

NORTHWEST REGIONAL WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD LOCAL WIOA PLAN

2016-2020



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INTRODUCTION

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires each local workforce development board (LWDB) to develop and submit, in partnership with the Chief Elected Official (CEO), a comprehensive four-year plan to the Governor. The local plan shall support the vision, goals and strategy described in the State Plan and otherwise be consistent with the Unified State plan.

The Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board (NRWIB) WIOA four-year plan will be effective July 1, 2016 - June 30, 2020. This Local Plan addresses current and future strategies and efficiencies necessary to meet the continuing modernization of the workforce system and creation of a customer-centered system: where the needs of business and workers drive workforce solutions; where American Job Centers provide excellent customer service to all jobseekers and businesses; and where the workforce system supports strong regional economies, as well as alignment with State priorities.

WIOA strengthened the alignment of the workforce development system's six core programs by imposing unified strategic planning requirements, common performance accountability measures, and requirements governing the one-stop delivery system. In so doing, WIOA placed an increased emphasis on coordination and collaboration at the Federal, State, and local levels to ensure a streamlined and coordinated service delivery system for jobseekers, including those with disabilities, and employers. Therefore, this local plan is based on current and projected needs of the workforce investment system as a whole. The needs of jobseekers, incumbent workers, youth, and businesses have been considered in every step of the planning process. It is the responsibility of the NRWIB to maintain a global view of the system-wide needs of the workforce development area and its relationship to the state vision rather than focusing on programmatic and operational details.

To accomplish the objectives set out by WIOA and these plan guidelines, the NRWIB in consultation with the Chief Elected Officials, have incorporated broad involvement in the development of this Local Plan. Input was received from a variety of stakeholders and the public. An atmosphere of collaboration and partnership and an emphasis on enhancing the entire system rather than categorical programs, has been the focus of this planning process. It is the NRWIB's responsibility to provide the leadership to achieve this goal.

As noted above, this Local Plan is designed to support the vision, goals, and strategy put forth in the State Plan. Connecticut's strategic vision states ***“Connecticut will create and sustain the global economy's best-educated, most-skilled, highest-productive workforce, capable of pursuing rewarding careers, such that every Connecticut business has access to a qualified, skilled, job-ready workforce.”*** Connecticut's challenge, and that of the Local Area, using the opportunity WIOA offers, is to ensure that a comprehensive, aligned, integrated workforce development system is in place and sustained into the future to achieve this vision of developing and maintaining the best-educated, most skilled, highest-productive workforce in the increasingly competitive global economy. The Connecticut Unified State Plan establishes the framework to achieve the vision and the NRWIB's Local Plan serves to accomplish the same goals.

Those goals, set by the Connecticut Employment and Training Commission (CETC), the State Workforce Board, include four overarching and complementary goals, as a policy and strategic framework for the

numerous business sector, government, labor, community-based and non-profit partners and stakeholders engaged in Connecticut's innovative workforce efforts. These include:

1. **Support Business Growth:** Connecticut businesses – particularly those in key industry sectors that drive economic growth – will have access to the skilled, talented employees they need to compete effectively, prosper and create new and rewarding jobs and career opportunities for Connecticut workers.
2. **Strengthen Current Workforce:** Connecticut workers will possess the critical skills and credentials needed to prosper and advance in careers that pay well and allow them to support their families.
3. **Develop Future Talent:** Connecticut's young people will be equipped and ready for career and post-secondary success as productive contributors to a vibrant and competitive state economy and in their communities.
4. **Transform System Capacity:** Connecticut's multi-faceted workforce/talent-development system will integrate and align goals, strategies, policies, investments, services, infrastructure and technology for effective, accountable performance.

To accomplish the vision and meet these goals, CETC endorses and the NRWIB embraces, a set of guiding principles for Connecticut's workforce system: Collaboration among partners and stakeholders is essential.

- Innovation is crucial, including use of technology and new approaches.
- Data and evidence must be used to shape strategy.
- Continuous improvement must be a way of life.

The NRWIB, in compliance with WIOA Sec. 108. Local Plan, and after collaborating with its chief elected officials, all relevant stakeholders, system partners and the public offers the following 4 Year Local Plan.

I. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A. CHIEF ELECTED OFFICIAL(S) (CEOS)

The NRWIB encompasses 41 municipalities covering a population base of over 550,000. 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 that defines how the parties will carry out the roles and responsibilities of the CEO's is in place. A copy of the Agreement is attached in Appendix B. Within the Intergovernmental Agreement, the nomination process used to appoint local board members, the term limitations and how the duration of term appointments are set forth. Also the process to notify the CEO of a board member vacancy to ensure a prompt replacement, the proxy and alternative designee process that will be used when a board member is unable to attend a meeting and assigns a designee as per the requirements at §679.110(d)(4) of the proposed WIOA regulations is articulated in the NRWIB Bylaws which also govern the use of technology for participation, such as phone and web-based meetings, that will be used to promote board member participation. Further, through a detailed committee structure, the process to ensure 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 are also articulated in the bylaws of the Local Workforce Development Board (Appendix C).

Utilizing the regional Council of Government structure, the CEO's of the region were informed of and invited to participate in the development and review of the Local Plan. A public hearing was held during the month of May in 2018 to solicit public comment on the updated version and CEO's in each of the three areas were invited to attend to hear public comment. The public hearing yielded not additional input nor comment. The Executive Committee of the Consortium of Lead Elected Officials 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 through the following ways:

- 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 hearings for the initial offering of this plan in 2017. Those public hearings were held in May. At the June 2016 Executive Committee of the LEOs, the Local Plan was approved. At the June 2016 NRWIB meeting, the WDB approved the Plan and its submission to 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 SUB RECIPIENT

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 NRWIB, as is articulated in the IGA.

D. ONE-STOP SYSTEM

1. *Provide a description of the local one-stop system, including the number, type, and location.*

The local one-stop system is comprised of both full service American Job Centers (AJC) as well as a network of other service delivery points. There are three (3) AJCs, each certified: 1 comprehensive center in Waterbury and 2 affiliate sites in Danbury and Torrington. All three centers house case management for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) clients and business services to employers.

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, Greater Waterbury Chamber of Commerce, Resource Development Associates (RDA), and the Northwest Connecticut Chamber of Commerce to increase business access to services and resources available through the AJCs.

2. *Identify the process to select the one-stop operator.*

On January 17, 2017, NRWIB released a Request for Quotes to procure a One-Stop Operator for the region. A legal advertisement was published in The News Times on January 17, 2017 and in the Republican American on January 18, 2018. The procurement was open for 30 days, however, an extension for the submission deadline was made due to the lack of proposals received. A second legal advertisement was posted in the Danbury News-Times, 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 Connect Chamber of Commerce for selection recommendation to the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors met on June 8, 2017 and voted to move forward with the selection.

3. 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.

4. 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 ad was posted in the Danbury News-Times and the Hartford Courant from December 13-14, 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, including those from ResCare, Eckerd, New Opportunities, Inc., and CRI and 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. (CRI) 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.

5. 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 service provider from those of the one-stop operator. All career services as outlined in the WIOA regulations are provided by CRI. These include both basic and individualized career services and follow-up services. Services range from labor exchange service, labor market information and information on partner programs to comprehensive skill assessments, career planning and the development of an individual employment plans. Training will be made available to participants after assessment and evaluation determines that the individual requires training 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.

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

Northwest Connecticut's industry and occupational mix are explored in the tables below. The NRWIB Region's economy generates over \$29 billion per year with employment concentrated within four industries: Health Care and Social Assistance; Retail Trade; Government; and Manufacturing. Together, these industries account for a little over half of the total employment in the region.

The largest industry sector, Manufacturing, accounts for nearly 12% of the region's economy, contributing over \$3.4 billion a year to the region's gross regional product (GRP) and a little over 10% of total employment. Health Care and Social Assistance, which employs 18% of workers, has the second largest GRP following Manufacturing's nearly \$2.8 billion. Together, these two industries account for over a quarter of the employment in the region.

NRWIB Region Industry Mix				
Industry (2-digit NAICS)	Gross Regional Product (2016)	Percent of Total	2017 Employment	Percent of Total
Health Care and Social Assistance	\$2,790,481,343	9.4%	39,818	18.0%
Retail Trade	\$2,096,307,054	7.1%	30,680	13.8%
Government	\$2,443,000,263	8.2%	28,992	13.1%
Manufacturing	\$3,408,415,844	11.5%	23,110	10.4%
Accommodation and Food Services	\$609,739,587	2.1%	15,684	7.1%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	\$513,582,788	1.7%	10,832	4.9%
Educational Services	\$751,471,345	2.5%	10,809	4.9%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	\$820,075,102	2.8%	10,732	4.8%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	\$1,793,844,142	6.0%	10,078	4.5%
Construction	\$1,357,313,147	4.6%	9,978	4.5%
Finance and Insurance	\$2,299,521,487	7.7%	6,074	2.7%
Wholesale Trade	\$1,287,503,266	4.3%	5,622	2.5%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	\$1,009,897,949	3.4%	4,800	2.2%
Transportation and Warehousing	\$361,092,594	1.2%	4,661	2.1%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	\$252,958,712	0.9%	3,777	1.7%
Information	\$662,465,285	2.2%	2,416	1.1%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	\$2,439,525,058	8.2%	2,176	1.0%
Utilities	\$317,354,832	1.1%	725	0.3%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	\$68,749,063	0.2%	565	0.3%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	\$93,460,185	0.3%	172	0.1%
Unclassified Industry	\$4,340,325,229	14.6%	48	0.1%

NRWIB Region Industry Mix				
Total	\$29,717,084,276	100.0%	221,749	100.0%

Source: EMSI 2017.4

HIGH EMPLOYMENT AND GROWTH INDUSTRIES

Aside from accounting for the largest share of employment in 2017, Health Care and Social Assistance grew by 4% over the last five years, adding over 1,600 new jobs. Manufacturing experienced a sharp decline in jobs in that same time span, losing over 2,300 jobs or 9% of employment. This trend is not projected to improve into 2022. Of the top industries in 2017, Accommodation and Food Services experienced the largest percentage growth, 10%, adding over 1,400 jobs. While this industry growth is positive for the region, it should be noted that many occupations within this sector are low-skilled positions accompanied with low earnings, which could create future economic concerns.

High Employment Industries, 2012-2017				
Industry (2-digit NAICS)	2012 Jobs	2017 Jobs	Change in Jobs	Percent Change
Health Care and Social Assistance	38,207	39,818	1,611	4%
Retail Trade	29,795	30,680	885	3%
Government	29,174	28,992	(182)	(1%)
Manufacturing	25,445	23,110	(2,335)	(9%)
Accommodation and Food Services	14,231	15,684	1,453	10%

Source: EMSI 2017.4

Manufacturing, which is projected to continue declining over the next five years, accounts for 10% of employment in 2017. Other sectors such as Accommodation and Food Services and Other Services have the possibility of surpassing its employment share in the region, a devastating blow to a high GRP earning industry. Health Care and Social Assistance is projected to add over 3,200 jobs by 2022 in addition to the already added 1,611 jobs over the last five years.

High Employment Industries, 2017-2022 (Projected)				
Industry (2-digit NAICS)	2017 Jobs	2022 Jobs	Change in Jobs	Percent Change
Health Care and Social Assistance	39,818	43,095	3,277	8%
Retail Trade	30,680	31,243	563	2%
Government	28,992	29,156	164	1%
Manufacturing	23,110	21,326	(1,784)	(8%)
Accommodation and Food Services	15,684	16,715	1,031	7%

Source: EMSI 2017.4

Drilling deeper at the 4-digit NAICS level and looking into 2022, Colleges, Universities, and Professional Schools is projected to experience the largest job growth with nearly 1,200 jobs, followed by Restaurants

and Other Eating Places (973). Several of these industry sectors require a high-skilled, trained workforce, associated with higher earnings. It is important that the region have training programs in place to create a talent pipeline to fill these growing sectors. Residential Intellectual and Developmental Disability, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse Facilities does not make up a large share of the region's employment, but the projected percentage increase is significant. According to the Connecticut Health and Human Services, the region's largest city, Waterbury, experienced the third largest share of accidental drug-related deaths from 2012-2016 (253 deaths).¹ As the national opioid epidemic continues, services from this sector will be in demand, thus a demand in trained employees.

Industries with Significant Job Gains, 2017-2022 (Projected)				
Industry (4-digit NAICS)	2017 Jobs	2022 Jobs	Change in Jobs	Percent Change
Colleges, Universities, and Professional Schools	7,117	8,307	1,190	17%
Restaurants and Other Eating Places	13,173	14,146	973	7%
Scientific Research and Development Services	2,238	3,122	884	39%
Residential Intellectual and Developmental Disability, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse Facilities	2,806	3,434	628	22%
Private Households	2,150	2,585	435	20%

Source: EMSI 2017.4

OCCUPATIONAL MIX

The top two occupations, Office and Administrative Support; and Sales and Related Occupations account for nearly 25% of the region's total employment. Of the top five occupations in the NRWIB Region Occupational Mix, only two exceed the region's median wage of \$24.26, neither of which are Office and Administrative Support nor Sales and Related Occupations. Management Occupations accounts for 6.2% of the region's total employment and is associated with the highest median wage of \$55.38. Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations accounts for the third largest share of occupations in the region, 8.0%, but typically requires low skills and subsequently results in the lowest median wage in the region: \$11.07.

NRWIB Region Occupational Mix				
Occupation (2-digit SOC)	2017 Jobs	Percent of Total	Annual Openings	Median Wages
Office and Administrative Support Occupations	34,014	15.3%	4,092	\$18.90
Sales and Related Occupations	21,863	9.9%	3,254	\$13.41
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	17,696	8.0%	3,308	\$11.07
Education, Training, and Library Occupations	17,546	7.9%	1,660	\$28.58
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	15,475	7.0%	1,053	\$35.55
Production Occupations	14,697	6.6%	1,713	\$18.17
Management Occupations	13,764	6.2%	1,194	\$55.38
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	11,652	5.3%	1,551	\$15.89
Personal Care and Service Occupations	11,145	5.0%	1,941	\$12.84

¹ <https://data.ct.gov/Health-and-Human-Services/Accidental-Drug-Related-Deaths-2012-2016/ecj5-r2i9>

NRWIB Region Occupational Mix				
Business and Financial Operations Occupations	8,671	3.9%	856	\$34.61
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations	8,402	3.8%	1,178	\$14.28
Healthcare Support Occupations	7,787	3.5%	1,020	\$15.32
Construction and Extraction Occupations	7,454	3.4%	830	\$25.48
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	7,202	3.3%	756	\$23.26
Community and Social Service Occupations	4,812	2.2%	626	\$24.12
Computer and Mathematical Occupations	4,186	1.9%	331	\$40.70
Protective Service Occupations	3,976	1.8%	472	\$24.99
Architecture and Engineering Occupations	3,961	1.8%	331	\$39.90
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations	2,854	1.3%	321	\$23.64
Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations	1,925	0.9%	251	\$36.55
Legal Occupations	1,310	0.6%	89	\$40.57
Military Occupations	835	0.4%	95	\$17.17
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations	518	0.2%	90	\$12.33
Total	221,749	100.0%	27,013	\$24.26

Source: EMSI 2017.4

HIGH GROWTH OCCUPATIONS

Of the fastest growing occupations, only three have gained over 400 jobs in the last five years. None of these fastest growing occupations provide a wage near the regional median wage of \$24.26. While Personal Care Aides; Fast Food and Counter Workers; and Building Cleaning Workers are the fastest growing occupations over the last five years, they are also among the top growing occupations into the next five years.

Fastest Growing Occupations, 2012-2017					
Occupation (4-digit SOC)	2012 Jobs	2017 Jobs	Change in Jobs	Percent Change	2016 Median Wage
Personal Care Aides	3,299	4,076	777	24%	\$13.12
Fast Food and Counter Workers	4,083	4,624	541	13%	\$10.71
Building Cleaning Workers	5,179	5,600	421	8%	\$13.24
Cooks	3,150	3,424	274	9%	\$12.79
Waiters and Waitresses	3,343	3,586	243	7%	\$10.67

Source: EMSI 2017.4

Personal Care Aides is projected to add the most jobs over the next five years with nearly 650 additional jobs; however, its median wage (\$13.12) is far below that of the region. Registered Nurses is also projected to grow into 2022, adding nearly 225 jobs, associated with a competitive median wage of \$37.36. Nursing, Psychiatric, and Home Health Aides, while in the Health Care industry, is projected to add 355 jobs with a median wage of \$14.37. Although that figure is below the regional median wage, it ranks second among

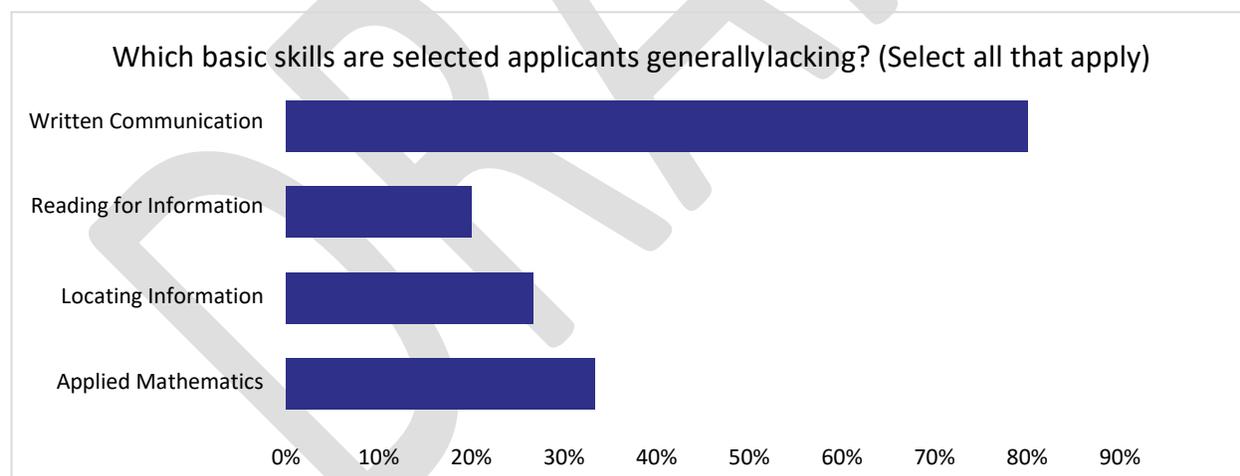
the top five occupations, following Registered Nurses. One explanation for this demand in healthcare-related occupations could be due to the projected number of individuals over the age of 65 who typically receive more health treatment than younger populations.

Fastest Growing Occupations, 2017-2022 (Projected)					
Occupation (4-digit SOC)	2017 Jobs	2022 Jobs	Change in Jobs	Percent Change	2016 Median Wage
Personal Care Aides	4,076	4,720	644	16%	\$13.12
Fast Food and Counter Workers	4,624	5,026	402	9%	\$10.71
Building Cleaning Workers	5,600	5,962	362	6%	\$13.24
Nursing, Psychiatric, and Home Health Aides	4,739	5,094	355	7%	\$14.37
Registered Nurses	4,825	5,049	224	5%	\$37.36

Source: EMSI 2017.4

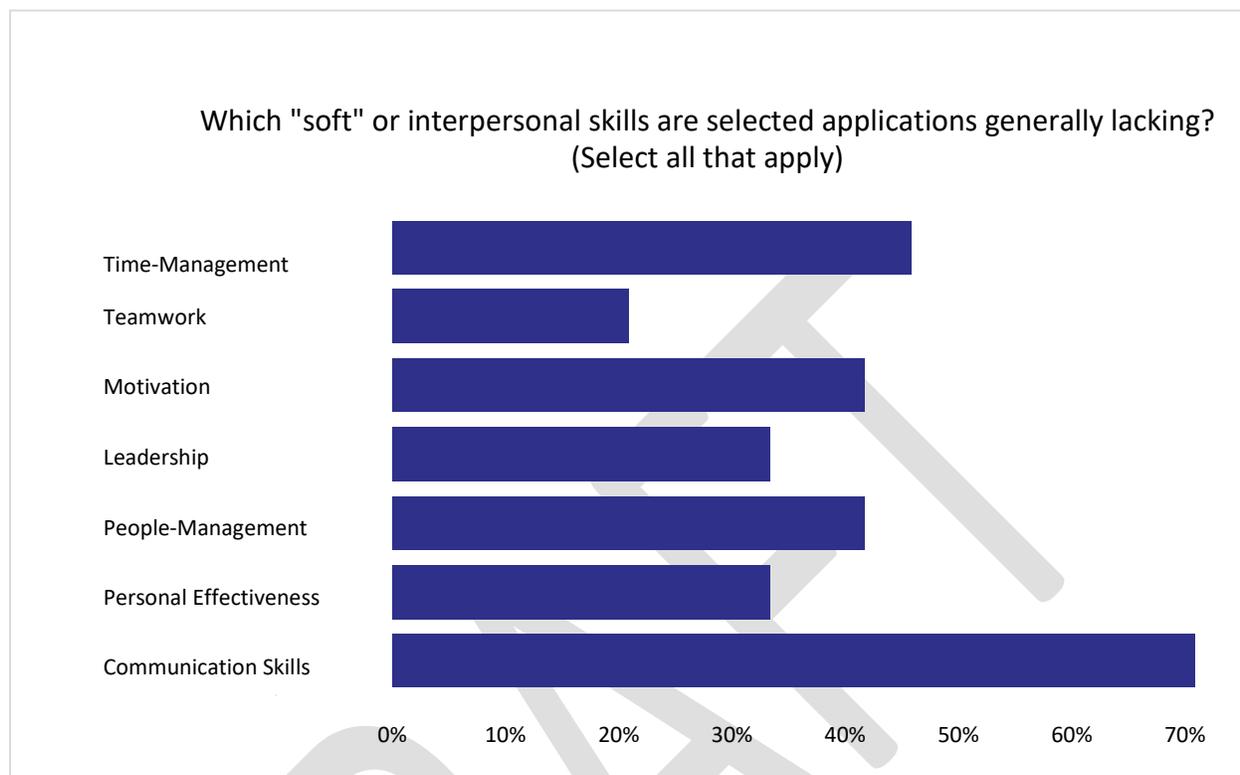
3. *Provide an analysis of the knowledge and skills needed to meet the employment needs of the employers in the region, including employment needs in in-demand industry sectors and occupations.*

The results of a regional employer survey revealed an in-depth look at the skill set employers are looking for in selected applicants. When asked which basic skills selected applicants are generally lacking, an overwhelming number of respondents identified Written Communication as the primary lacked skill.



As respondents were asked about Hard/Occupational Skills, nearly half identified Project Management and Critical/Analytical Thinking as the skill set selected applicants are lacking. Other skills that garnered responses were Basic Communication/Writing and Computer Software. In addition, when asked about Soft/Interpersonal Skills, 71% of respondents identified Communication Skills as the most lacked skill

followed by Time-Management, Motivation, and People Management.



When asked if retirement-eligible employees were able to meet the current skill requirements of the positions they held, 86% of respondents answered yes.

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.

TOTAL POPULATION

The population for the NRWIB region and State have both decreased over the last five years while the nation has increased by four percent. The region’s population change from 2012-2017 was nearly half that of the State which suggests that almost half of the state’s departing population came from the NRWIB region, a looming concern for the future workforce needs.

Population Growth 2012-2017				
	2012	2017	Change	% Change
NRWIB	560,160	552,677	(7,483)	(1%)
Connecticut	3,593,814	3,578,636	(15,178)	0%
United States	313,998,345	325,401,909	11,403,564	4%

Source: EMSI 2017.4

POPULATION GROWTH

Over the next five years, the population of the region and State is expected to continue declining, but at a much slower rate than the previous five years. The population loss for the region is projected to be 3,750 and 2,837 for the State; meanwhile the nation is projected to experience a nearly 8.8 million-population growth. This continual decline in population in the NRWIB region is a concern for the future workforce, especially as it pertains to the projected growing occupations in the health care industry.

Population Growth 2017-2022				
	2017	2022	Change	% Change
NRWIB	552,677	548,927	(3,750)	(1%)
Connecticut	3,578,636	3,575,799	(2,837)	0%
United States	325,401,909	334,191,585	8,789,676	3%

Source: EMSI 2017.4

AGE

The median age for the region is over seven years older than the State as a whole. At 47.3 years old, the median age is over 10 years older than the median age of the United States. The aging of the region can be seen clearly in the population growth by age. The three largest age groups are 25 and older. The population between the age of 5 and 24 is expected to decline by nearly 8,000 over the next five years. The age group that is projected to grow the most into 2022 is those 65 years and older, the baby boomer generation and those within the age of retirement. That population is projected to increase by over 11,500 people. The largest percentage growth over the next five years of any age group is Under 5 and those 65 and older, at 12%.

Population Change Among Age Groups, 2017-2022				
Age	2017	2022	Change	Percent Change
Under 5	28,297	31,806	3,509	12%
5 to 14	67,271	62,281	(4,990)	(7%)
15 to 24	70,203	63,871	(6,332)	(9%)
25 to 44	127,209	134,789	7,580	6%
45 to 64	165,537	150,502	(15,035)	(9%)
65 and older	94,161	105,678	11,517	12%

Source: EMSI 2017.4

RACE & ETHNICITY

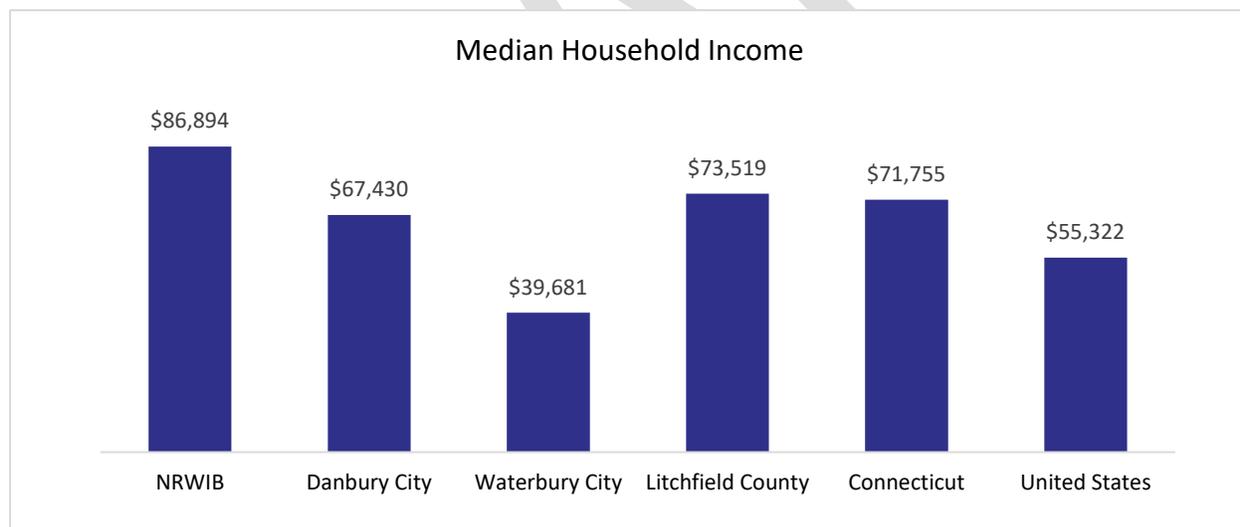
Constituting nearly three-quarters of the population, White individuals make up a majority of the region's population. The second largest race is Hispanic with over sixteen percent followed by Black at 6.2%. Asian and Two or More Races account for less than five percent of the region's population while the American Indian or Alaskan Native; and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander population make up less than 1% of the region's population. Although the region's population remains more than 70% White, increases in diverse populations could indicate a need for more diverse community resources better serve those populations.

Race/Ethnicity	2012 Population	2017 Population	% of Cohort	Change ('12-'17)	% Change ('12-'17)
White	420,711	398,443	72.09%	(22,268)	(5%)
Hispanic	77,104	88,804	16.07%	11,700	15%
Black	32,813	34,453	6.23%	1,640	5%
Asian	18,019	19,856	3.59%	1,837	10%
Two or More Races	10,404	10,295	1.86%	(109)	(1%)
American Indian or Alaskan Native	839	638	0.12%	(201)	(24%)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	270	189	0.03%	(81)	(30%)
TOTAL	560,160	552,677	100.00%	(7,483)	(1%)

Source: EMSI 2017.4

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

In 2016, the NRWIB Region had a median income of \$86,894, which was 21% more than the State’s. Compared to the national household income, the region is even higher with \$31,000 more. Part of this can be attributed to the higher median age of the population. Older individuals typically have established careers and years of experience, which is associated with higher wages than entry-level positions.

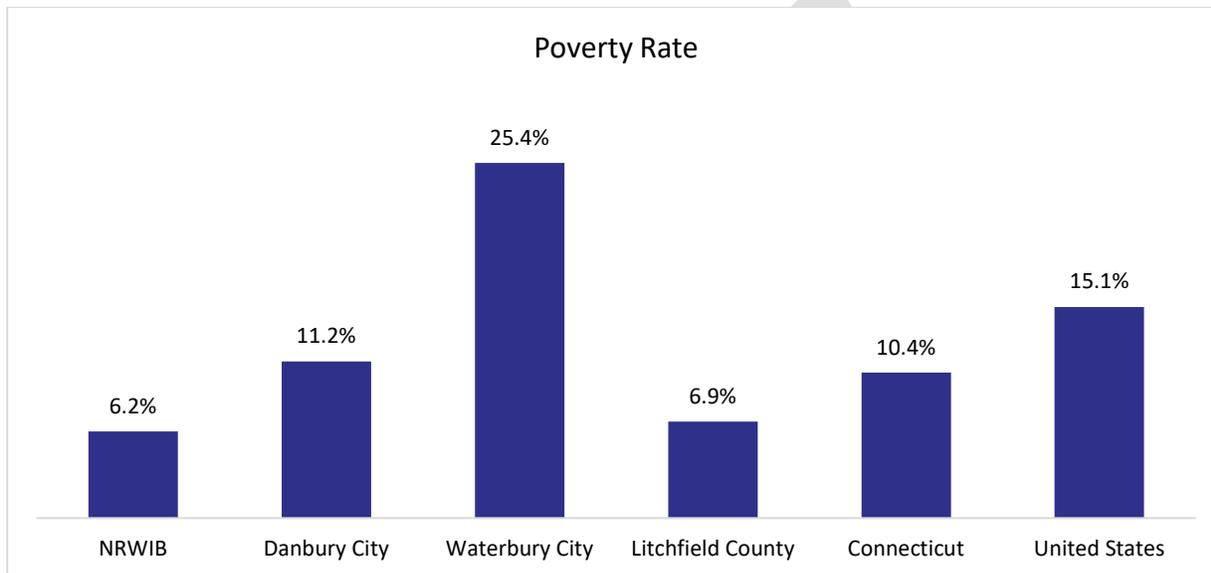


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (Table B19013)

Although the region has a higher median household income compared to state and national figures, cities within the region have a distinct contrast. Danbury has a higher income than the United States but is \$4,325 below the median income for the State. Waterbury’s median income is more than \$15,000 below the median income for the United States and is less than half of the median income for the region. Litchfield County, located in the northwest corner of the region, has a median income higher than the state, yet \$13,000 less than the region.

POVERTY

Poverty rate is closely associated to median household income. Typically, the higher the median household income, the lower the poverty rate and this is true for the region. At 6.2%, the poverty rate for the NRWIB region is lower than Connecticut (10.4%) and the United States (15.1%). As described in the previous subsection, the region has a higher median income compared to the State and the nation. This means there are less people whose income falls below the poverty line, thus explaining the low poverty rate of the region. Waterbury, which has the lowest median household income, also has the highest poverty rate of 25.4%. This figure is easily identifiable in the chart below.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (Table S1701)

LABOR FORCE

The labor force for the region has grown over three percent over the last ten years. This growth has been nearly identical to the 3.6% growth experienced by the State, but lags the 5.1% growth experienced by the United States. The region had its largest labor force of over 321,000 people in 2011, however, that figure declined between 2011 and 2013, resulting in the loss of over 7,000 people in the workforce. In 2014, the labor force began to regain momentum, recovering almost 3,000 people.

Labor Force, 2006-2016			
	2006	2016	% Change
NRWIB	308,800	318,457	3.1%
Danbury City	43,715	47,444	8.5%
Waterbury City	49,210	50,641	2.9%
Litchfield County	103,691	104,907	1.2%
Connecticut	1,826,817	1,891,792	3.6%
United States	151,409,000	159,191,000	5.1%

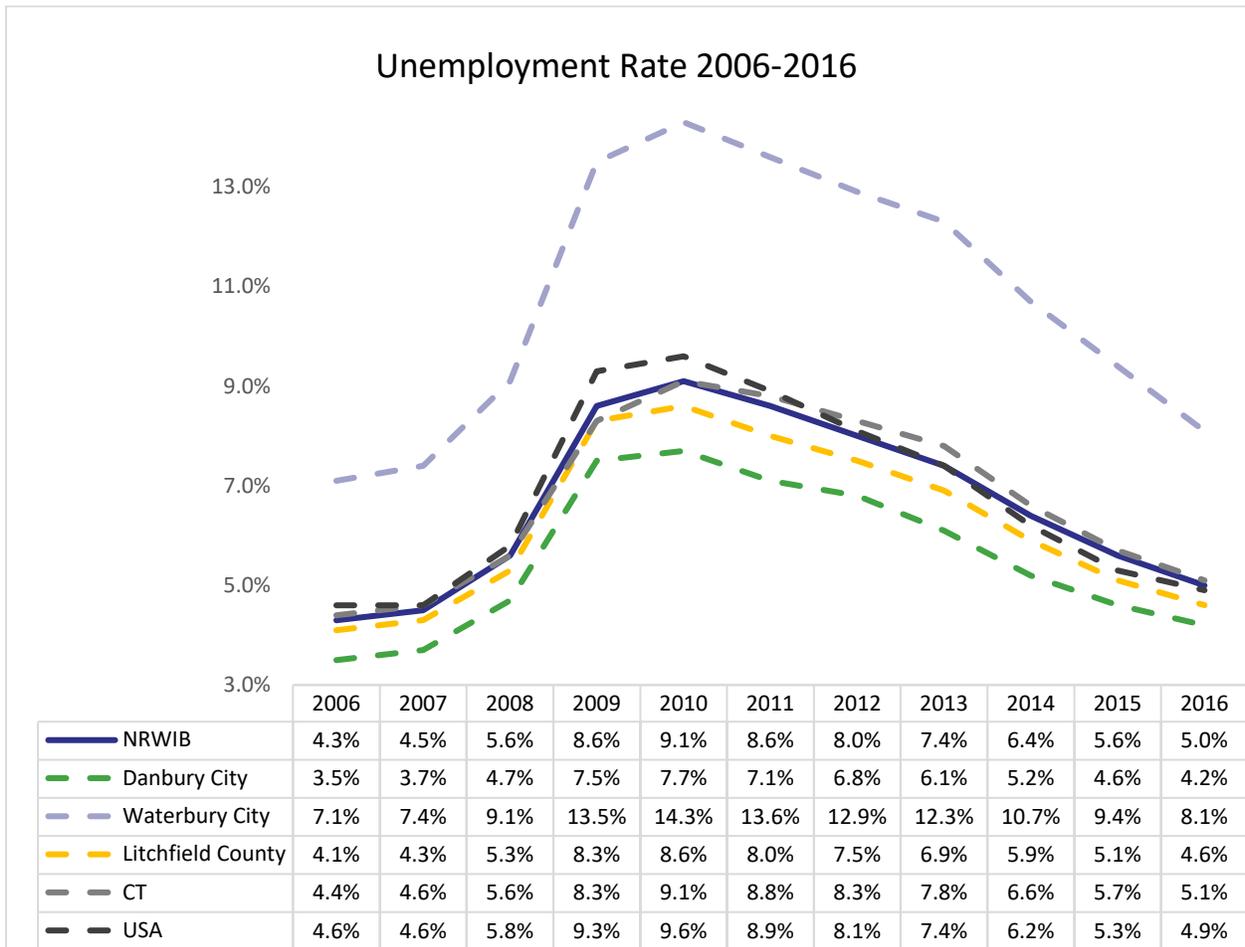
Source: TPMA Analysis of Northwest Local Area Unemployment Statistics (CTDOL)

Since 2006, Danbury City has seen a growth in its labor force growth by nearly 9%. While the Region has experienced a 3.1% growth in the labor force, only the State and U.S. has experienced more. Waterbury City and Litchfield County have both experienced an increase in labor force, however not at the same rate as the region.

UNEMPLOYMENT

The unemployment rates for the Region, State, and Country have followed very similar trends from 2006-2016. The U.S. experienced a higher unemployment rate than the State from 2006 to 2011, but after that time, the State's unemployment rate has been higher. The Region's unemployment rate has been nearly identical to the State's, with the largest difference being in 2013 (0.4%). Since 2010, the unemployment rate for all areas included in the chart has declined consecutively each year. The lowest unemployment rate in 2016 was in Danbury City, 4.2% compared to the highest in Waterbury City, 8.1%, respectively.

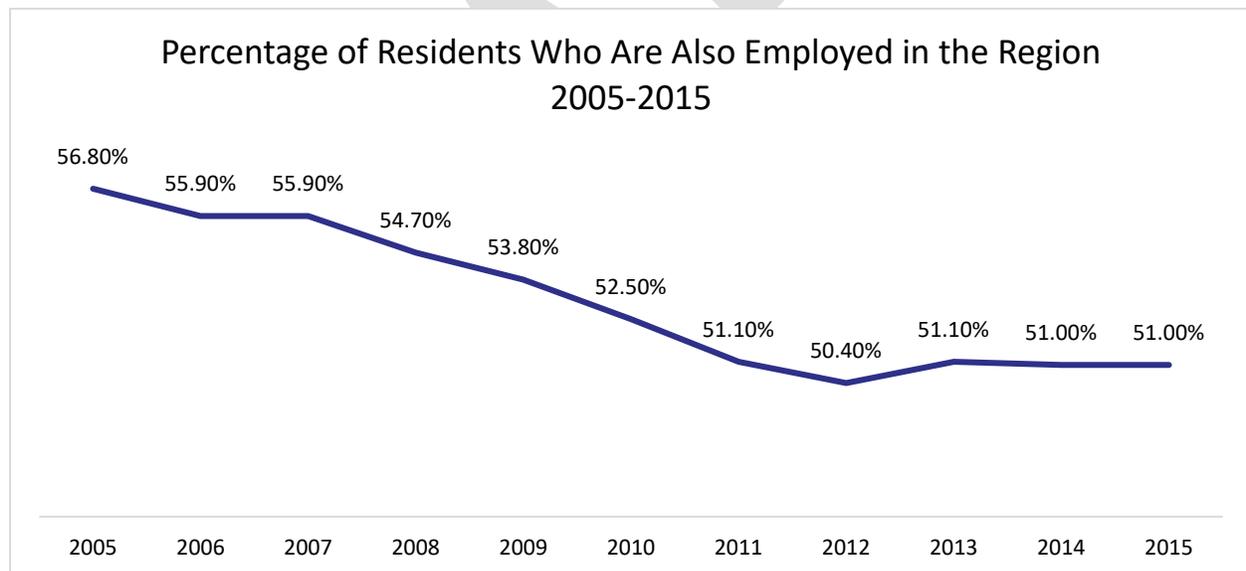
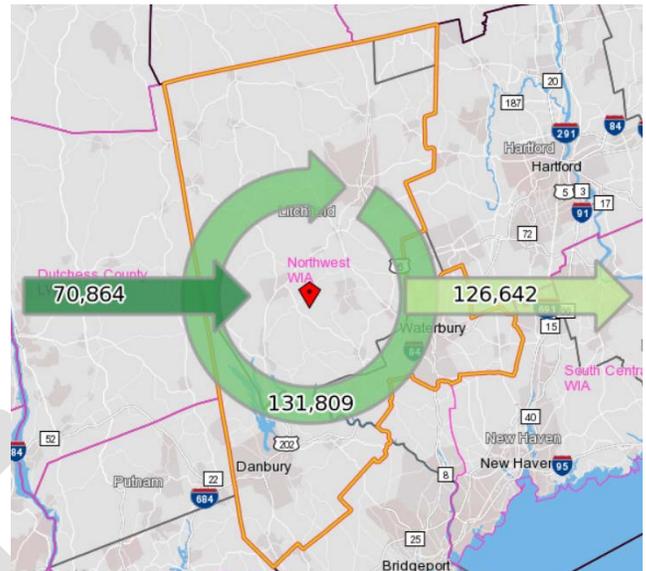
The two largest cities in the Region, Waterbury and Danbury, have stark differences in unemployment rate. Waterbury has a rate higher than any other area in the chart. In 2010, it experienced its highest unemployment rate (14.3%), but it has continued to decline since. Danbury, on the other hand, has consistently had the lowest unemployment rate of any other area in the chart. In 2006, it experienced its lowest unemployment rate (3.5%) and since the economic disaster in 2010, Danbury's unemployment rate has continued to drop to low levels (4.2% in 2016).



Source: TPMA Analysis of Northwest Local Area Unemployment Statistics (CTDOL)

COMMUTING

Overall, the NRWIB Region is a net exporter of workers. In 2015, over 70,000 people commuted into the region for their primary job. In the same year, nearly 127,000 lived in the region but worked elsewhere, for a net commuter loss of approximately 55,800 workers each day. Approximately 131,800 workers both live and work in the Northwest Region. The State is also a net exporter of workers, with nearly 119,000 inflowing into the State and 136,992 workers crossing out state lines for work, resulting in a net commuter loss of approximately 17,000 workers. The NRWIB Region has historically been a net exporter of workers (more workers live in the region but work elsewhere). In 2015, approximately 51% of the local labor force was living and employed in the NRWIB Region, compared to 56.8% in 2005, representing a decrease in locals living and working at home.



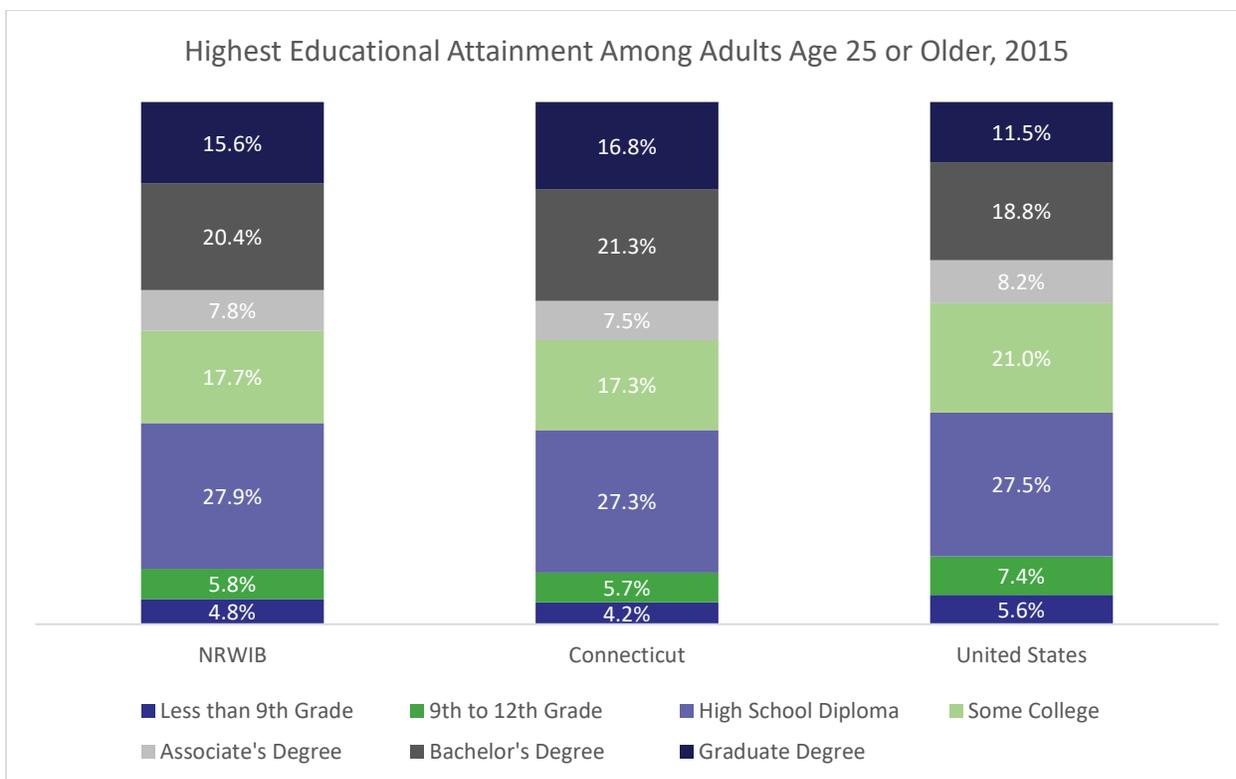
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, On the Map 2015

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The NRWIB Region’s four-year graduation rate has steadily declined from 2012 to 2014; meanwhile the State’s four-year graduation rate has experienced the opposite, passing the region’s rate in 2014. The region had its highest graduation rate in 2012 at 87.4%. The educational attainment of the region shows that 36% of the population over the age of 25 had at least a bachelor’s degree. This is slightly lower than the educational attainment of the State (38.1%). The United States has a lower rate at 30.3% with at least a bachelor’s degree. The Region’s rate with less than a high school diploma, 10.6%, is higher than the State’s rate, 9.9% but still lower than the national rate of 13% of the population.

Enrollment and Graduation Rates, 2013-2014				
	Enrollment	Four Year Graduation Rate		
	2013-14 SY	2012	2013	2014
NRWIB	26,761	87.4%	86.2%	86.7%
Connecticut	167,800	84.8%	85.5%	87.0%

Source: Northwest Information for Workforce Investment Planning 2017 (CTDOL)



Source: EMSI 2017.4

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 the strategic plan, TPMA was contracted to conduct an updated version of the existing plan to help address the current workforce needs in the region. As part of the original WIOA Local Plan, drafted in 2016, TPMA conducted four focus groups in November 2015. Two focus groups consisted of jobseekers, one group consisted of education partners from K-12 institutions and training programs and the other group consisted of workforce partners, community colleges and adult education. These focus groups shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of the workforce development activities in the region; findings from these focus groups are outlined below.

Customer Flow

- **Referral** –All customers wishing to receive services under the WIOA through the AJC will meet with CTDOL staff to complete the Wagner Peysler registration, 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. The customers complete the Traitify personality assessment. 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, which includes testing, the customer is ready to move on to mapping out their prospective career path and training plan.

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:

- 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.
- The Workforce Achievers Value Education (WAVE) program, an WIOA out of school program has

a paid study hall up to \$600 a semester (many students must work so paying students helps keep them from having to work more than 17 hours a week). This program also gets participants work-study jobs on campus and internships connected to WIOA.

- 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 ITxpress program is a \$4 million TechHire Partnership Grant. The project trains unemployed and out-of-school young adults (ages 17-29) and upgrades skills of current workers for jobs in the Information Technology Industry. Trainings include: software development, information system management, and computer programming. This initiative was created in recognition of substantial future growth in the technical economic sector and the surprising number of current job openings. The program allows qualified students to obtain 'entry level' skills at NO COST to participants who meet the eligibility requirements.
- 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. Convening 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 need 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** – In general, ex-offenders are underserved. Waterbury has the highest rate of ex-offenders but also has the highest placement of them. The Ex-Offender Reentry Roundtable, a diverse group that includes the Mayor, strategizes to connect ex-offenders at halfway houses

with training, employment and general reentry issues including securing ID's and substance abuse supports. 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 the group.

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 focus on over the next two years is placing these individuals in transitional jobs (as noted above) 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).

- **Disabled Population** – the NRWIB has committed to providing career services, in conjunction with local school systems, to the disabled youth population. 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 the disabled population. 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. Just recently, NRWIB has hired an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher to help these individuals. Classes are held in the satellite AJC's as well as the comprehensive AJC in Waterbury.

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
- Northwest Connecticut Community College (OSY) 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 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 think, teamwork, written and oral communication, etc. Students who complete the camp and pass the test receive the American Bankers Association (ABA's) Bank Teller Certificate or the Customer Service Rep Certificate – a widely recognized industry credential for entry level employment.

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 the availability of them to clients, is paramount to help clients navigate the system efficiently. Understanding timelines for each process is critical so customers have reasonable expectations.

United Way of Greater New Haven (UWGNH) has worked with the NRWIB to bring a customer-centric case management approach to WIOA programs by implementing the Service Delivery Improvement Initiative (SDII). Within the SDII, 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 on building a customer-centric case management practice. Core trainings were delivered and multiple coaching sessions for the staff and supervisors were provided.

Technology

Technology limitations can pose a challenge in the NRWIB region. Since the transition to CT Hires, 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. It would be ideal to look into more automated text systems like ExactTarget, SignalVine or others. Adult serving 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.

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

The focus groups conducted with adults and dislocated workers during the planning process were particularly insightful. The majority of jobseekers attending the first focus group were female and had been referred to the AJC from other agencies. The second jobseeker group was comprised primarily of men. Most were referred to the AJC due to a job loss and were interested in finding new jobs or transitioning into a new career. Key takeaways about the type and availability of employment and training activities for these customers are outlined below.

Initiating Assistance from WIOA

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

Service Delivery Opportunities

Through the focus groups with jobseekers, 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 WIA verification process takes a long time as well as the approval to take courses. Under WIOA this frustration is removed as the Career Navigator has the ability to place a participant directly into whatever career service will address their needs.
- 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 more help navigating the process of identifying and selecting training. There is not currently a clear understanding of where they can take classes for new certifications, when those classes will be offered, and which WIOA eligible are. This issue is born out of the complex rules now governing the ETPL and its' new regulations and requirements for providers.

After identifying these service delivery opportunities, NRWIB has defined a course of action to address the gaps and/or make improvements where needed. Specifically, Career Navigator, a customer-centric case management approach, was implemented in the AJCs throughout the region. Staff at the AJC adopted customer-centric approaches by individually meeting with customers and learning their specific needs. This “deep dive” approach is relatively new but is beginning to be measured for its effectiveness.

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. In-school programs have financial literacy elements built in. A program with the Waterbury Police Activity League (WPAL) and the Waterbury Career Academy (Academy) is a promising In-School Youth (ISY) program. The Academy has developed articulated career pathways that lead to industry recognized credentials in four of NRWIB's target industry sectors (Manufacturing, Healthcare, IT, and Human Services).

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 strategy for each sector 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 the disabled population have suffered from gaps throughout the region; the NRWIB has sought to address those concerns through the Disability Employment Initiative Youth Program which will provide the disabled 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 Rehabilitation (DORS), DSS, and JFES, at minimum. This could be done informally throughout the year and formally by setting up training twice a year for any 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.

III. LWDB VISION, GOALS, AND STRATEGIES

1. *Identify the vision, goals and strategies adopted by the LWDB in response to the passage of WIOA 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 Connecticut Employment Training Commission. 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 the true and 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 sector partnerships in the target sectors of construction, health services, information technology (IT), and human services based on existing manufacturing industry partnership.

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.

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.

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 Work Ethic Workshops for adults that are integrated as individuals work with their Career Navigator.

- 2. Identify the vision, goals and strategies adopted by the LWDB in response to the passage of WIOA and how these will affect the preparation of an educated and skilled workforce.*

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 in 2016 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. In 2018, 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.

After implementation the Board continued to monitor the progress of the goals and strategies. The Board convened for a follow up working session in January 2018 to evaluate and refine the vision and goals. The Board agreed to maintain the current vision and goals, but to amend some of the strategies in addition to developing an action plan (Appendix F) for continued implementation.

- 3. Describe the local area's strategy to work with entities that carry out the core programs to align resources available to the local area 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, as well as the NRWIB serving as a convener and broker will continue to facilitate the implementation and deliver of a broad array of initiatives that focus on the regions priorities. These include the Connecticut Advanced Manufacturing Initiative, and the Advanced Manufacturing training programs set up locally at Naugatuck Valley Community College, the Manufacturers Alliance Service Corp and the Waterbury Career Academy High School. The Manufacturing Alliance Service Corp 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, careers in healthcare by leveraging the HPOG and IT careers using the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) TechHire grant to serve youth and young adults ages 17-29. HPOG targets in-demand occupations in the healthcare industry that follows 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 CT Step-Up dollars to encourage employers to hire and retain unemployed residents with a focus on the Veteran population. Focus on Youth, through both WIOA and the CT Summer Youth Employment Program, will consist of exposure to career opportunities, primarily in the five targeted sectors in the northwest region. Those youth expressing interest in other areas will be served to the same degree 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.

Serving as a Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) site, the NRWIB is an Employment Network in the Social Security Ticket to Work Program. Via uniquely developed orientation and recruitment sessions, disabled customers are encouraged to enroll in a variety of services including workshops, training program and job placement activities. Assistive technologies have been put in place to accommodate those in need of them. Through the Disability Employment Initiative Youth Program, NRWIB has partnered with the Waterbury Public Schools and the Watertown Transition Academy to provide extra assistance to each school district in serving its disabled youth population. NRWIB has committed to enrolling these youth into its DEI youth program which comes with access to the AJC and its many offerings including workshops, job exploration, and opportunities to pursue further education. In addition to the services under DEI, NRWIB will provide the funding for paid work experience for this population.

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 Roundtable in Waterbury.

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 Federal or State minimum wage (whichever is greater). 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 continues to negotiate 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 One-Stop 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 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 individualized career 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 local area 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 Rehabilitation 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 local board will coordinate workforce investment activities carried out in the local area with economic development activities.

By participating in the local Council of Governments (COG) meetings and with municipal Economic Development Agencies (where applicable), the NRWIB will be a working partner in assuring the readiness of a skilled workforce. Concentrating on the five dominate industry sectors, the NRWIB will serve as an intermediary connecting industry and education partners with economic development. Keeping a watchful eye out for new and emerging industry trends, the NRWIB stands ready to develop and implement platforms to meet emerging sectors.

The NRWIB is collaborating with economic development in two of its major municipalities as a partner in the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston's Working Cities Initiative. The Initiative seeks to address the plight of low wage workers through system change. In Waterbury's River Baldwin neighborhood's economic and racial/ethnic inequities will be addressed by creating a strong, resident-driven, civic infrastructure, realigning/relocating job training services to increase resident access, and revise child care decision-making policies to be more equitable insuring adequate access for neighborhood children and families.

NRWIB also convened economic development partners in a targeted focus group 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. Findings from that focus group included the following:

- The most common workforce challenges economic developers in the region hear about from healthcare employers are turnover and retention, not the need for skilled workers or competition for workers (this contrasts to some degree healthcare employer survey responses).
- The healthcare industry is facing major challenges due to changes brought on by the Affordable Care Act (ACA). It must set a roadmap for future employees and more clearly articulate new expectations for staff.
- The biggest issue in construction/trades is not finding skilled workers, but rather the union vs. non-union issue. The cost of doing jobs with unions is a real challenge for companies.
- Economic developers note that the largest challenge for training providers in keeping up with changes in the IT industry is funding for new equipment, technologies, etc.
- There is a strong feeling among employers that high schools are not teaching students what businesses need. In both hard skills and soft skills, employers believe that it is incumbent upon the K-12 system to instill a degree of soft skills (employability skills) in today's youth.
- Employers see a significant need for increased collaboration among K-12 superintendents, community colleges, and training providers. We need to build partnerships, share employers' needs, and then ensure that education and training providers follow through on responding to those needs. The College Connections program partnership between Waterbury Public Schools and Naugatuck Valley Community College was cited as an example.
- Employers also note that even college graduates with credentials need further employer-provided training in order to meet industry skill and competency expectations. Employers feel colleges have been very slow to change their programs and curriculum to align to employer expectations.
- Employers want workers who want to work, and who want to learn; this is a gap area in terms of recent high school and college graduates.
- Significant concerns for area employers and for companies inquiring about locating here:
 - Transportation is a huge issue for workers, and employers are very concerned about gaps in

- the area's transportation network. Workers' reliance upon public transportation has increased significantly.
- Deficiencies in the state's road/highway networks; transportation, distribution, and logistics are concerns.
 - The cost of healthcare is a top concern for companies.
 - Lack of available real estate inventory is a major barrier for companies considering locating or expanding in the area.
 - Companies have large concerns about raising the minimum wage; as it is raised, people will lose jobs and the increase will cause inflation in other areas, e.g. prices
 - The state's changing demographics are a major concern for employers considering locating here, particularly in terms of whether new demographic groups will buy their product.
 - New England is one of the most difficult regions to do business in; we are competing with other areas in the country, like the South, that are much more business-friendly.
 - Economic developers stress the need to think and act regionally, rather than acting as individual communities in competition with one another; advertise the area as an interconnected economic region and address perception issues.

Considering all the factors noted above, the NRWIB seeks to establish an economic development round table consisting of municipal economic development entities to brainstorm effect strategies to overcome these obstacles.

3. Coordination of Education and Workforce Development Activities

Describe how the LWDB will coordinate education and workforce investment 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 will provide 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.

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. 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 attached education and credential requirements for advancement. Educational programming assets in the region could then be reviewed to determine gap areas as well as areas of potential over-supply or other mismatch.

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. 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.

Focus group participants emphasized the value and return 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 and feel that classroom training alone does not necessarily prepare students to be effective employees. The NRWIB will consider opportunities 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 needs to expand youth career exploration, reduce worker turnover, and improve soft skills development. Within local high schools, the NRWIB Youth Director has begun outreach efforts with school counselors and is in the infant stages of creating a bank teller program in the high schools. This program would target youth and build partnerships with local banking institutions to teach students about financial planning.

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. The local Adult Education providers are actively marketing their programs, including employee assessments and customized work-base placed trainings with the help of the Business Services team.

4. Coordination of Transportation and Other Supportive Services

Describe how the LWDB will coordinate workforce investment 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. Unique methods such as "car-based solutions" are restricted by funding reductions at the State level. 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. Other supportive services such as work gear, uniforms, health screening (physicals, vaccinations) and child care are prioritized on an individual participant need basis. A lack of child care resources is a significant barrier to employment throughout the region but organizations such as Care 4 Kids has provided critical assistance to those impacted. Other supportive services less often engaged include license fees reimbursement (TWIC card, OSHA cards, union cards). The NRWIB does not make needs-based payments. Supportive services may include, but are not limited to:

- Transportation including 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.

Throughout the focus groups, transportation was raised repeatedly as a worker training, employment, and retention barrier by employers and economic developers. In more urban areas, public transportation often does not align to students' and workers' childcare, work, and school schedules, and may not effectively link workers from where they live to where they work and attend training. 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 focus group industries, specifically healthcare, human services, and construction/trades, noted that lack of a personal vehicle with valid license, insurance, and registration are significant barriers to employment in these industries.

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 of 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 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. Through a coordinated reception area in each one stop the seamless delivery of services to all clients, communication among partners, especially DOL, is key to streamline services, avoid duplication and maximizing the resources available. The recent closing of the UI call centers in CT has created a flow into the AJC's of claimants seeking assistance, meaningful

assistance, that has put a severe burden on the comprehensive AJC and flooded the affiliates with claimants where limited (if any) DOL staff is available to assist. This issue must be addressed on a statewide level. The AJC's have devolved into unemployment centers as a result of this.

6. Coordination of Adult Education and Literacy

Describe how the LWDB will coordinate workforce investment 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 the applications to provide adult education and literacy activities under Title II for the local area to determine whether such applications are consistent with the local plan. NRWIB will make recommendations to promote alignment with the plan where needed. 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 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 will begin classes, held at the AJC. CRI has begun providing digital literacy classes at the AJC as well.

As noted earlier, the NRWIB will serve as a convener and coordinator of the promotion and implementation of work-place based assessments and customized training delivered by area Adult Ed entities. The opportunity to assess current incumbent workers and develop low cost training initiatives to improve the skill sets will increase productivity and competitiveness of area employers.

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 narrative below (Section V, Question 2) regarding individuals with disabilities.

V. LOCAL ONE-STOP SYSTEM

1. General System Description

Describe the one-stop delivery system in your local area including the roles and resource contributions of one-stop partners.

A. Is each of the required WIOA partners included in your one-stop delivery system? Describe how they contribute to your planning and implementation efforts. If any required partner is not involved, explain the reason.

Each required partner was invited and attended the Strategic Planning session in 2015 and again for revisions in 2017. Each required partner was also invited to and participated in the sector strategy initiative meetings over the course of the six months prior. In these sessions, the one-stop operational leadership updated and revised the strategic plan as the coordinator of partner services. Each partner had the opportunity to provide comments on practices that are considered effective and those that should be revamped to address service delivery inefficiencies.

B. Identify any non-required partners included in the local one-stop delivery system.

None

C. The LWDB, with the agreement of the Chief Elected Official, shall develop and enter into a memorandum of understanding between the local board and the one-stop partners. Please provide a copy of any executed MOUs.

Sample provided in Appendix G

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.

A. Describe how entities within the one-stop delivery system, including one-stop operators and one-stop partners, will comply with the Americans with Disabilities 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.

B. Describe how entities within the one-stop delivery system are utilizing principles of universal design in their operation.

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

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. The WDB's Disability Resource Coordinator (DRC) serves customers and staff and acts to 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
- Asset development resources
- Customized Individual Training Accounts
- Provision of supportive services
- Coordination and implementation of the 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 wheel chair 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 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:

The Workforce Development Board's Disability Resource Coordinator provides all AJC staff 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 nondisabled customers
- 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 Rehabilitation Services:

NRWIB has established a Partnership Plus agreement with the Department of Rehabilitation Services. Both entities frequently refer clients back and forth and collaborate in streamlining services. The Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) and the AJCs collaborate for in-service training and DORS/Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is co-located in Waterbury. Both entities also emphasize inclusion, choice and integration. Furthermore, the regional DORS Director is a member of the WDB. The NRWIB has partnered with DORS to offer a 2 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.

3. Integration of Services

Describe how one-stop career centers are implementing and transitioning to an integrated, technology-enabled intake and case management information system 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, strengthened by the integrated, technology-enabled intake and case management information systems that are being considered by the CTDOL. 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. It is understood that CTDOL is planning to ultimately make the management information systems for the core programs interoperable by expanding 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 CT Hires. NRWIB supports the expansion as the future system would provide for a common intake and data collection across multiple agencies and programs as it would: 1) improve service delivery to individuals by enabling data to be collected once and shared by service providers and 2) foster communication and collaboration among service providers.

4. Competitive Selection of One-Stop Operator

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

On January 17, 2017, NRWIB released a Request for Quotes to procure a One-Stop Operator for the region. A legal advertisement was published in The News Times on January 17, 2017 and in the Republican American on January 18, 2018. The procurement was open for 30 days, however, an extension for the submission deadline was made due to the lack of proposals received. A second legal advertisement was

posted in the Danbury News-Times, 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 Connect Chamber of Commerce for selection recommendation to the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors met on June 8, 2017 and voted to move forward with the selection.

5. System Improvement

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

Using Future Works to track outcomes, the CT Performs application will be used to track, manage, and analyze our performance metrics. By doing so, real time adjustments to the delivery of services can be made creating a more effective system with improved outcomes. The Career Navigator style has led to customer-centric delivery of services by understanding the direct needs of customers and streamlining the referral process without the duplication of services.

The planning process, as noted earlier included focus groups with jobseekers as well as other stakeholders including workforce partners. These sessions were extremely informative and led to the change in the way services to clients are delivered in the AJC. The NRWIB will continually engage stakeholders and partners in the workforce system focused on certification training, cost-sharing, and other areas of consideration to continue to be more effective. The information gleaned in these interactions will contribute to the review of and enhancements to the ongoing delivery of services within the network of partners.

VI. DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM SERVICES

1. System Description

Describe the local workforce development system. Identify the programs that are included in the system and how the local board will work with the entities carrying out core programs and other workforce development programs to support alignment in provision of services, including programs of study authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq.), that support the strategy identified in the State Plan under WIOA section 102(b)(1)(E). WIOA §108(b)(2).

Career Resources Inc. (CRI) delivers Adult and Dislocated Worker program activities through the AJC system via comprehensive and affiliate centers. Career services are provided to a wide range of jobseekers, 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). The Business Services Team, a diverse, integrated number of partners and business intermediaries engage employers and provide recruitment and hiring assistance, as well as access to an array of training resources for incumbent workers and new hires.

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 sites. DOL services are very limited in the affiliates due to staffing issues.

The AJCs will be hubs from which jobseekers can be referred to sector-focused programs in targeted sectors such as Manufacturing, Health Care, Information Technology, Human Services or Construction. Job Developers from organizations like DORS 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.

The customer flow within the NRWIB's AJCs is outlined below and in Appendix H:

- Walk-in jobseekers at the Waterbury comprehensive AJC will be greeted at main reception desk by a team of CTDOL and WDB partner staff, as front desk coverage will be a shared responsibility between the two partners.
- CTDOL will provide a full time Unemployment Insurance staff expert at the front desk of the Waterbury office to answer any Unemployment Insurance-related inquiries from jobseekers.
- The Waterbury AJC will be staffed jointly by CTDOL and WDB staff with each partner committed to assigning a minimum of one staff member on a full-time basis. In Torrington and Danbury, the mini-Career Centers will be staff by CRI, WIOA, and case management staff.
- When a jobseeker enters an AJC seeking services, the AJC staff will first determine whether they are registered in the new CT Hires system in order to track the services provided. If the jobseeker is not registered, they will be guided to a computer and asked to complete the CT Hires customer registration. If the customer needs assistance in completing the registration process, staff

assistance will be provided to them.

- All AJC customers will be provided with some form of orientation to the employment services that are available to them through all the various partners. AJC staff will discuss the jobseeker's career exploration to steer her/him in the right direction. Jobseekers will get the opportunity to sign up for a number of free employment readiness workshops, such as Job Search Strategies, Job Interviewing Techniques, Resume Preparation and many others. If they need one-on-one job search assistance, career counseling, or a resume critique, every effort will be made to provide that service. If the jobseeker is interested in self-service activities, the jobseeker can utilize the AJC computers, fax machines, copiers, resume paper, and free postage for applications and resumes, etc. Jobseekers will also be informed about the various services available under WIOA.
- Jobseekers who self-identify as veterans will complete a Veterans Triage form to determine if they have a significant barrier to employment and qualify for one-on-one job search assistance from a CTDOL Veterans Representative.
- Jobseekers with a self-disclosed disability may be referred to either a Disability Program Navigator or to the Disability Employment Initiative representative. Jobseekers with disabilities may also be referred to DORS for service. All jobseekers have the option of accessing the universal services available to everyone in the center.
- Two full-time staff will be assigned to each of the career centers in the comprehensive AJCs to support and assist jobseekers in whatever way needed. Jobseekers needing to improve computer skills will be referred to a computer skills workshop or drop-in computer skills classroom to work on developing or enhancing their computer skills.
- Jobseekers interested in WIOA services will be connected to the appropriate WIOA representative or WIOA information session.
- All jobseekers will be asked if they are receiving public assistance benefits (i.e. TANF, SNAP, HUSKY, Care 4 Kids) and referred to the appropriate WIOA service entity to assist with any special needs beyond those offered by the AJC. Such referrals will be documented, and outcomes noted.

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.

2. Sub Grants and Contracts

Provide a description of the competitive process to be used to award sub-grants 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 procurement states:

Required Solicitation of Quotations from Vendors and Sub-Recipients

Purchase decisions more than \$5,000 for labor, equipment, supplies or services purchased, leased or contracted for shall be made only after receiving, whenever possible, oral quotations from at least two (2) vendors.

Purchase decisions exceeding \$25,000 for labor, equipment, supplies or services purchased, leased or contracted for shall be made only after receiving whenever possible, written quotations from at least two (2) vendors. Specific selections shall be recommended, via the Executive Director, to the Executive Committee for approval with written quotations attached for review. Recommendations shall be based on consideration of all applicable criteria as described under "Evaluation of Alternative Vendors and Subrecipients" below.

Purchase decisions more than \$50,000 shall be made by obtaining competitive proposals from at least three (3) responsible vendors. Sealed bids shall be utilized when required by a Federal or State awarding agency.

Solicitations for goods and services (requests for proposals) should provide for all the following:

1. A clear and accurate description of the technical requirements for the material, product, or service to be procured. In competitive procurements, such a description shall not contain features which unduly restrict competition.
2. Requirements which the bidder/offeror must fulfill and all other factors to be used in evaluating bids or proposals. (see the next section entitled "Evaluation of Alternative Vendors and Subrecipients" for required criteria.)
3. A description, whenever practicable, of technical requirements in terms of functions to be performed or performance required, including the range of acceptable characteristics or minimum acceptable standards.
4. The specific features of "brand name or equal" descriptions that bidders are required to meet when such items are included in the solicitations.
5. The acceptance, to the extent practicable and economically feasible, of products and services dimensioned in the metric system of measurement.
6. Preference, to the extent practicable and economically feasible, for products and services that conserve natural resources and protect the environment and are energy efficient.
7. A description of the proper format, if any, in which proposals must be submitted, including the name of the NRWIB person to whom proposals should be sent.
8. The date by which proposals are due.
9. Required delivery or performance dates/schedules.
10. Clear indications of the quantity(ies) requested and unit(s) of measure.

Extensions of Due Dates and Receipt of Late Proposals

Solicitations should provide for sufficient time to permit the preparation and submission of offers before the specified due date. However, if a prospective offeror requests an extension to a due date specified in

a solicitation, and such an extension is both justified and compatible with the requirements of NRWIB, an extension may be granted by the purchasing representative.

Vendor/subrecipient proposals are considered late if received after the due date and time specified in the solicitation. All such late proposals shall be marked "Late Proposal" on the outside of the envelope and retained, unopened, in the procurement folder. Vendors/subrecipients that submit late proposals shall be sent a letter notifying them that their proposal was late and could not be considered for award.

Evaluation of Alternative Vendors and Sub-Recipients

Alternative vendors and sub-recipients shall be evaluated on a weighted scale that considers the following criteria:

1. Adequacy of the proposed methodology of the vendor/subrecipient
2. Skill and experience of key personnel
3. Demonstrated company experience
4. Other technical specifications (designated by department requesting proposals)
5. Compliance with administrative requirements of the request for proposal (format, due date, etc.)
6. Vendor's financial stability
7. Vendor's demonstrated commitment to the nonprofit sector
8. Results of communications with references supplied by vendor/subrecipient
9. Ability/commitment to meeting time deadlines
10. Minority or women-owned business status of vendor/subrecipient
11. Other criteria (to be specified by department requesting proposal)

Not all the preceding criteria may apply in each purchasing scenario. However, in each situation requiring consideration of alternative vendors/subrecipients, the employee responsible for the purchase shall establish the relative importance of each criterion prior to requesting proposals and shall evaluate each proposal based on the criteria and weighting that have been determined.

After a vendor/subrecipient has been selected and approved by the Executive Director, the final selection shall be approved by the Executive Committee prior to entering into a contract.

If solicitations go unanswered, the NRWIB may request a sole source justification from the granting authority.

Affirmative Consideration of Minority, Small Business, and Women-Owned Businesses

Positive efforts shall be made by NRWIB to utilize small businesses, minority-owned firms, and women's business enterprises, whenever possible. The following steps shall be taken in furtherance of this goal:

1. Ensure that small business, minority-owned firms, and women's business enterprises are used to the fullest extent practicable.
2. Make information on forthcoming opportunities available and arrange time frames for purchases and contracts to encourage and facilitate participation by small business, minority-owned firms and women's business enterprises.
3. Consider in the contract process whether firms competing for larger contracts tend to subcontract with small businesses, minority-owned firms and women's business enterprises.
4. Encourage contracting with consortiums of small businesses, minority-owned firms and women's

business enterprises when a contract is too large for one of these firms to handle individually.

5. Use the services and assistance, as appropriate, of such organizations as the Small Business Administration and the Department of Commerce's Minority Business Development Agency in the consideration of minority-owned firms and women's business enterprises.

3. Expanding Access to Employment

Describe how the local board, 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 recognized post-secondary credential.

In order to expand access to employment, particularly to 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. Extensive development and refining of career pathways has been ongoing and included in the development were the appropriate training entities to insure alignment of training programming in each pathway. (Pathways attached) 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. The recent opioid addiction crisis has led to a need to expand the skilled workforce to address this multifaceted issue. The NRWIB is currently developing an application with CT DOL to increase the number of drug and alcohol recovery counselors and other mental health and substance abuse professionals.

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 five 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

As reflected in its goals and strategies in this plan, NRWIB will leveraged its relationships with individual companies or small groups of companies to scale and build sustained industry partnerships in

coordination with regional partners. Through focus group sessions, companies seem eager to engage in sustained, at-scale dialogue with the NRWIB. This is a tremendous opportunity to build industry partnerships or expand upon those already existing like that within manufacturing.

Many companies that participated in the focus groups have trusted relationships with the WDB on a one-on-one level, which can be leveraged and expanded. The NRWIB has an opportunity to serve as leader and convener of ongoing dialogues with employers in its target industry sectors. The NRWIB will continue to develop more formalized regional target industry partnership groups that meet regularly (e.g. quarterly) 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. 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. Illustrated Career Pathways for these sectors can be found in Appendix J.

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 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 is promoting 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 Haz-woper 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. Nationally certified training in the precision parts manufacturing industry is provided to enrollees through classroom, on-line 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 local board 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. 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 attach 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.

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. 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 2017- 2018, the Board deems the following to be industries with significant labor market demands:

- Manufacturing
- Healthcare
- Construction
- Information Technology
- Human 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;*
- C. Better coordinate workforce development programs and economic development; and*
- D. Strengthen linkages between the one-stop delivery system and unemployment insurance programs.*

The input received during the focus groups 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 the five targeted industries. Focusing on themes that emerged prominently in all the focus groups, the Board prioritized next steps that can have the most impact for a wide range of employer partners.

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 exist to ensure efficiency in the communion process and the ultimate 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. STEP-UP, 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.

During the strategic planning process, NRWIB convened economic development partners in a targeted focus group 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"> 1. Below 70% of poverty guidelines 2. Youth in need of GED or High School diploma 3. Parenting youth 4. Youth who are basic skills deficient 5. Youth with educational attainment that is one or more grade level below the grade level appropriate to the age of the youth 6. Youth with disabilities including learning disabilities 7. Youth who are homeless or runaway youth 8. 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 or an authorized partner 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 local board to ensure customer choice in the selection of training programs, regardless of how the training services are to be provided.

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).

E. Describe any ITA limitations established by the board.

F. Describe any exceptions to the use of ITA.

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

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 2017- 2018, the Board deems the following to be industries with significant labor market demands:

- Manufacturing
- Healthcare
- Construction
- Information Technology
- Human 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 jobseekers 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 five 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 area of Certified Drug and Alcohol Counselor will be explored for an apprenticeship possibility. The nationwide Opioid crisis has hit Connecticut hard and this field is need of trained licensed staff to address this crisis.

To promote apprenticeships throughout the region, NRWIB will encourage both employers and jobseekers to consider the model. As part of the NRWIB's employer engagement efforts, we will encourage employers to use the State's Step-Up Apprenticeship funds and leverage the \$5M Apprenticeship grant received by the State. At orientation sessions and during the 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 described

in Section III. WIOA §134(c)

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 Subsidized Training and Employment Program (Step Up) and On the Job Training (OJT).

A program of the Connecticut Department of Labor and regional workforce development boards throughout the state, NRWIB will offer the three programs through Step Up: 1) the Wage Subsidy program, 2) the Small Manufacturer Training Grant Program, and 3) the Unemployed Armed Forces Member Subsidized Training and Employment 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.

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, through the system and ensure that such providers meet the needs of local employers, workers and jobseekers.

The NRWIB is awaiting guidance from CTDOL on methods to ensure continuous improvement of eligible providers of services as this relates to contracted service providers and providers of eligible training providers.

15. Youth Program Design

Describe the design framework for youth programs in the local area, and how the 14 program elements required in §681.460 of the proposed WIOA regulations are to be made available within that framework.

All prospective bidders for in and out-of-school youth programs must address all 14 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, as required by CTDOL 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 in the region. The NRWIB also provides access to and requires participants that are deficient in basic skill, 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 I.

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

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