website.

The following table depicts processed **continued** unemployment claims by industry between January 6, 2020 and mid-July 2020:

Construction	Manufacturing	Retail Trade	Healthcare & Social Assistance	Accommodation & Food Services	Transportation and Warehousing
505,201	562,097	880,306	902,404	1,049,393	331,219

Information from CT Department of Labor, Labor Market Information website.

The following table depicts the enormous influx in the amount of unemployment claims that have been **processed** in the Northwest Workforce Development Area between January 5, 2020 through July 19, 2020:

	January 2020	March 2020	April 2020	July 2020
Total Initially Processed Claims	17,693	218,480	117,100	62,639

Information from CT Department of Labor, Labor Market Information website.

The Connecticut Dept. of Labor – LMI webpage states: “Connecticut’s official unemployment rate for June produced by the BLS LAUS continues to be impacted by pandemic related survey data problems. Connecticut’s official unemployment rate is not accurate. BLS is actively working to overcome this problem as quickly as possible.”

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

Due to recent events that have unfolded as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, it is difficult to gauge and/or predict what employers in these industry sectors will need in terms of job training and what their expected job openings will be. The Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board will expand its current sector-strategies to include the following industries: Manufacturing, Healthcare, Human Services, Construction, Information Technology, Retail Trade, Transportation & Warehousing and Accommodation & Food Services.

The NRWIB hosted a series of stakeholder meetings in July 2020 in order to solicit comment and feedback regarding employer need specific to these industry sectors and occupations. The resounding sentiment expressed during these meetings, regardless of sector, was uncertainty regarding future job openings and needs due to the impending economic impact from the COVID-19 Pandemic.

For instance, during our Healthcare and Human Services session, a major difficulty identified is that staff are not used to working with infectious disease of an unfamiliar nature such as COVID-19 and/or many employees are not comfortable with the uncertainty and have concerns. Employers in these sectors also mentioned they are experiencing a difficult time recruiting for entry-level positions due to the fear incited by COVID-19. Although there are many chemical agents and diseases that are just as, or more dangerous, COVID-19 seems to be the biggest concern because fears are difficult to dispel.

The results of the regional employer meetings also revealed an in-depth look at the skillset employers are looking for in selected applicants. When asked which basic skills selected applicants are generally lacking, an overwhelming number of respondents identified a lack of basic soft skills. Employers have difficulty filling vacancies because workers (especially younger workers) lack soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and punctuality. This issue was discussed at length during the Information Technology session where employers mentioned the need for good communication skills as many entry-level positions in the IT field require an individual who is able to articulate troubleshooting and assistance over the phone. In many instances, the job would require the employee to assist individuals who need to be walked through step-by-step and click-by-click.

Another challenge identified during these meetings, in terms of job training, is due to COVID-19 the landscape of traditional classroom training has changed drastically. The NRWIB is working closely with local training providers and community colleges to increase the number of virtual job training offerings in order to continue meeting employer demand.

All of the information gleaned from the stakeholder meetings assists the NRWIB with planning for implementing the Next Generation Sector Partnership model in two of these sectors: healthcare and manufacturing.

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

Following the lead of the Governor's Workforce Development Council, the NRWIB is engaged in the Next Generation Sector Partnership strategy models and is currently coordinating with its three major chambers of commerce partners to develop a core team. The mission of this team will be to bring these partnerships to an active and impactful existence. This employer engagement strategy seeks to put the business leaders at the forefront of the partnership allowing them to define and focus on issues that they collectively agree upon. This strategy allows the business services team to listen instead of talk. By allowing the employers to set the agenda it is truly their needs and not the system's view of their needs that become the action items. Over time it is anticipated that these partnerships will engage at least two of the industry sectors that drive the region's economy beginning with Manufacturing and Healthcare. Upon establishment of the initial effort, the NRWIB will continue its focus to include the Construction and Human Services sectors and lastly Information Technology.

Setting a series of goals in achieving the implementation of these partnerships, the determination of core partners, selection of a convener(s) and the assembly of the network of supporters required to make this sector strategy viable will commence immediately.

The NRWIB's employer engagement strategies assure that the industry sectors' and the individual employers within each sector needs are met. A robust coordinated business services unit that

comprises partners from across the workforce system, economic development entities, training providers, educators, industry associations, and community members work together to avoid redundancy and minimize employer fatigue.

A lack of access to technology was a significant concern expressed during stakeholder meetings; more specifically- access to equipment, adequate access to internet and basic training in terms of how to properly operate a computer or tablet. In order to address these issues, the NRWIB will provide support services to purchase laptops/tablets and WIFI cards and/or hot spot devices to provide to customers who are participating in job training or employment activities. The NRWIB will also provide digital literacy classes to customers in need via a virtual platform.

Projected employment needs vary widely by industry sector, yet there is confidence that employment in the Information Technology, Construction, Manufacturing, Transportation & Warehousing and Healthcare industries will grow while there is a great deal of uncertainty regarding the future of employment needs in Retail Trade and Accommodation & Food Services due to the pandemic.

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

The following table depicts the fastest growing occupations requiring **short-term on-the-job training** in the State of Connecticut:

Occupation	2016	2026	Percent Change	1Q2018 Average Annual Wage
Home Health Aides	7,786	10,437	34%	\$29,146
Personal Care Aides	31,029	38,804	25.1%	\$28,176
Community Health Workers	616	710	15.3%	\$48,062
Combined Food Preparation & Serving Workers, Including Fast Food	29,512	33,510	13.5%	\$26,473
Industrial Truck & Tractor Operators	2,278	2,519	10.6%	\$42,494
Social & Human Service Assistants	8,119	8,931	10%	\$41,510
Construction Laborers	10,464	11,419	9.1%	\$50,564
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers	23,796	25,915	8.9%	\$33,805
Psychiatric Aides	1,683	1,830	8.7%	\$38,229
Cooks, Institution and Cafeteria	3,454	3,750	8.6%	\$39,818
Childcare Workers	19,634	21,091	7.4%	\$28,279
Hotel, Motel and Resort Desk Clerks	684	734	7.3%	\$36,565

Waiters and Waitresses	28,650	30,322	5.8%	\$27,196
Bartenders	7,935	8,317	4.8%	\$27,835
Food Preparation Workers	10,108	10,547	4.3%	\$29,869
Sewing Machine Operators	1,112	1,167	4.9%	\$35,922
Cutting and Slicing Machine Setters, Operators and Tenders	816	846	3.7%	\$39,706
Food Servers, Non-restaurant	3,549	3,629	2.3%	\$29,611

Information from CT Department of Labor, Labor Market Information website.

According to the Connecticut Economic Digest, several sectors showed notable gains in 2019 and continued to improve from their 2018 levels. The Transportation and Warehousing, Healthcare and Social Assistance, and Manufacturing sectors all showed solid increases. Transportation and Warehousing was the largest gainer last year, expanding 2,777 jobs. This continued the expansion of this sector, growing 5.7%. The Healthcare and Social Assistance sector saw marked growth over the past year, nearly equaling transportation gains with 2,541 jobs added. Manufacturing showed continued improvement in 2019, gaining 1,399 jobs.

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

To assist the NRWIB with the drafting of its strategic plan, a stakeholder meeting was conducted with regional training providers along with its workforce partners. These sessions shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of the workforce development activities in the region as outlined below:

Customer Flow: Pre-Pandemic

- ✚ Referral –All customers wishing to receive services under the WIOA through the AJC will meet with CTDOL staff to tour the self-service area of the Career Center and register in CTHires. Customers are then referred to the Career Services Provider (currently CRI) for the WIOA Adult/Youth or Dislocated Worker Information Session. These sessions are on a first come first serve basis on Tuesday and Thursday; up to 20 customers per session. All customers have access to universal services upon entering the AJC and are encouraged to utilize them during this session.
- ✚ Information Session – Customers seeking to receive job training and/or job placement assistance under WIOA are required to attend the WIOA Information Session. When the customer registers for an Information Session, they receive a series of personal information forms to complete and return the day of the session. During the Information Session, the presenting staff member discusses WIOA eligibility requirements and the assessment process. Individuals also receive directions on how to access the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) which lists the approved training programs that are available. The customers' personal

information forms are retrieved at that time. Upon receipt of the information provided, customers move to the next phase of the process where they are scheduled for an intake/eligibility appointment with their assigned Career Navigator.

- ✚ Intake/Eligibility Determination – During the intake appointment, the Career Navigator will complete the paperwork required to determine eligibility for the customer to receive services under WIOA (Most-in-need criteria is completed for Dislocated Workers prior to the intake appointment). CASAS testing (math and reading assessment) is scheduled for the customer to determine a baseline and identify any potential basic-skills deficiencies. Following eligibility determination, the customer is ready to move on to mapping out their prospective career path and training plan; the customer then completes the Career Edge assessment.

Customer Flow: Post-Pandemic

- ✚ Referral –All customers wishing to receive services under WIOA will express their interest to register for an information session via email: info@nrwib.org. The customer will then receive an email invitation to attend a virtual information session.
- ✚ Online Information Session – Customers seeking to receive job training and/or job placement assistance under WIOA are required to participate in the virtual WIOA Information Session. During the Information Session, the presenting staff member discusses WIOA eligibility requirements and the assessment process. Attendees are also given instruction regarding CTHires registration and filling out the online WIOA Pre-application along with uploading their eligibility documentation. Individuals also receive directions on how to access the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) which lists the approved training programs that are available. Upon receipt of the information provided, customers move to the next phase of the process where they are scheduled for an intake/eligibility appointment with their assigned Career Navigator.
- ✚ Intake/Eligibility Determination – During the intake appointment, the Career Navigator will complete the paperwork required to determine eligibility for the customer to receive services under WIOA (Most-in-need criteria is completed for Dislocated Workers prior to the intake appointment). CASAS testing (math and reading assessment) is scheduled for the customer to determine a baseline and identify any potential basic-skills deficiencies. Following eligibility determination, the customer is ready to move on to mapping out their prospective career path and training plan; the customer then completes the Career Edge assessment.

Job Training and Placement

Within the region, there are many programs that have proven to be successful and that offer lessons learned or elements that can adapted to other strategies in the region. These include, but are not limited to:

- ✚ Apprenticeship Connecticut Initiative: Manufacturing Your Future. The Apprenticeship Connecticut Initiative (ACI) was created to develop workforce pipeline programs to train qualified entry-level workers for job placement with manufacturers and employers in other industry sectors in the state that are experiencing sustained workforce shortages. The NRWIB's Manufacturing Your Future program provides separate training programs by creating pipelines for: (i) students in the 11th or 12th grade and (ii) young adults 18 years of age or older who are not currently enrolled in 11th or 12th grade. This program focuses on addressing the shortage of skilled workers in the manufacturing sector. This regional

partnership comprises the following entities: Manufacturing Alliance Service Corporation, Northwestern CT Community College, Naugatuck Valley Community College, CT Technical High Schools, Torrington H.S., Danbury H.S., New Milford H.S. and Waterbury high schools along with sixteen employers throughout the northwest workforce region (which includes Waterbury, Torrington and Danbury), and several business associations and chambers of commerce. Training programs available include (but are not limited to): Introduction to Manufacturing (7 weeks), Introduction to Machinist (30 weeks), Fundamentals of Manufacturing Technology, Engineering Drawing Specifications (8 weeks) and Manufacturing Process/Precision Machining (8 weeks).

- ✚ Vocational Rehabilitation's On-the-Job Training (OJT) Dual Customer approach allows staff to split their time between case management and true job development to find the right fit for those positions. They are trying to shift from counseling about "what do you want to do" to "what is available now" and connecting customers to positions in which they can develop foundational skills and then discussing career desires in a long-term career pathway approach.
- ✚ The Health Profession Opportunity Grant (HPOG) requires participants to complete work readiness, employability, and basic skills "boot camp" to prepare them for entry-level vocational trainings in the healthcare industry. Trainings consist of 25 hours of short-term occupational training for two weeks, resulting in an industry-recognized credential issued by an approved training vendor or by the CT Department of Public Health.
- ✚ Jobs First, the mandated TANF program, provides subsidized employment for clients who need to develop a work history, allows companies to get involved while mitigating risks. The program is comprised of dedicated staff that help connect with employers.
- ✚ Transitional employment funded through WIOA provides short term employment experience for those with limited work history. It is primarily geared toward the ex-offenders who needs to build not only their resume but skills and coping mechanisms as they return from incarceration.
- ✚ The Northwest Construction Careers Initiative strives to reach out to area residents in the interest of recruiting individuals for career opportunities in the construction building trades. The system brings together community-based organizations, direct-services providers such as the American Job Center in Waterbury, the local school system, the building trades and other community groups to achieve specific goals.

Business Services

The NRWIB serves as the convener of industry representatives from all five-targeted industry sectors: Manufacturing, Healthcare, Information Technology, Construction, and Human Services. We convene a robust business service unit that consists of business intermediaries (Chambers of Commerce), AJC partners (Voc-Rehab, Adult Ed). These representatives understand more about what is needed from service providers, how the WDB and other workforce entities can do more to prepare workers for their jobs and understand their emerging skill needs.

Strong collaboration exists among workforce partners and those business intermediaries, but as always continuous improvement and honing a more strategic plan when working with businesses will be a focus of the NRWIB. The state has a well-rounded, diverse database detailing job openings that are available and skills needed, developing a well-defined strategy to connect employers with available talent is needed.

Special Populations

Several populations are at risk of slipping through the cracks in northwest Connecticut. These include:

- ✚ Ex-Offenders – The NRWIB has representatives who serve on the Danbury, Waterbury and Torrington Re-Entry Collaborative Roundtables. These roundtables are a collaboration of state, federal and local organizations that convene monthly to identify needs and address gaps in services for individuals returning to the community from incarceration. These grassroots efforts are working together to affect change in policy by fostering successfully re-entry with the elimination of barriers in our community, region-wide. Many ex-offenders in the state are paroled to the halfway houses in Waterbury, but when they finish parole, their home is not in the area they are from originally. Addressing this disconnect is a focus of these groups. Typically, ex-offenders are from other parts of the state. This raises challenges in ensuring they receive continuous services. Existing models for ex-offenders need to be promoted. One such model that the NRWIB will continue to focus on is placing these individuals in transitional jobs that allow them to build work history and develop skills. A full description of NRWIB's approach to transitional jobs is included later in this plan (Section III, Question 4).
- ✚ Persons with Disabilities – the NRWIB has committed to providing career services, in conjunction with local school systems, to youth with disabilities. Individuals between the ages of 18-64 who receive Social Security benefits because of a disability are informed about the Ticket to Work program, a free and voluntary program that helps Social Security beneficiaries go to work, finding a path for a career. Enrolled in the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work program as an Employment Network, the agency has developed an excellent track record of working with persons with disabilities. A benefit specialist is available to help answer questions and solve problems relating to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. Services are free and confidential.
- ✚ Non-English Speakers – The number of languages spoken within the region poses a resource/capacity challenge to NRWIB. There are limited staff with the capacity to work with all the non-English speakers. The NRWIB also intends to hire an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher to help these individuals with classes to be conducted virtually.

Partnerships between Agencies and Providers

Partners within the region truly value the connections they have with each other. Strong communication exists among workforce system partners within the region. In addition to day-to-day communication, regular partner meetings are held in each AJC. Statewide partnerships meet quarterly, and local meetings are held monthly with CTDOL, Department of Social Services (DSS), case management, the VETS unit, and the Business Services unit to discuss issues ranging from programmatic to operations issues. Additionally, JFES has a partner meeting with all those involved in JFES, CTDOL, local DOL, Department of Social Services (DSS), Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), and case management to discuss what is working and the tasks that need to get completed.

Partnerships with Education

Partners from the high school-based programs, community colleges, and adult education had very positive things to say about the WIOA process. There are several strong examples of programs helping low-income (WIOA eligible) clients access post-secondary education and enter the job market. These programs included:

- ✦ The WAVE program at Naugatuck Valley Community College (OSY) focuses on the importance of intrusive advising—reaching out to out-of-school youth students to ensure they understand the process, file a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), are attending and doing well in classes, and connecting them to resources. Students are mentored by staff. After completing the program (which results in an Associate degree), they are encouraged to pursue a four-year degree or enter the workforce.
- ✦ Naugatuck Valley Community College also has an in-school program for students in 8th grade that follows them through four years of high school with mentoring and tutoring, which results in 85% of students attending college. GEAR-UP, a national grant funded by the U.S. Dept. of Education service over 1500 students in the region
- ✦ Northwestern Connecticut Community College uses a cohort model for a semester. This allows students to take courses together to build a sense of community. The college also still has a primary advisor in addition to an academic advisor who works closely with the student, reducing the length of the program by a semester. Students receive credit-bearing coursework and are mentored individually and collectively by staff. This model incorporates service-learning which is required to engaging other students.
- ✦ The NRWIB works closely with its community and technical college partners as well as education leaders in the K-12 and Adult Education systems. Fostering these strong relationships is integral to identifying key partners to integrate into the local workforce system. The NRWIB and college leadership are interconnected through board membership. The NRWIB has seats on its board for a representative of the President of Northwest Regional Community Colleges along with the President of Northwest CT Community College and a Technical Assistant from the CT State Department of Education. The NRWIB intends to deepen its partnership with secondary and post-secondary providers in the region, some promising practices for collaboration include: career exploration, co-location, shared planning, service referrals, curricula development leading to industry-driven career pathways and implementation of virtual digital literacy and ESL classes.
- ✦ The NRWIB Future Bankers' Camp is designed to motivate and tap into the talent of high-achieving students from low-income areas, providing them a clear and promising career path in the financial services industry. In partnership with the Center for Financial Training, area public schools, and local banking institutions, the Future Bankers' Camp helps improve math, communication, and financial literacy skills in high school juniors and seniors. Upon completing the four-week program (two weeks of classroom lessons, two weeks of real world experience), students are provided entry-level training and an upward mobility career path. Students are taught about the roles of a bank teller and customer service representative as well as the basic skills accompanied with these positions, including professionalism, work ethic, critical thinking, teamwork, written and oral communication, etc. Students who complete the camp and pass the test receive the American Bankers Association (ABA) Bank Teller Certificate or the Customer Service Rep Certificate – a widely recognized industry credential for entry level employment.

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

Initiating Assistance from WIOA

A customer's experience with the NRWIB and staff begins with an initial welcome where they will experience high value, relevant and efficient services. Once staff engages their customer, their focus should turn to discovering why they are seeking services and how to best assist them in meeting their needs. Staff are equipped with the skills necessary to help customers who may not be clear on exactly what their needs are and at asking the right questions to help the customer identify which of NRWIB's integrated services will advance their employability, training and/or education objectives. Current promising practices identified by jobseekers include:

- ✚ The referral process from other agencies or when a company's workforce is reduced seems to work properly.
- ✚ The orientation session is perceived as informative.

The issuance of WARN notices allows staff to mobilize services. For adults, the referral and recruitment efforts are primary to the initial introduction to WIOA services.

Service Delivery Opportunities

Through focus groups conducted with jobseekers over the last years, NRWIB was able to identify opportunities to fill gaps and/or make improvements to its service delivery strategy. The opportunities identified are outlined below.

- ✚ Participants felt they often had to complete the same paperwork repeatedly and wondered why there was not a central system to access their data versus having started new with each group/agency/program. This issue is under study at a statewide partner level.
- ✚ Focus group attendees reported the WIOA verification process takes a long time as well as the approval to take courses. Under WIOA this frustration is removed as the Career Navigator can place a participant directly into a relevant and meaningful career service to address their needs quickly and efficiently. Dislocated Workers and Adults are encouraged to take an active role in their case management process, making it a "partnership".
- ✚ With the use of assessment tools there is an opportunity for AJC staff to play a more integral role in helping jobseekers explore potential careers, understand in demand occupations, and define the transferrable skills customers possess. Currently, jobseekers' skills and career paths are being identified through a variety of ways – sometimes on their own and sometimes with AJC staff. Most recently, digital literacy classes have been provided at the AJC to improve jobseekers' computer skills.
- ✚ Jobseekers reported they could benefit from additional guidance navigating the process of identifying and selecting training. Customers struggle with understanding where they can take classes for industry certifications and when those classes will be offered. This issue is born out of the complexities currently governing the ETPL.

After identifying these service delivery opportunities, NRWIB has defined a course of action to address the gaps and/or make improvements where needed, specifically, the customer-centric case management approach. This model was implemented in the AJCs throughout the region. Staff now takes a "deep dive" approach with each participant to assure success and satisfaction.

- 7. Provide a description and assessment of the type and availability of youth workforce investment activities in the local area, including activities for youth who are individuals*

with disabilities. The description and assessment must include an identification of successful models of such youth workforce investment activities.

The region has a strong group of entities providing workforce activities to youth. The NRWIB partners closely with Naugatuck Valley Community College (NVCC) and Northwest Connecticut Community College (NCCC) to support programs for Out-of-School Youth (OSY).

- ✚ At Naugatuck Valley Community College (NVCC), the Workforce Achievers Value Education (WAVE) program is implemented to ensure high risk students are served through a strongly knit program that assists them in completing education and career pathways. With funding from WIOA, the WAVE program not only provides academic project-driven classes to participants, but also demonstrates the value of the skills they are learning through relevant paid and unpaid internships, certificates, and projects. NRWIB and NVCC work collaboratively to ensure area youth succeed in the workplace and help students develop real world skills.
- ✚ Northwest Connecticut Community College partners with NRWIB to provide the Team Success Program. Team Success is a mentoring scholarship program that is available to students entering NCCC between the ages of 16 and 24, particularly those who face barriers that prevent them from pursuing higher education, job training, or support services. The program provides a network of support along each student's path to obtaining a credential that helps them develop confidence and competences in academic, professional, and social skills.

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

Through the analyses previously described, NRWIB has identified the following gaps in service and opportunities to enhance workforce services in northwest Connecticut:

- ✚ The region should continue to develop its sector-based strategies. With a strong foundation in sectors like Manufacturing, a well-developed Next Generation Sector Partnership for each industry will help provide a more strategic approach to business services and long-term career pathways in the region. Data from this approach can then be used to counsel students and jobseekers toward career paths that lead to meaningful employment.
- ✚ Services provided to jobseekers with disabilities have suffered from gaps throughout the region; the NRWIB has sought to address those concerns through the Disability Employment Initiative Youth Program which provides the population with access to a Benefit Specialist at the AJC and funding for paid work experiences.
- ✚ More cross-training among staff will help streamline referrals, improve consistency, and ensure customers have access to the comprehensive suite of services available to them. Cross-training should include all WIOA partners, Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS), DSS, and JFES, at minimum. This will be done informally throughout the year and formally by setting up training twice a year for all new hires and as a refresher for all others every six months to cover any gaps. The Integrated Resource Teams (IRT) will provide the AJC and its partners with quarterly meetings to discuss functional, case management level program issues.
- ✚ Workforce system partners need to have a strategy to connect customers to supportive services in an intentional and strategic way. For example, some jobseekers would benefit from childcare while they are seeking work. Additionally, public transit needs to be more accessible and available to more consumers. The Governor's Workforce Development Council is formulating a strategy to address these barriers.

III. LWDB VISION, GOALS AND STRATEGIES

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

✚ The vision and goals adopted by the NRWIB reflect those adopted by the Governor’s Workforce Council. The vision of the NRWIB, to promote and foster regional economic development by providing quality employment and training services to employers, jobseekers and youth, is aligned with the State’s four overarching goals serving as a framework for the ongoing development and continuous improvement of the workforce development system. This process requires that all stakeholders be engaged in the region’s workforce efforts. Seeking comprehensive alignment with the State goals outlined above, the NRWIB has set its goals as follows.

GOAL 1. Promote regional economic development and business growth: Assure employers have access to a skilled workforce required to be competitive in the marketplace, primarily in the key industry sectors that drive the region’s economy.

Strategy 1.1: Launch or expand Next Generation Sector Partnerships in the target sectors of Construction, Healthcare, Information Technology (IT), and Human Services to reflect the Next Generation Sector Partnership model.

Strategy 1.2: Engage additional workforce system partners in responding to needs identified by industry and sector partnerships.

GOAL 2. Create a pipeline for talent development: Increase youth and adults’ exposure to career opportunities and related education and training so they are prepared to enter the workforce as confident, responsible productive employees upon completion of post-secondary and/or credentialed training.

Strategy 2.1: Continue to expand Career Pathways for each of the targeted sectors and other industry sectors as needed.

Strategy 2.2: Assure consistent processes and procedures for career exploration in the region’s schools, colleges, American Job Centers, and community-based organizations.

Strategy 2.3: Establish mechanisms for regular communication and collaboration around career and supportive services.

Strategy 2.4: Assist businesses with connecting with training providers to implement solutions utilizing the Next Generation Sector Partnership model.

GOAL 3. Promote continuous improvement of the current workforce: Continue to develop the necessary skills and credentials within the regional workforce - with an emphasis on addressing basic skill deficiencies – to maintain and advance in career paths that promote economic self-sufficiency.

Strategy 3.1: Connect basic skills training and education to career pathways to ensure individuals persist and see tangible outcomes.

Strategy 3.2: Incorporate digital literacy into strategies to increase individuals’ basic skills.

Strategy 3.3: Promote supportive services and resources that are available to individuals in the region.

Strategy 3.4: Implement a series of Professional and Work Readiness Workshops for adults that are integrated as individuals work with their Career Navigator.

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

✚ The vision and goals adopted by the NRWIB were developed through an inclusive strategic planning process. The process was grounded in an analysis of labor market information and economic conditions in the region as well as an inventory of existing education and training programs. NRWIB then conducted a series of focus groups with stakeholders throughout the region to supplement the information collected from the data analysis. Focus groups were held recently with workforce system partners (core partners, non-core partners, and community-based organizations), education and training providers (K-12 and post-secondary), business and industry representatives, and jobseekers from the AJCs. A stakeholder engagement survey was disseminated to jobseekers, employers, and workforce professional staff to identify the strengths and challenges within the workforce system and opportunities for sustaining and building new partnerships. The information from the data analyses, education and training inventory, and focus groups was presented to Board members and key partners during a half-day strategic planning session. The strategic planning session facilitated conversation among the Board to shape the strategic direction of the NRWIB and the work of the regional workforce system. As a result of the session and stakeholder survey, NRWIB prioritized goals and identified the strategies that will contribute to the achievement of those goals.

While the world adjusts to uncharted conditions as a result of COVID-19, the Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board will expand its vision, goals, and strategies with partners to include the following:

- Increase access to cash assistance and healthcare, food and housing utilizing the NRWIB's Home Works Program resources and by referral to partner agencies.
- Comprehensive income, healthcare, and re-training support to dislocated workers. Help small and mid-sized business avert layoffs: Help businesses keep their employees, using the Payroll Protection Program, while they are paid and re-trained during and in the aftermath of COVID-19, including jobs that are themselves rapidly changing with new technology.
- Addressing immediate shortages in industries needed to respond to crisis: Industries like healthcare, logistics, and manufacturing are essential to responding to COVID-19 and are already facing severe shortages of trained workers.
- Updating education and training policies to respond to marketplace disruption
- Updating our policies to support the infrastructure and flexibility required for short-term digital learning to get displaced workers retrained quickly.
- Job creation: There is strong bi-partisan support for a major effort to re-build our nation's infrastructure, which could create millions of jobs that will be needed as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

Strategies 2.3 and 3.3 specifically address working with the local partners to address program alignment to achieve the area's three goals. These partners include but are not limited to state agencies, adult education providers, literacy agencies, vocational rehabilitation, and post-secondary institutions. NRWIB will streamline access and increase availability of the multitude of federal, state and local programs. The One-Stop Operator will take the lead in the coordination of partner services. The NRWIB will serve as a convener and broker and will continue to facilitate the implementation and deliver of a broad array of initiatives that focus on the region's priorities. These include the Connecticut Advanced Manufacturing Initiative, and the Advanced Manufacturing training programs set up locally at Naugatuck Valley Community College, the Apprenticeship CT Initiative in partnership with Manufacturers Alliance Service Corp (MASC). MASC is currently responding to employer demand for training in Plastics Manufacturing which will launch in the fall of 2020 (a program funded through the NRWIB's ACI 2.0 grant). MASC also provides 240 hours of nationally certified training in the precision parts manufacturing of Computerized Numerical Control (CNC). Similarly, the same efforts will be directed through the Northwest Construction Career Initiative, the region's Job Funnel program and careers in healthcare by leveraging the HPOG program. HPOG targets in-demand occupations in the healthcare industry that follow a career pathway. Aligning with local healthcare employers, HPOG leverages the support and resources of partners to provide supportive services to individuals as they complete their training program and obtain full-time employment. Addressing the needs of incumbent workers, the NRWIB will work with its business community to promote the CT Manufacturing Innovation Fund and set aside a portion of its formula dollars to upskill lower skilled workers to promote movement along the manufacturing career pathways. AJC staff will leverage CARES Act dollars to encourage employers to hire and retain unemployed residents with a focus on the Veteran population. Our focus on serving youth continues to include both WIOA and the CT Summer Youth Employment Program, to provide exposure to career opportunities, primarily in the five targeted sectors in the northwest region. Those youth expressing interest in other areas will be served similarly, addressing each youths' unique needs and desires.

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

The NRWIB is redoubling its efforts to identify and document all of a customer's barriers to employment by co-enrolling in multiple programs as applicable. In an effort to serve those who have a disability, the NRWIB will utilize its Ticket to Work program. Ticket to Work is a Social Security program that helps persons who receive SSI or SSDI disability benefits to obtain vocational counseling, training, job readiness, job referrals and other employment support services, free of charge. The NRWIB is an authorized Social Security "Employment Network". Currently there are 45 participants. The NRWIB recently hired a TTW coordinator and is conducting a vigorous recruitment campaign; 235 prospects have been identified.

Services for Ticket holders include:

- ✚ Career counseling
- ✚ Resume development and interview preparation
- ✚ A wide variety of employment workshops
- ✚ Referrals to additional services and supports

- ✚ Job matching and job development
- ✚ SSA disability benefits advisement referral
- ✚ Job accommodations instruction and assistance
- ✚ Possibility of training through WIOA funds, based on eligibility
- ✚ Follow-up supports and retention services after employment

In addition to job center services, the beneficiary will have disability medical reviews deferred, will continue to have Medicare/Medicaid, and will receive Expedited Reinstatement of benefits if needed. To be Ticket eligible, individuals must be currently receiving SSI or SSDI benefits; be 18 through 65 years of age; willing to work full time. NRWIB will provide the funding for paid work experience for this population through WIOA.

Another population that has been targeted for additional services is the ex-offender population. Moving forward, NRWIB and its partners will work to promote existing programs that have proven successful and will collaborate with the Ex-Offender Reentry Roundtables in Danbury, Waterbury and Torrington. The NRWIB's Project Re-Entry program is an intensive two-week program designed to help returning citizens (ex-offender population) begin the path to successful employment. Our goal is to provide supports for ex-offenders who are struggling to find or keep a job. This comprehensive program provides intensive case management and consists of assessments, work readiness boot camp training, individualized employment planning, career coaching, occupational skills trainings, specialized workshops and job placement. The two-week work readiness boot camp training consists of the following topics: job-related terminology, basic math, reading and writing skills, computer literacy, communication skills, work readiness skills and "Research Your Next Move to a Career Pathway"- Manufacturing, Information Technology and Construction. Upon successful completion of the boot camp, program participants will work with a job developer to gain sustainable employment.

The NRWIB's CT Recovers program targets individuals affected by the nation's opioid crisis. Connecticut is among the top ten states with the highest rates of opioid-related deaths. The epidemic is on the rise, affecting users and families alike at an alarming rate. It is our mission to create and promote a positive work environment for those impacted by the crisis. CT Recovers is focused on serving those who find themselves unemployed either directly or indirectly from this crisis by providing a career pathway as a Peer Recovery Coach. This training involves an addiction-based curriculum while taking into the consideration the individual's current education level and personal interest. It is a 300-hour counselor training program that places the individual on a path to become a Drug and Alcohol Recovery Counselor, Certified Addiction Counselor, Certified Alcohol, or Drug Counselor, or a Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor.

When surveyed, jobseekers identified the top barriers to meaningful employment as lack of education/training (47.92%), lack of transportation (37.5%), criminal background (20.83%), lack of childcare (18.75%), and no work history (16.67%). NRWIB will implement a strategy to secure transitional jobs for individuals facing barriers to employment such as ex-offenders, individuals who are chronically unemployed, or those who have inconsistent or no work history. In doing so, NRWIB defines transitional jobs as time-limited (three months with ability to extend to six months to be determined by a case by case basis) work experiences that are subsidized and are in the public, private or non-profit sectors at no less than the State minimum wage. These services will also be combined with comprehensive employment and supportive services so that individuals can

establish a work history, demonstrate success in the workplace and develop the skills that lead to entry into and retention in unsubsidized employment

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

Each of the goals established by the NRWIB are designed with the intent that outcomes for participants are aligned with the attainment of the federal accountability performance measures. By assuring the continued training and development of a competent workforce to support the five industry sectors that dominate the region's economy, continued economic growth for both industry(s) and individuals will be realized. Addressing the fact that 1 in 4 households have earnings above the Federal Poverty Level but below a basic cost of living threshold requires additional attention when adopting a self-sufficiency standard.

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

The NRWIB intends to co-enroll as many participants as possible, documenting all barriers to employment. This will greatly increase the numbers in performance measures and will likely have a negative impact on performance; however, the intent is to improve the coordination of programs. The NRWIB will continue to manage performance levels, based on the statistical regression model, that reflect the economic conditions of the region and allow for successful attainment of the negotiated performance levels. Ongoing discussions with both State and Federal DOL must consider the loss of population in CT, the middle skills gap in filling job openings and the impact of legislation under consideration by the Connecticut General Assembly on the business climate in the state. Current Performance levels are attached.

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

The NRWIB uses a comprehensive program monitoring tool to measure the effectiveness of the American Job Center delivery system. Each partner's ability to contribute to the system in a manner that increases the likelihood of a positive outcome for every participant is vital to the overall success of the system. Assuring the programs and services meet the needs of each participant, each contracted service provider (not ITA vendors) is reviewed annually to measure the program content, delivery of the content and satisfaction of enrollees. A similar fiscal tool is used to assure that all dollars allocated within the workforce delivery system are managed with prudence and provide the most efficient and effective delivery of services. For contracted service providers, NRWIB will utilize FutureWorks tracker (in real time) to measure the completion rates, credential/certificate attainment rate, entered employment rates and earnings. This unique tool allows for a timelier view of participant performance allowing for adjustments in strategies to achieve the negotiated performance levels if needed as well and provide for continuous improvement of the providers and the delivery.

IV. COORDINATION OF SERVICES

1. *Coordination with Partner Programs and Services*

✚ Describe how WIOA Title I Services will be coordinated across programs/partners in the one-stop centers, including Vocational Rehabilitation, Adult Education and Literacy activities and

TANF. Specify how the LWDB will coordinate with these programs to prevent duplication and improve services to customers.

During the initial orientation and intake process, all customers (WIOA/TANF) will be asked to self-identify special needs and/or requirements as it relates to Vocational Rehabilitation or to other forms of disabilities. Through the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) testing process, required for all TANF and Adult participants and DW participants who do not have a high school diploma, basic skills deficiencies will be determined and addressed through referrals to Adult Education partners and Literacy remediation partners. A coordinated referral system that begins with an Integrated Resource Team (IRT) comprised of representatives of each partner will be in place to assure appropriate services are provided to each participant. This group will consist of two levels – administrative IRT and programmatic IRT. The administrative IRT will consist of a representative from each partner that has entered into an Infrastructure Funding Agreement with the NRWIB. The purpose of convening on a quarterly basis will be to provide the partners with the opportunity to speak freely about what may or may not be working on an administrative level (i.e., budgetary matters). The programmatic IRT will consist of Career Navigators and Case Managers from the various programs that offered through the AJC and its partners. This group will convene on a quarterly basis to discuss functional, case-management level program issues. Monthly IRT meetings will review the ongoing status of each referred customer to assure timely client flow up to and through job placement and follow up. With partners onsite at least once a week, referral to customers has been much more seamless. The team approach will prevent the duplication of services to participants and streamline their travel through the system. A referral system to outside agencies (non-partner) for services that may be needed to address other underlying barriers will be developed and implemented. The Board has started efforts of referring customers to 2-1-1 for utility assistance, food, housing, childcare, elderly care, after-school programs, and crisis intervention and to the Department of Aging and Disability Services for additional assistance to overcome barriers.

The American Job Center operational leadership provided strategies for planning and implementation of service delivery. An example includes coordinating services to address shared workforce concerns through co-enrollment of programs, regional adult education meetings, workforce roundtables with CTDOL and NRWIB, and a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) feature on CT Hire to share information and alleviate duplication of services. In addition, the NRWIB recently released two television advertising campaigns to promote the services available at the AJC.

2. Coordination with Economic Development Activities

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

The local workforce development system has a strong tradition of cooperation among partners and coordination of effort across agencies in providing services to business customers. The Northwest Region hosts a Business Services Team that is made up of staff from the CTDOL and NRWIB, the Greater Waterbury Chamber of Commerce, Resource Development Associates, the Danbury Chamber of Commerce and Northwest Chamber of Commerce, BRS, Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), JFES, Adult Education and other stakeholders and partners. The comprehensive Waterbury AJC organizes Business Services functions to serve business customers in a single, unified, coordinated team structure. The local Business Services Team reaches out to

communicate with all local economic development officials to develop a working relationship that allows for the coordination of workforce activities with economic development plans, including strategies for business retention, business growth and recruitment of new businesses to the region. A single point of contact will maximize communications and the delivery of services.

Some of those services include:

- Posting in the CT Hires databank of all job openings for which recruitment support is provided.
- Promotion of funding programs designed to assist employers (e.g. Manufacturing Innovation Fund (MIF) that includes:
 - Access to On-the-Job Training funds;
 - Transitional Jobs
 - Subsidized work experience; and
 - Provide job-matching and recruitment events.

Business Services Team participants will use the CT Hires system. They will meet on a regular basis to share information and coordinate strategy. Businesses seeking services and support will be reviewed to ensure their eligibility and appropriateness. The appropriate use of social media will also be utilized.

3. *Coordination with Education and Workforce Development Activities*

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

The NRWIB provides a framework to bridge the skill gaps that may exist within its workforce. Aligning the local labor market demands with appropriate training and education programs, the NRWIB will coordinate its sectors strategies by convening industry, with secondary, post-secondary and apprenticeship providers. This will assure that in-demand, industry-recognized credentials are available to meet the needs of industry while promoting career pathways for jobseekers in the region.

Using the Next Generation Sector Partnership model, the NRWIB will collaboratively identify workforce needs and support industry-driven career pathways. The NRWIB, in partnership with K-12 leaders, Adult Education providers and post-secondary partners, will facilitate the development of career pathways and co-enrollment in programs to improve access to activities leading to a recognized credential. Career pathways are an effective strategy to assist jobseekers and workers in gaining marketable skills and industry-recognized credentials. The career pathways strategy encourages greater collaboration of partners in the local workforce development system and can be adapted for youth, adults and individuals with disabilities as well as a range of individuals facing unique challenges and barriers to employment. This collaborative approach and effort ensures the avoidance of duplicative services while providing efficient and meaningful benefits to our customers.

Labor exchange and immediate job placement are critical roles for the workforce development system, but employers have emphasized the need for the NRWIB and its partners to take a longer-range view and expand emphasis on ongoing worker skill development along career pathways,

particularly for entry-level and lower-skilled workers. The NRWIB and its secondary and post-secondary education partners will work with employer groups in targeted sectors to map occupational progressions along career pathways and the education and credential requirements for advancement. Educational programming assets in the region will be reviewed to determine gap areas as well as areas of potential over-supply or mismatches.

Critical components of the development of career pathways-focused programming are the integration of shorter-term, modular training models that use work as the central context for learning; the integration of “bridge” education, such as Adult Education, as part of (rather than prerequisite to) technical training; the incorporation of stackable credentials that can be earned relatively quickly to incrementally increase workers’ labor market competitiveness; and the provision of supportive services at critical education and work transition points. Equally important is the reorientation of AJC staff serving both jobseekers and employers to this longer-range skill and career development view and ensuring that they have the training and knowledge to support both customer groups in this work.

Employers have also emphasized the value of employer-driven, workplace-based training models. While not discounting the need for classroom-based training, companies need workers who are well-versed in both the culture and competency expectations of their workplaces. Classroom training alone does not necessarily prepare students to be effective employees. The NRWIB will continue to enhance investments in employer-driven work-based training for both youth and adults, including work experience, internships, on-the-job-training, incumbent worker training, customized training, and Registered Apprenticeships. The NRWIB has begun collaborating with local labor unions to drive this effort. Doing so may have a significant impact upon other themes mentioned in this report, such as the need to expand youth career exploration, reduce worker turnover, and improve soft skills development. Within local high schools, the NRWIB has worked with school counselors and has created a Registered Pre-apprenticeship Universal Banker program in the high schools. This program has targeted youth and built partnerships with local banking institutions to teach students about financial planning and provide them with the basics to begin a career in the financial services industry.

It is important to note that expanding work-based training opportunities will require that employers in the region put “skin in the game” and offer training sites and training mentors.

Adult basic education services in the regional workforce system also integrate the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 funding. Through the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Bureau of Adult Education, the NRWIB receives funding to support infrastructure costs within in the AJCs. NRWIB will utilize a portion of these dollars to increase access to technology in the job centers that will support individuals’ career exploration, planning and development along identified career pathways. New technology has been installed in the training room, including updated computers, a projector, wireless internet, and more. ABE has leveraged these resources by utilizing the training room twice a week to host classes and the National External Diploma Program. As the top-rated service utilized by jobseekers at the AJC (54.9%), the resource area and training room will continue to be a vital resource toward helping customers obtain meaningful employment.

4. Coordination with Transportation and Other Supportive Services

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

The vast geographic area of the region and the lack of public transit in the rural northwest complicates the ability to meet the needs of industry and jobseekers alike. Para transit routes, once in play have been cut compounding the already significant barrier of transportation. Where possible, the NRWIB provides bus passes and gas cards to eligible participants in an attempt to mitigate this primary barrier. Used for access to training programs as well as employment opportunities, this is a supportive service that does not adequately address the needs of the system. The NRWIB has partnered with Uber and Lyft to provide job seekers transportation to and from interviews and/or other job-related activities. Other supportive services such as work gear, uniforms, health screening (physicals, vaccinations) and childcare are prioritized on an individual participant need basis. A lack of childcare resources is a significant barrier to employment throughout the region but organizations such as Care 4 Kids have provided critical assistance to those impacted. The barrier of childcare has been further complicated and compounded by COVID-19. Many parents once relied on their children being in school during the day so they could participate in job training and/or job search activities. There are efforts underway, being made by the Office of Early Childhood Education, to increase the number of family childcare centers which may help mitigate the crisis that has been compounded by COVID-19. Other supportive services less often engaged include license fees reimbursement (TWIC card, OSHA cards, union cards). The NRWIB does not make needs-based payments, but has implemented stipend payments leveraging philanthropic dollars.

Supportive services may include:

- Transportation assistance such as gas vouchers or cards – not to exceed value of \$50.00 per month, taxi fare and bus passes – while enrolled and attending training. Attendance verification is required.
- Uniforms, required footwear and equipment (as required by training vendor) separate and distinct from the cost of the training program as published by the ETPL list.
- Specialized assistance not otherwise specifically listed herein required to participate in services or accept or retain employment with actual documentation of expenses. These requests will be reviewed on a case by case basis.

Supportive services cannot exceed, in the aggregate, \$5,000 for any one customer enrolled in WIOA program activities.

Customers have consistently raised the issue of transportation as a barrier to worker training, employment, and retention. In more urban areas, public transportation- particularly evenings and weekends - often does not align with students' and workers' childcare, work, and school schedules. It does not effectively link workers from where they live to where they work and train. In rural areas of the state, qualified workers are disconnected from available jobs in more metropolitan areas due to personal transportation challenges and lack of public transportation resources. Several local industries, specifically healthcare, human services, and construction/trades, have stated that lack of a personal vehicle (with valid license, insurance, and registration) is a significant barrier to employment in these industries. A formal, statewide plan to address transportation barriers needs

a champion to move the needle and address this issue along with increasing the number of family childcare centers.

A lack of available and affordable childcare resources was also cited as a significant barrier to worker training, employment, and retention, particularly among employers in the healthcare and human services sectors. Expanding availability of on-site childcare at training locations and workplaces is clearly desired, as is addressing childcare affordability issues.

Connecting and expanding these supportive services networks for students, jobseekers, and workers will require the commitment and collaboration of multiple regional partners, particularly community-based and human services partners with direct oversight of or influence upon these resources. NRWIB can play a lead role in bringing partners together and facilitating this conversation, and in bringing its own supportive service assets to bear.

5. *Coordination with Wagner-Peyser Services*

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

The NRWIB prides itself on the lack of duplication of services as it has a close and productive partnership with its Wagner-Peyser CT DOL staff. Monthly partner meetings, coordinated calendars of workshops and shared staffing of the AJC are just a few examples of the strategies in place that maximize the delivery of a wide range of services through the one-stop system. A coordinated reception area in each one stop assures the seamless delivery of services to all clients, communication among partners, especially the DOL. This coordination is key to streamline services, avoiding duplication and maximizing the resources available. During partner meetings, other agencies communicate and coordinate with the Board and DOL which also assist with the prevention duplicating efforts and services.

6. *Coordination with Adult Education and Literacy*

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

The NRWIB will coordinate with local adult education and literacy providers to review all applications to provide adult education and literacy activities under Title II for the local area. In doing so, determination of whether such applications are consistent with the local plan is assured. NRWIB will make recommendations to promote alignment. With respect to efforts that will enhance the provision of services to individuals with disabilities and other individuals (such as cross training of staff, technical assistance, sharing of information, cooperative efforts with employers, and other efforts at cooperation, collaboration, and coordination), the Board staff will play an active role through the One-Stop Committee. The NRWIB has identified and hired an English

as a Second Language (ESL) teacher who teaches classes, held at the AJC. Except for temporary suspension during the pandemic, digital literacy and ESL classes are also available at the AJC.

The Northwest Region Adult Education providers, in partnership with the NRWIB and CT Association of Adult and Continuing Education (CAACE) is leading a statewide initiative to educate and empower our community. This initiative provides adult learners access to a free high school completion program along with English Language programs. The goal of this initiative is to encourage residents to return to school and receive their high school diploma or improve their English language skills through an annual “*No Excuse – March for Education*”. This unique, annual march will provide a local, state and national platform focused on the programs and services of adult education.

7. *Cooperative Agreements*

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

See Section D, Question 2, regarding individuals with disabilities.

V. DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM SERVICES

1. System Description

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

Career Resources, Inc. delivers WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker program activities through the AJC system via three comprehensive and affiliate centers. Career services are provided to a wide range of job seekers, with specialty programs directed to returning veterans and individuals with disabilities. Services include career coaching, guidance on job search techniques, skill and interest assessments, advice and support through peer groups, individual employment planning, and job development and placement. Occupational training is provided through access to Individual Training Accounts (ITAs). Business Services Teams engage employers and provide recruitment and hiring assistance, as well as access to an array of training resources for incumbent workers and new hires. Post-pandemic efforts have allowed for the provision of virtual access to services through Career Edge and CTHires.

Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) services and CRI’s services are co-located in all 3 AJCs, with Waterbury serving as the primary comprehensive AJC and Danbury and Torrington serving as affiliate one-stops.

The AJCs are hubs from which jobseekers can be referred to sector-focused programs in targeted sectors such as Manufacturing, Healthcare, Information Technology, Human Services, Construction, Transportation & Warehousing, Retail Trade and Food & Accommodation Services. Job Developers

from organizations such as Dept. of Aging and Disability Services and Adult Education providers attend the Regional Business Service team meetings in each region. AJC staff will be familiar with these targeted sector initiatives and programs and capable of making informed referrals to them. In some situations, targeted sector programs may be co-located at an AJC. Accessible printed information will be available to jobseekers concerning these programs.

Customer Flow: Pre-Pandemic

Referral –All customers wishing to receive services under the WIOA through the AJC will meet with CTDOL staff to tour the self-service area of the Career Center and register in CTHires. Customers are then referred to the Career Services Provider (currently CRI) for the WIOA Adult/Youth or Dislocated Worker Information Session. These sessions are on a first come first serve basis on Tuesday and Thursday; up to 20 customers per session. All customers have access to universal services upon entering the AJC and are encouraged to utilize them during this session.

Information Session – Customers seeking to receive job training and/or job placement assistance under WIOA are required to attend the WIOA Information Session. When the customer registers for an Information Session, they receive a series of personal information forms to complete and return the day of the session. During the Information Session, the presenting staff member discusses WIOA eligibility requirements and the assessment process. Individuals also receive directions on how to access the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) which lists the approved training programs that are available. The customers' personal information forms are retrieved at that time. Upon receipt of the information provided, customers move to the next phase of the process where they are scheduled for an intake/eligibility appointment with their assigned Career Navigator.

Intake/Eligibility Determination – During the intake appointment, the Career Navigator will complete the paperwork required to determine eligibility for the customer to receive services under WIOA (Most-in-need criteria is completed for Dislocated Workers prior to the intake appointment). CASAS testing is scheduled for the customer (math and reading assessment). Following eligibility determination, the customer is ready to move on to mapping out their prospective career path and training plan; the customer then completes the Career Edge assessment.

Customer Flow: Post-Pandemic

Referral –All customers wishing to receive services under WIOA will express their interest to register for an information session via email: info@nrwib.org. The customer will then receive an email invitation to attend a virtual information session.

Online Information Session – Customers seeking to receive job training and/or job placement assistance under WIOA are required to participate in the virtual WIOA Information Session. During the Information Session, the presenting staff member discusses WIOA eligibility requirements and the assessment process. Attendees are also given instruction regarding CTHires registration and filling out the online WIOA Pre-application along with uploading their eligibility documentation. Individuals also receive directions on how to access the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) which lists the approved training programs that are available. Upon receipt of the information provided, customers move to the next phase of the process where they are scheduled for an intake/eligibility appointment with their assigned Career Navigator.

Intake/Eligibility Determination – During the intake appointment, the Career Navigator will complete the paperwork required to determine eligibility for the customer to receive services under WIOA (Most-in-need criteria is completed for Dislocated Workers prior to the intake appointment). CASAS testing is scheduled for the customer (math and reading assessment). Following eligibility determination, the customer is ready to move on to mapping out their prospective career path and training plan; the customer then completes the Career Edge assessment.

2. Subaward Grants and Contracts

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

Most services will be provided by CRI. Training services outside of those offered on the ETPL will be competitively procured using the NRWIB Fiscal Policy and Procedures. The section relating to can be found in Appendix I.

3. Expanding Access to Employment

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

In order to expand access to employment, particularly eligible individuals with barriers to employment, the NRWIB will work with its core and non-core partners to ensure a diverse array of career services, training services, and supportive services exist within the region. NRWIB has identified the expansion of apprenticeship models as a key strategy for improving access to employment that concurrently prepares individuals with the skills needed for employment and addresses business needs. NRWIB will work with businesses, business intermediaries such as the chambers of commerce, and organized labor to develop new apprenticeship models in the region's target industries. NRWIB will also leverage its OJT policy, transitional jobs strategy, and customized training solution to expand individuals' access to employment.

4. Key Industry Sectors

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

The NRWIB has identified seven sectors as critical in the region's economy based upon analysis of labor market data and other intelligence. These are:

- ✚ Healthcare
- ✚ Human Services
- ✚ Information Technology
- ✚ Construction
- ✚ Manufacturing
- ✚ Retail Trade
- ✚ Accommodation & Food Services

As reflected in its goals and strategies in this plan, NRWIB will leverage its Next Generation Sector Partnership model to develop relationships with companies and scale and build sustained industry partnerships in coordination with regional partners. Local companies seem eager to engage in sustained, at-scale dialogue with the NRWIB. This is a tremendous opportunity to build industry partnerships and expand upon those already existing, such as in manufacturing.


Many companies have trusted relationships with the WDB on a one-on-one level, which can be leveraged and expanded. Over the next year, the WDB will develop more formalized regional target industry partnership groups to include Retail Trade and Accommodation & Food Service representatives; the goal is to meet regularly with the Board, Board staff, and key partners to advise on evolving workforce needs and give ongoing input to strategic planning, programming, and workforce services based on Next Generation Sector Partnership strategies. Developing or expanding industry sector-driven partnerships will enable the NRWIB and its partners to better understand industry-wide workforce needs and dynamics, aggregate and respond to employers' training and other needs across multiple employers, increasing impact; and enhance the alignment of workforce, economic development, and education strategies region-wide.

By leveraging and formalizing these relationships through industry partnerships, NRWIB will also create opportunities to work with partners throughout the region to:

- Address significant soft skill deficits, especially prevalent among the young/millennial workforce;
- Assist industry partners in addressing growing worker retention and turnover challenges;
- Work with secondary education partners to expand early career education and exploration and create earlier on-ramps to careers for students;
- Map career pathways in targeted industry sectors and expand focus on skill development and career advancement beyond workforce entry for employers and workers;
- Expand work-based learning/training offerings to align to employers' skill needs;
- Operationalize the focus on the workforce needs of target industry sectors in AJCs and staffing and in jobseeker/worker and business service delivery; and
- Explore how the NRWIB and its partners can help close identified transportation and childcare resource gaps in the region.

In order to adequately support these target sectors, the NRWIB may raise its limit on ITAs when appropriate. NRWIB will review training costs associated with in-demand occupations in these sectors and analyze any gaps in funding that result from current ITA caps.

5. Industry Partnerships

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

NRWIB will leverage its existing relationships with industry partners and its history of building successful industry partnerships in manufacturing to grow and/or launch new partnerships, based off of the Next Generation Sector Partnership model, throughout the region.

During the planning process, NRWIB solicited input from employers on their critical workforce needs and challenges and on how the NRWIB and its partners can collaborate to address those needs. Input gained during these focus groups will drive the NRWIB's development of industry-specific partnerships and workforce solutions, in collaboration with its education, economic development, and other regional partners. Employers participating in the focus groups represented

industry sectors that the NRWIB has identified as critical in the region's economy based upon analysis of labor market data and other intelligence.

NRWIB has promoted apprenticeship and OJT programs throughout the region. On the first and third Thursday of each month, the Northwest Construction Careers Initiative offers residents apprenticeship training opportunities for plumbing, HVAC, sheet metal, OSHA Hazwoper certification, and lead and asbestos abatement licensing. The Manufacturing Alliance Service Corporation (MASC) provides remedial instruction in reading and math, as well as hands-on machine training, at the Technical Training and Conference Center in Waterbury. MASC will also launch a new Plastics Program offering hands-on training utilizing state-of-the-art industry equipment. Nationally certified training in the precision parts manufacturing industry is provided to enrollees through classroom and hands-on training. At the AJC, employers of every size can participate in the "new" OJT program.

6. *In-demand Training*

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

Labor exchange and immediate job placement are critical roles for the workforce development system. But focus group employers emphasized the need for the NRWIB and its partners to take a longer-range view and expand emphasis on ongoing worker skill development along career pathways, particularly for entry-level and lower-skilled workers. To ensure that training provided is linked to in demand industry sectors, the NRWIB and its secondary and post-secondary education partners will work with employer groups in its targeted sectors to map occupational progressions along career pathways and attached education and credential requirements for advancement. Educational programming assets in the region will then be reviewed to determine gap areas as well as areas of potential over-supply or another mismatch. The NRWIB will validate all in-demand sectors using current Labor Market Information.

Critical components of the development of career pathways-focused programming are the integration of shorter-term, modular training models that use work as the central context for learning; the integration of "bridge" education, such as Adult Education, as part of (rather than prerequisite to) technical training; the incorporation of stackable credentials that get be earned relatively quickly to incrementally increase workers' labor market competitiveness; and the provision of supportive services at critical education and work transition points. Just as important is reorienting AJC staff serving both jobseekers and employers to this longer-range skill and career development view and ensuring that they have the training and knowledge to support both customer groups in this work. NRWIB will ensure these components are woven into its strategies for in-demand training.

Furthermore, NRWIB annually identifies in-demand occupations that then are prioritized by the Board. Programs meeting annually defined "Priority Labor Market Demands" as determined by the Board receive consideration for additional funding through ITAs. Such consideration must be approved by the Executive Director or designee. For PY 2019- 2020, the Board deemed the following to be industries with significant labor market demands:

- ✚ Manufacturing
- ✚ Healthcare
- ✚ Construction

- ✚ Information Technology
- ✚ Human Services
- ✚ Retail Trade
- ✚ Accommodation & Food Services

7. Employer Engagement

- ✚ Describe the strategies and services that will be used in the local area to:
 - A. facilitate engagement of employers, including small employers and employers in in-demand industry sectors and occupations, in workforce development programs
 - B. support a local workforce development system that meets the needs of businesses in the local area; and
 - C. better coordinate workforce development programs and economic development.

Input received from local employers provided specific recommendations for strategies and action steps the NRWIB and its partners can jointly pursue to address the workforce needs of regional employers across targeted industries. We have focused here on themes that emerged prominently in all the focus groups to assist the Board in prioritizing next steps that can have the most impact for a wide range of employer partners. We have also gained insight on how to best move forward with these efforts based off information gleaned from Next Generation Sector Partnership strategies.

The local One-Stop workforce system has a strong tradition of cooperation among partners and coordination of effort across agencies in providing services to business customers. The Northwest Region hosts a Business Services Team that is made up of staff from the CTDOL and NRWIB, the Greater Waterbury Chamber of Commerce, Resource Development Associates, the Danbury Chamber of Commerce and Northwest Chamber of Commerce, BRS, Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), JFES, Adult Education and other stakeholders and partners. The Waterbury AJC will organize Business Services functions to serve business customers in a single, unified, coordinated team structure. The local Business Services Team will reach out to communicate with all local economic development officials to develop a working relationship that allows for the coordination of workforce activities with economic development plans. A single point of contact will ensure efficient communication and delivery of services.

Some of those services include:

- Posting in the CT Hires databank of all job openings for which recruitment support is provided;
- Promotion of funding programs designed to assist employers such as the Manufacturing Innovation Fund (MIF);
- Access to On-the-job Training funds;
- Transitional Jobs;
- Subsidized work experience; and
- Provide job-matching and recruitment events.

Business Services Team participants will use the CT Hires system. They meet on a regular basis to share information and coordinate strategy. Businesses seeking services and support will be reviewed to ensure their eligibility and appropriateness. The appropriate use of social media will also be utilized.

NRWIB has convened economic development partners to gather their feedback on the most common cross-industry workforce challenges and other concerns shared by companies currently in the region or potentially interested in locating in the region.

8. Priority for Services

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

The NRWIB’s Priority of Service policy is outlined below.

Priority of Service	
Adults	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Veteran and eligible spouses 2. Low income adults (i.e. TANF/WtW- Below 70% of poverty guidelines) 3. Customers that are employed and below the 100% LLSIL (Lower Living Standard Income Levels) with at least one barrier to employment. 4. Training based on DOL Labor Market Occupations in Demand
Dislocated Workers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Veterans and Eligible Spouses 2. Most In Need Criteria 3. Training based on DOL Labor Market Occupations in Demand
Youth	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Below 70% of poverty guidelines 5. Youth in need of GED or High School diploma 6. Parenting youth 7. Youth who are basic skills deficient 8. Youth with educational attainment that is one or more grade level below the grade level appropriate to the age of the youth 9. Youth with disabilities including learning disabilities 10. Youth who are homeless or runaway youth 11. Youth who are offenders <p><i>*As allowed under Section 129 (c)5(H) the board chooses to identify a youth participant who resides in a single parent family as an additional barrier in the eligibility criteria.</i></p>

9. Training Services

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

Adult: An adult is defined as an individual 18 years of age or older. Unemployed customers unable to obtain employment through Career Services and employed customers who need assistance to retain or upgrade employment, must be determined eligible and registered before receiving Training Services.

Dislocated Worker: Dislocated workers must be certified by CTDOL prior to individualized career services. Dislocated workers unable to obtain employment through career center services and under-employed dislocated workers who need assistance to retain or upgrade employment must be determined eligible and registered before receiving WIOA Services.

10. Customer Choice

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

A customer may select any WIOA-approved education and training program in the state, as listed on the current ETPL, if the participant meets all other criteria relating to initial and subsequent eligibility for such educational and/or training services. Individuals seeking WIOA funded assistance have the freedom of “customer choice” in selecting the educational and training program that best fits their personal and career needs.

11. Individual Training Accounts

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

- A. *Describe any ITA limitations established by the board.*
- B. *Describe any exceptions to the use of ITAs.*

The NRWIB adopts the following policy with respect to the issuance of Individual Training Accounts.

The NRWIB has limited funding for ITAs and with this declaration, will prioritize the issuance of ITAs to region residents first, while following its Priority of Service as outlined in the Client Flow and Registration Policy. The following factors are to be considered by the Career Navigator when developing an Individual Employment Plan with participants:

- Communication with Career Navigator in timely manner
- Appropriateness of requested training as it relates to current industry sector/labor market demand
- Labor market demand status of previous training (if any)
- Attendance records from previous training (if any)
- Career Navigator recommendation

Funding for ITAs will not exceed \$4,000 per customer. However, programs identified as meeting annually defined “Priority Labor Market Demands” as determined by the Board will receive consideration for additional funding. Such consideration must be approved by the Executive Director or designee. For PY 2019-2020, the Board deemed the following to be industries with significant labor market demands:

- Manufacturing
- Healthcare
- Construction
- Information Technology
- Human Services
- Retail Trade
- Accommodation & Food Services

Customers receiving an ITA shall not be eligible for further ITA funds until 24 months after the date of exit from the prior training. Requests for additional training vouchers will be reviewed and awarded on a case by case basis.

12. Enhancing Apprenticeships

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

Through the Northwest Construction Career Initiative, an arm of the NRWIB, and in partnership with the local building trades, participants interested in apprenticeship currently have access to a variety of pre-apprentice and union-based apprenticeship training opportunities. However, the NRWIB seeks to expand the role of apprenticeship training in its seven key industry sectors.

Working with the Office of Apprenticeship, the NRWIB has submitted documentation to expand apprenticeships in the field of Information Technology (as part of the targeted sector strategy in this industry) and is confident that employers within this growing sector will register with the Office of Apprenticeship Training. Through the TechHire grant, the NRWIB has provided a no-cost customizable training to young adults age 17-29 for careers in the information technology industry. Students earn industry credentials and are able to receive supportive services throughout the program. The NRWIB will also work with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) to develop and implement an apprenticeship program in early childhood development.

The NRWIB has also worked with the Office of Apprenticeship to register its Future Bankers program as a Registered Pre-apprenticeship program. The goal of this initiative is to provide students with a clear and promising career path in the financial services industry. It is a collaborative effort of the Center for Financial Training, area public schools, and local financial services institutions.

To further promote apprenticeships throughout the region, NRWIB will encourage both employers and jobseekers to consider participating in pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship efforts. At orientation sessions and during individual employment planning, the opportunity for apprenticeship training will be promoted to participants. Wage subsidy and related instruction reimbursement will be offered, and competency/performance reimbursements will be available to applicants.

13. Other Program Initiatives

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

The NRWIB will provide other services in support of the Board's vision and strategic goals. These services include but are not limited to the implementation of the On the Job Training (OJT) program. On-the-Job Training (OJT) has a proven track record in Northwest Connecticut of helping unemployed workers gain new skills to find and retain employment. NRWIB is and will continue its efforts to increase the utilization of OJT throughout the region. To increase consistency among OJT providers, NRWIB has developed minimum standards and widely accepted protocol for implementation of the program.

To promote OJTs, NRWIB outreaches directly and indirectly to employers and jobseekers. Specifically, for businesses, the Business Services staff have integrated OJT into their suite of services offered to and promoted to businesses during their outreach and encourage partner organizations (e.g. chambers of commerce, community colleges) to do the same. This minimizes the

chance of multiple staff contacting one employer about the program. The NRWIB also utilizes intermediaries such as regional chambers of commerce and the Smaller Manufacturer's Association to outreach to individual employers.

14. Service Provider Continuous Improvement

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

The NRWIB will rely upon guidance from CT DOL on methods to ensure continuous improvement of eligible providers of services as this relates to contracted service providers and providers of eligible training providers. The NRWIB has additional staff dedicated to maintaining the Eligible Training Provider List; we intend to increase efforts regarding outreach and recruitment to increase the number of vendors and programs made available to our customers.

15. Youth Program Design

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

All prospective bidders for out-of-school youth programs must address all fourteen youth elements in their proposals and whether these elements are provided within the context of their design or provided through referrals as deemed appropriate.

WIOA Required Program Elements:

The Act states that youth programs shall provide:

1. Tutoring, study skills training, and instruction, leading to completion of secondary school, including dropout prevention strategies;
2. Alternative secondary school services;
3. Occupational skill training with a focus on a recognized post-secondary credential and in-demand occupations;
4. Paid and unpaid work experiences, including internships and job shadowing; summer employment opportunities that are directly linked to academic, occupational skills training;
5. Integrated education and training for a specific occupation or cluster;
6. Leadership development opportunities, which may include community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility and other positive social behaviors during non- school hours;
7. Supportive services;
8. Adult mentoring for the period of participation and a subsequent period, for a total of not less than 12 months;
9. Follow-up services for not less than 12 months after the completion of participation;
10. Comprehensive guidance and counseling, which may include drug and alcohol abuse counseling and referral;
11. Financial literacy education;
12. Entrepreneurial skills training;
13. Services that provide labor market information about in demand industry sectors and occupations; and
14. Post-secondary preparation and transition activities.


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

The NRWIB utilizes the CASAS reading and math testing to determine a youth’s levels and ability to compute, read, write, and speak English. For youth with special needs, special accommodations are made for testing. Based on a youth’s raw/scale scores, any youth needing to reach the next educational functioning level are provided with basic skills remediation by the respective vendor or may be referred to the local Adult Education. The NRWIB also provides access to Work Keys “Keytrain” modules for the purpose of self-paced remediation.

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

The NRWIB has defined transportation as required additional assistance and at intake this determination is made, and each youth will complete a self-attestation (note attached self-certification). Each contracted vendor may utilize funding under support services for gas vouchers, bus passes and the like; while other vendors will leverage other funding streams to provide this support service.

16. *Rapid Response*

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

The NRWIB has adopted Connecticut’s Rapid Response policy issued under AP-16-1 to wit: The policy outlines the total process from the time the Rapid Response Unit (RRU) learns of a layoff until all workers, when possible, have received Early Intervention services. It also includes general guidelines for Rapid Response. The full Policy appears in Appendix H.

Core WIOA program activities in the NRWIB will be aligned as partners build upon existing inter-agency relationships and program collaborations.

VI. RESPONSE TO COVID-19

*** PLEASE NOTE, THIS SECTION OF THE PLAN IS STILL IN PROGRESS AS OUR RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IS A FLUID SUBJECT

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

1. *The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the Northwest region.*

The details and statistics about the economic impact are not yet known at the time of this report, but as the year unfolds, the likelihood of a severe recession is looming. The service, hospitality, retail and food sectors have been particularly hard hit. As the nation moves from a public health problem to an economic problem, a conclusive assessment would be premature at this time. There has been significant economic impact due to disruption in childcare provisions and school closures. The NRWIB recognizes the need to prepare for a staged and gradual reopening of offices, first to staff at 50% capacity which began in June 2020, then to the public. Employers and jobseekers alike have been severely impacted by COVID-19. NRWIB has prepared and begun to execute a plan for

the safe and gradual reopening of the region’s workforce development offices in Waterbury, Danbury and Torrington which is outlined in its Post Pandemic Plan (Appendix J).

2. *The impact of COVID-19 on the workforce in your local area.*

COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on the workforce in our area. The following is data regarding processed continued claims:

	<u>March 8</u>	<u>April 26</u>
NORTHWEST WORKFORCE AREA	8,403	45,907

	<u>June 7</u>	<u>July 5</u>	<u>August 9</u>
CITY:			
Waterbury	10,261	10,431	8,784
Danbury	5,407	5,147	4,087
Torrington	2,818	2,984	2,201

	<u>June 7</u>	<u>July 5</u>	<u>July 26</u>
NORTHWEST WORKFORCE AREA:	40,126	39,472	36,278

Most of the relevant WARN data is not yet available but the following WARN notices illustrate the negative impact of the virus:

WARN Date	Name of Affected Company * = layoffs due to the Coronavirus	Location(s) of Layoffs	Number Affected Workers
7/15/2020 Rec'd 7/15/2020	Aptar Group, Inc.*	Torrington	59
5/15/2020 Rec'd 5/18/2020	Franklin Products, Inc.*	Torrington	129
4/23/2020 Rec'd 4/27/2020	Crowne Plaza* (Updated Notice)	Danbury	78
4/9/2020 Rec'd 4/14/2020	Victorinox Swiss Army* (Updated Notice)	Monroe	54
4/3/2020 Rec'd 4/3/2020	Victorinox Swiss Army, Inc.*	Monroe	48
4/2/2020 Rec'd 4/7/2020	Scholastic Book Fairs, Inc.*	Danbury	87
4/1/2020 Rec'd 4/3/2020	Connecticut Eye Consultants*	Danbury	124
3/31/2020 Rec'd 4/6/2020	North American Dental Group*	Colchester, Milford, Northford, Ridgefield,	89

		Tolland, Monroe , Norwalk, Old Saybrook	
3/31/2020 Rec'd 4/3/2020	Primark*	Danbury	116
3/25/2020 Rec'd 4/6/2020	<u>Mayflower Inn Spa*</u>	Washington	98
3/23/2020 Rec'd 3/24/2020	<u>Crowne Plaza*</u>	Danbury	56
3/17/2020 Rec'd 3/18/2020	<u>121 at Oxford LLC dba 121 Restaurant and Bar</u>	Oxford	41

3. New service delivery strategies and partnerships

NRWIB has implemented and plans to implement following this crisis.

Almost overnight the workforce landscape changed radically. The NRWIB has vigorously moved forward to adapt. This has required moving from a system devised decades ago that emphasized:

- Submission of paper forms
- Personal presence
- Physical appearance for registration, interviews, orientation, training.
- Business conducted at a traditional office setting – not online.
- Non-virtual verification of signatures, social security numbers, birth certificates, income, etc.
- Paper invoices, bills, checks, payments.

The NRWIB rapidly replicated, virtually, a workforce service delivery system rooted in non-virtual practices. The NRWIB has developed and implemented the following workplace safety policies and procedures:

General

- Employees will be assigned to one of two teams- “X” or “O”. Each team will work in the office on a rotating schedule A day and B day. X team will begin Monday, June 8th, O team will begin Tuesday June 9th. When not in the office the HOME team will remotely.
- All non-essential workplace travel is suspended. When meeting with employers outside of the office masks must be worn and hand washing is advised as soon as reasonably possible after completion of meeting.
- Ensure that all participants that do not speak English as their first language are aware of procedures by communicating the procedures, either orally or in writing, in their native or preferred language.
- Control access to external visitors including:
 - Prohibiting entry into the facility for non-essential visitors.
 - Interviewing approved visitors about their current health condition and recent travel history. Advise participant that they need to wear a mask during appointment. If they do not have one, one will be provided. Side door will used for entry rear door for exit. Temperatures will be taken at entry along with 5 questions.
 - Using soap and water or within available supplies, hand sanitizer at point of entry to the facility.

Masks or Cloth Face Coverings Required

- Each employee shall be required to wear a mask or other cloth material that covers his or her mouth and nose while in the workplace, except to the extent an employee is using break time to eat or drink. NRWIB will issue such masks or cloth face coverings to their employees. In the event an employer is unable to provide masks or cloth face coverings to employees because of shortages or supply chain difficulties, employers must provide the materials and [CDC tutorial](#) about how to create a [cloth face covering](#), or compensate employees for the reasonable and necessary costs employees expend on such materials to make their own masks or cloth face covering.
- In workplace settings where employees are working alone in segregated spaces (i.e. cubicles with walls, private offices, etc.), employees may remove their masks. However, workers shall wear a mask or face covering from the time they enter the building until the time they arrive at their cubicle/work station and at any time they are leaving their work station and moving around common areas (i.e. in hallways and stairwells, going to the restroom or break room, etc.). For employees working in congregate settings (i.e. open manufacturing floors, warehouses, areas open to the public, shared offices, or similar settings), those workers shall wear a face covering as above, as well as when they are at their work station. In addition, continuous wearing of masks is not required in outdoor workspaces where employees do not regularly come within six feet of other employees.
- Nothing in these rules shall require the use of a mask or cloth face covering by anyone for whom doing so would be contrary to his or her health or safety because of a medical condition.
- If a person declines to wear a mask or cloth face covering because of a medical condition as described above, such person shall not be required to produce medical documentation verifying the stated condition.

Controlling contact between employees and other employees or customers

- NRWIB has developed practices for social distancing.
- Social distancing means avoiding large gatherings and maintaining distance (approximately 6 feet or 2 meters) from others.
- Require all customers to wear cloth face coverings while on premises. Nothing in these rules shall prohibit a business from issuing face coverings to customers or other visitors upon or prior to entry. Nothing in these rules shall require the use of a mask or cloth face covering by anyone for whom doing so would be contrary to his or her health or safety due to a medical condition, by a child in a child care setting, anyone under the age of two years, or by an older child if the parent, guardian or person responsible for the child is unable to place the mask safely on the child's face.
- If a person declines to wear a mask or cloth face covering because of a medical condition as described above, such person shall not be required to produce medical documentation verifying the stated condition.
- In-person meetings should be avoided as much as possible. Teleconferencing may be used by site-essential staff, provided they are dialing in from separate areas. Where in-person meetings occur, they should be limited to a maximum of ten people, each attendee should have a mask covering their mouth and nose at all times, and a distance of six feet should be maintained.
- Discourage carpooling.
- Increase physical space between employees and customers (e.g., drive through, Plexiglas partitions).
- Deliver services remotely (e.g. phone, video, or web) where practical.

- Deliver products through curbside pick-up or delivery when possible.
- Where possible, close or restrict break rooms and cafeterias and have employees bring lunches from home and eat at workstation or in cars.
- If an employer does maintain break or lunchrooms, utilize extra rotations to reduce the number of employees in the break room/cafeteria at one time to achieve social distancing norms. Provide soap and water, or within available supplies, hand sanitizer and/or disposable wipes in break or lunchrooms and clean them after every shift.
- Increase ventilation rates and increase the percentage of outdoor air that circulates into the system where possible.
- Wherever possible, segment the workspace into discrete zones. Prohibit employees from entering into zones where they are not required to be to perform their jobs.

Eliminating transmission points

- Reduce common touch points by opening internal doors where possible.
- Install all no-touch disposal receptacle or remove lids that require contact to open for non-hazardous waste containers unless doing so creates an unsanitary environment.
- **Frequent cleaning of all touch points.**
- Secure all secondary doors and access points to minimize incidental contact.
- Recommended to provide disposable wipes so that commonly used surfaces (for example, doorknobs, keyboards, remote controls, desks, other work tools and equipment) can be wiped down.
- To disinfect surfaces, use products that meet [EPA's criteria for use against SARS-Cov-2](#) and are appropriate for the surface.
- Prohibit workers from using other workers' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment, when possible. If shared, clean and disinfect equipment before and after use.
- Employees should clean their personal workspace at the beginning and the end of every shift.
- If a sick employee is suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19, follow the CDC cleaning and disinfection recommendations.

Guidelines for employees

- Employees who are ill should stay home.
- Where possible, employees should take their temperature before they go to work. If they have a temperature above 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit, they should stay home.
- Make hand sanitizer available to employees who do not have ready access to soap and water.
- Place posters that encourage hand hygiene to help stop the spread at the entrance to your workplace and in other workplace areas where they are likely to be seen.
- Whether at work or at home, all employees are advised to follow the [CDC guidelines for preventing transmission of COVID-19](#) including:
 - Washing hands frequently for at least 20 seconds, avoiding touching mouth and nose, avoiding close contact with others, cleaning and disinfecting surfaces, using cough and sneeze etiquette, and staying at home when sick.

Guidelines for employees who had close contact with a person with symptoms of or have been diagnosed with COVID-19:

- Specific guidance for healthcare workers and first responders can be found [here](#).
- Do not go to work.
- Notify your supervisor
- Isolate yourself from the rest of the people in your home.
- Consult your healthcare provider.
- Practice home isolation as recommended by your health care provider.

Guidelines for workplace illness:

Guidelines if an employee is [exposed to](#) or diagnosed with COVID-19:

- Employees who have symptoms (i.e., fever, cough, or shortness of breath) should notify their supervisor and stay home.
- Sick employees should follow [CDC-recommended steps](#). Employees should not return to work until the criteria to discontinue home isolation are met, in consultation with healthcare providers and state and local health departments.
- Employees who are well but who have a sick family member at home with COVID-19 should notify their supervisor and follow CDC recommended precautions.
- If an employee is confirmed to have COVID-19 infection, employers should:
 - inform fellow employees of their possible exposure to COVID-19 in the workplace but maintain confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The fellow employees should then self-monitor for symptoms (i.e., fever, cough, or shortness of breath).
 - Ventilate areas visited by that individual.
 - Clean and disinfect all impacted spaces, especially commonly used rooms and shared equipment.
- Employees should not return to work until the criteria to end home isolation is met as instructed in consultation with healthcare providers and state and local health departments.

Guidelines for Employees Returning from Vacations:

People who choose to travel on a plane, train or bus during their time off, where they cannot perform social distancing and best hygiene practices, are being asked to self-quarantine for 14 days. If the employee is able to work from home, then projects and expectations are to be discussed prior to their departure. For employees who cannot work from home, they either have to take additional vacation time or take the time unpaid.

Screening Questions for Visitors Prior to Entrance to NRWIB

In the last 14 days have you or anyone you live with:

- had a fever?
- experienced difficulty breathing or shortness of breath?
- had a cough?
- experienced loss of taste or smell
- been exposed to anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19?

As the virus increasingly impacted, and continues to impact, our communities, the Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board adapted practices to ensure we could continue to provide services to our customers. We continue to information from reliable sources like the Center for Disease Control to ensure the decisions we make prioritize the safety and health of residents and vendors who provide services to our region.

The NRWIB opened its AJC offices back up to staff, at 50% capacity, in early June of 2020. Our reopening plan is split into three phases and details can be found in Appendix J- Post Pandemic Plan. Virtual information sessions for WIOA and all NRWIB programs are currently available. In an effort to co-enroll program participants, it is now required that each individual wishing to receive AJC services register on CTHires and submit the WIOA pre-application; details regarding these procedures can be found in Section II. Q. 5 of this Plan.

4. New related [training and supportive services needs](#) that the NRWIB has identified in our region and summary of [plans to address these needs](#).

a) The NRWIB has identified the following major training and supportive services needs: job seekers need to be able to:

- ask questions about programs and services
- submit applications and required documentation
- enroll in training programs
- take part in virtual info sessions
- enroll in remote / distance learning
- take credential exams remotely
- receive assistance remotely with resume building, interview skills, and job search strategies.

b) Summary of NRWIB's plans to address these needs.

The Board has worked feverishly to enable staff, customers, training providers and other stakeholders to work and function remotely. We have made use of the following:

- CareerEdge, Inc.
- Microsoft 365
- Laptops for Board and CRI staff
- Laptops for customers
- VNC software for working remotely at home
- Internet service, hot spot, and other arrangements
- Enhanced social media content for programs, such as TechHire ITXpress, instructing candidates to contact the Career Navigator directly. Once contacted, the CN directs them to the NRWIB site to fill out a form of interest in the program.
- Creation of program application forms as online fillable PDF with instructions to email it to the career navigator when completed. This will be added to the NRWIB page as well.
- Use of SurveyMonkey to determine candidate availability, then set up the date and time for information sessions.
- Use of Go To Meeting and Zoom for program information sessions, followed by online small group Q and A sessions after each.
- Face to face web meeting with each candidate for interviews.
- Use of apps that allow a person to legally sign documents online.