



# Education and Workforce Collaborative Status Report

**October 2022– October 2024**

The leadership of the Education and Workforce Collaborative is appointed by the Governor to carry out the charge outlined in [Executive Order 2020-551](#) and the strategic vision set forth by the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (KWIB). The Collaborative includes 19 members from across the Commonwealth's executive branch agencies, as well as stakeholder partners who work together on critical workforce priorities. This group takes an intragovernmental approach to the KWIB's workforce development strategy by supporting individuals, businesses, and partner customers while moving Kentucky forward as a leader in workforce innovation. This report captures the interagency work performed to take a functional and systemic approach to service delivery, preparing Kentuckians for family-sustaining careers and developing a strong talent pipeline to meet Kentucky employer needs and support vibrant communities across the Commonwealth.

## **Background:**

The Collaborative is comprised of executive branch cabinet leaders, education partners across the continuum of K-12 through postsecondary, federal workforce training partners, statewide business associations, local elected officials, and representatives from the local and state workforce development boards. Kentucky Education and Labor Cabinet Deputy Secretary Beth Brinly began serving as the chair of the collaborative in October 2022. The group's initial meeting with Deputy Secretary Brinly as chair was held in January 2023. In alignment with the Executive Order's direction to focus on functions as opposed to agencies, the Collaborative has alternated its meeting agendas to address targeted populations and services strategies; for example, the justice-involved population and the work-based learning ecosystem.

The executive branch agencies and its stakeholder partners provide a wide array of workforce development services in support of the KWIB's strategic plan. The Collaborative utilizes this depth of expertise to provide a platform for improving workforce services, deepening partnerships, aligning programs and visions, and ultimately enhancing programming through mutually reinforcing activities. This approach allows federally funded programs, such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), to be leveraged, complemented, and supplemented by other federal funds, state appropriations, and philanthropic or private investments throughout the workforce development system. Furthermore, the collaboration among members provides avenues to take a systemic approach to targeted populations and

critical service strategies through the braiding of resources, as well as, enhancing programs and initiatives that are mutually beneficial across Kentucky's workforce development system.

The Collaborative meets on a quarterly basis with two rotating focus areas: services to targeted talent pools and workforce ecosystem service strategies. This cadence was established when the Collaborative was reinvigorated in 2023. The following recaps provide an overview of topics covered since that time and resulting steps that have been taken.

## **Collaborative Meeting Topics and Outcomes**

### **Targeted Population Focus: Jobs on Day One, Investing in Justice-Involved Talent – January 2023**

The first meeting that took place under the newly implemented structure focused on existing statewide resources, programming, and initiatives around the justice-involved population. At that time, there were more than 63,000 justice-involved Kentuckians and over 13,000 individuals return home from incarceration annually in the commonwealth. Investment in workforce training and development for this population is critical not only for the economy and public safety, but also to reduce recidivism. These efforts open opportunities for employers to engage this talent pool while also allowing justice-involved individuals to gain the skills and employment that greatly improve their chances for successful reentry.

During this meeting, Collaborative members discussed current opportunities to serve the justice-involved workforce and meet the needs of employers across executive branch agencies, education providers, and community-based organizations, as well as a strong and enthusiastic interest from the statewide business-serving entities. The Collaborative created a workgroup to develop the reentry workforce development framework entitled "Jobs on Day One." This workgroup was comprised of various government and inclusive of stakeholders in the reentry field. This group developed a three-phase framework, including: pre-employment training during incarceration; employment immediately upon release (or a job on day one); and post-release employment retention strategies.

Jobs on Day One moved beyond vision to action when several members of the Kentucky State Building and Construction Trades Council joined Governor Andy Beshear to adopt the initiative. These members committed to work with the Department of Corrections to provide pre-release trades training and build out the talent pipeline into their respective registered apprenticeship programs. The Iron Workers Local 70 and the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades will launch their pre-apprenticeship trade programs in early 2025 in targeted state facilities.

The all-government approach to serving the justice-involved talent pool can also be seen through the resources available on [Team Kentucky's Second Chance website](#).

## **Systemic Service Focus: Work-Based Learning Ecosystem in Kentucky – April 2023**

Understanding that the work-based learning ecosystem is a critical component to training individuals and providing exposure to opportunities within a career pathway, the Collaborative explored the current efforts across partners to highlight progress and innovation. The Collaborative then explored opportunities for improvement in the work-based learning ecosystem. A key component of this ecosystem must be designed with the employer at the center of the experience, as the employer is the one providing the continuum of opportunities ranging from mentorship to paid internships to registered apprenticeships for current and potential employees. The Collaborative and its member organizations understand that meeting employers where they are on the spectrum of work-based learning is crucial to expanding this service strategy.

The work-based learning continuum starts with the availability of career exploration opportunities, which can be done through career fairs and engagement by businesses with a school or a training center. Next, should be a focus on career exposure and career engagement for prospective and current employees, which can involve job shadowing, internships and pre-apprenticeships. Finally, work-based learning prioritizes career experience through registered apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and/or industry-run apprenticeships. With the wide array of opportunities, the key to successful execution of work-based learning is making partnership with education and training institutions easy for employers at the level of engagement most pertinent to them.

Given the resources identified across the partners, the Collaborative focused on the various initiatives and resources available across the continuum, including: the Kentucky Department of Education's Office of Career and Technical Education (CTE) [Work-Based Learning Manual](#); career exposure via Kentucky Chamber Foundation's [Bus to Business initiative](#); summer internship opportunities through local workforce development boards; industry-run manufacturing apprenticeships via the [Kentucky Federation of Advanced Manufacturing Education \(KY-FAME\)](#) model; [Kentucky's Registered Apprenticeship](#) services; and highlights of companies engaging in the various forms of work-based learning.

The Collaborative then extended an invitation for members to join a workgroup addressing two priorities key to expansion: (1) provide consistent definitions for work-based learning opportunities across partners; and (2) streamline the processes for business engagement, such as recruitment of businesses to provide these opportunities. Both issues were identified as essential for the expansion of work-based learning opportunities. The Collaborative's goals and objectives in this area are being addressed through the [Launch Initiative's WBL workgroup](#), whose members include representatives from education and training from secondary to postsecondary, local workforce boards, and Kentucky businesses. The work group will finalize its strategic plan in Fall 2024 and present it to the Collaborative.

## **Targeted Population Focus: Resources for Veterans, Transitioning Military, and Military Families in Kentucky – June 2023**

Kentucky is home to two major US Army installations, Ft. Campbell, and Ft. Knox, and has a multitude of resources available to veterans that span government agencies, nonprofit community-based organizations, and postsecondary institutions that provide training and education. The veteran talent pool, as well as transitioning military and military families, have a wide array of experiences, education, and skillsets that can be valuable to businesses throughout the commonwealth. Business engagement with the veteran population includes companies that are military-friendly, such as those employers who attend military job fairs; military-ready, such as those employers who provide a culture that fosters acceptance and affirmation of skills that military talent bring; and military-engaged, such as those employers that intentionally focus on recruitment and retention efforts with policies and initiatives to encourage growth and support for the veteran population.

The Collaborative discussed all various services and resources available that support veterans, transitioning military, and military families, with an emphasis on attracting and retaining veteran talent in the Commonwealth. This conversation demonstrated the critical need for a listing of all the employment resources that can be utilized by both the veteran jobseekers and businesses with goals to attract and retain this talent pipeline.

The Collaborative formed a workgroup consisting of the various veteran-focused organizations tasked with compiling a resource guide to include various employment services for veterans; business resources to hire veterans; family support resources; education resources; military transition assistance; and support services, including housing and equal opportunity resources. [The Veterans, Transitioning Military, and Military Family Resource Guide](#) was completed and shared among organizations for further utilization. After the completion of the resource guide, it was suggested that the next step would be to develop an interagency strategic plan to create a collective impact approach to these services. The Collaborative concurred and the Education and Labor Cabinet committed to provide a point person to move forward on its development.

## **Systemic Service Focus: Kentucky's Workforce Development State Plan – October 2023**

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires that every state in the nation submit a four-year workforce development plan to the US Department of Labor and US Department of Education. The Department of Workforce Development (DWD) within Education and Labor Cabinet and the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (KWIB) analyzed local input and developed the 2024-2027 WIOA State Plan, and the Collaborative played an important role in infusing critical needs of the workforce ecosystem into the resulting document.

Through breakout sessions, members of the Collaborative focused on ways to jointly collaborate to better support Kentucky's talent pipeline needs through mutually reinforcing activities in the categories of practice, data collection, and policy improvements. The Collaborative voted on priorities to advance the system through all three categories. In the practice category, the need to track and market return on investment through stakeholder communication and education was the top priority. In the data category, the importance of data sharing and standardization of measurements and definition across partners was chosen. In the policy category, the critical need to increase public-private partnership policies was selected.

Through dialogue and final assessments, the Collaborative strongly emphasized the importance of collaboration, partnership, and mutually reinforcing activities that span across the executive branch, community-based organizations, education and businesses. The final outcome of the input from the Collaborative was incorporated into the [WIOA 2024-2027 State Plan](#), which was submitted to and approved by the federal government; the executive summary and highlights from the plan can be found in the [Kentucky's 2024-2027 WIOA State Plan Briefer](#).

### **Targeted Population Focus: Individuals Facing Benefit Cliffs – January 2024**

The KWIB's Workforce Participation Committee began an analysis of benefit cliffs as an initiative to understand the impact on Kentucky families. A benefit cliff occurs when increased wages lead to a reduction in governmental social benefits, resulting in a net loss or "benefits cliff" for families. The work of the KWIB built upon the [Family Resource Simulator](#) created by the Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS). Furthermore, the analysis of Kentucky's benefits cliff was conducted by a third party, the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), who worked closely with KYSTATS and the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) to provide the report.

The Collaborative reviewed the report's findings to understand the biggest cliffs and ways to smooth the transition for Kentuckians and move from "benefits cliffs" to "ramps," allowing individuals to seek employment, higher wages, and/or promotional opportunities without instantly losing all benefits. The biggest impact was seen in the childcare cliffs, with the heavy impact of Kentucky Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), as well as with Medicaid cliffs and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) cliffs.

Understanding the background, the Collaborative's focus revolved around the role of education and support systems through the work of career coaching and advisory services that provide the bridge between employment/education and the employee/student. Furthermore, the importance of public-private partnerships was emphasized to increase access to childcare, healthcare, and resources to help Kentuckians succeed in employment when faced with barriers. The Collaborative agreed that a holistic approach to reducing the impacts of benefits cliffs provides a true opportunity to assist individuals and employers in the Commonwealth.

Leadership from the KWIB, the Collaborative, and the Cabinet for Health and Family Services reviewed the recommendations, assessed where the state is on addressing the benefits cliffs within the executive branch, and determined what may require legislative action.

### **Systemic Strategy Focus: The Launch Initiative – April 2024**

Kentucky is one of 13 states selected to participate in the Launch Initiative, which is designed around a principle that every young person deserves a high school diploma with a postsecondary credential that has labor market value. Furthermore, the initiative's goal is for every person to be engaged in full-time employment or continued training that leads to family-sustaining career in an economically strong community. The four pillars of the Launch Initiative include: alignment of credentials of value; seamless transitions between secondary and postsecondary education; work-based learning; and student advising and support. A strategic plan for credentials of values was finalized in February 2024, which recommended that the Collaborative be the driver of the strategic plan. An overview of that plan, as well as an update on the work-based learning pillar, was presented to the Collaborative.

The Collaborative established a workgroup to undertake the first element of the credentials of value strategic plan focused on ensuring that common definitions are identified across partners for credentials of value. The workgroup will craft the definition of credentials of value, which can later be codified and accepted by all stakeholder partners. The workgroup has initiated national and state best practices to develop the framework most suitable for Kentucky. The work will be presented in Program Year 24 Collaborative meetings.

### **Targeted Population: Youth Employment and Services – July 2024**

During the statewide listening sessions conducted to inform the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) 2024-2027 State Plan, the overwhelming topic that was cited across every region in the commonwealth was youth employment. The Collaborative addressed the importance of youth employment with the understanding that services are widely provided across the commonwealth by federal, state, and local providers with various focus areas – from summer employment opportunities, pre-apprenticeships, exposure to industry, to support services that allow successful employment.

In preparation, the Collaborative collected all the services that are provided across the Commonwealth ([Youth Partner Services packet can be found here](#)). Part of the discussion focused on the opportunities available to leverage recent state investments in the 10 Local Workforce Development Boards, including \$10 million annually across the biennium to provide youth employment services. Further, the Collaborative explored the importance of support services that provide a safety net in both the pre-employment phase and during employment; specific attention was raised to trauma-informed services, as many young individuals face challenges that require additional intensive case management.



Finally, understanding that Kentucky is a manufacturing powerhouse, the Collaborative explored ways to engage 16- and 17-year-old youth in manufacturing opportunities using an example provided by Ohio's program that focuses on collaborative marketing efforts with manufacturing employer partners. This resulted in interest to form a workgroup to better understand Ohio's approach and utilize best practices to inform executive and potential legislative strategies.

### **Systemic Strategy Focus: Sector Strategies – October 2024**

In September 2024, US Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration (ETA) released an updated Sector Strategies Framework to guide national, state, and local practitioners in their efforts to launch and implement effective sector strategies. Harnessing lessons learned from the field, the framework is intended to advance knowledge and support the development, scaling, and sustainability of sector strategies. It provides workforce system practitioners with a clear picture of the concepts and elements essential to the successful implementation of sector partnerships and sector strategies.

The federal release of sector strategies framework aligns with the commonwealth's public-private partnership known as the [Statewide Workforce and Talent Team \(SWATT\)](#). The purpose of SWATT is to collectively serve employers of all sizes through a customized and collaborative approach. The outcome of the meeting was to use the national framework provided as a tool for SWATT, especially as the new top five in-demand sectors are being identified by the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (KWIB).

