

WORKFORCE INNOVATION
AND OPPORTUNITY ACT
(WIOA)
KENTUCKY CENTRAL REGION
REGIONAL PLAN
PY25/FY26 – PY28/FY29



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SIGNATORY PAGE

BLUEGRASS LWDA BOARD CHAIR	CHIEF LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIAL (CLEO)	LWDA DIRECTOR
Name: Jon Dougherty	Name: Linda Gorton Judge Michael Williams	Name: Tiffanie Reeves
Title: Chair	Title: Mayor, Lexington Bourbon County Judge Executive	Title: Director
Signature:	Signatures:	Signature:
Date:	Date:	Date:

LINCOLN TRAIL LWDA BOARD CHAIR	CHIEF LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIAL (CLEO)	LWDA DIRECTOR
Name: Lance Blanford	Name: Maurice Lucas	Name: Beth Roberts
Title: Chair	Title: Breckinridge Co Judge Exec.	Title: Director
Signature:	Signature:	Signature:
Date:	Date:	Date:

NORTHERN KENTUCKY LWDA BOARD CHAIR	CHIEF LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIAL (CLEO)	LWDA DIRECTOR
Name: Dean McKay	Name: Chuck Dills	Name: Correy Eimer
Title: Chair	Title: Grant County Judge Executive	Title: Director
Signature:	Signature:	Signature:
Date:	Date:	Date:

Local Workforce Development Area Name: Bluegrass / Lincoln Trail / Northern Kentucky

Region Name: Central Region

The responses received to questions addressed in each chapter, whether regional (R) or local (L). Answering regional questions necessitates the collaboration of LWDBs, CLEOs, and partners within the region to provide a unified regional response. The guidance for local and regional plans can be found here: [Guidance 21-007](#) released 1/1/2025. With the accompanying [Local and Regional Plans Toolkit](#) that provides statewide strategic objectives, programs, and initiatives that are referenced in the Combined WIOA State Plan.

Chapter 1: Workforce and Economic Analysis

- A. **(R)** Provide a description of the planning process undertaken to produce the regional plan, including a description of how all local areas were afforded the opportunity to participate in the regional planning process.

The Bluegrass, Lincoln Trail, and Northern Kentucky Workforce Development Boards came together to outline common goals, priorities and the planning approach for the Central Kentucky Regional Plan. Directors from the three areas agreed to work together through remote meetings, calls, and emails to develop a plan equally reflective of the region's unique needs and challenges. Remote meetings were scheduled with representatives and each Board was given an opportunity to comment on and contribute to the final regional plan. Each Board votes separately on the final regional plan.

Local participation in the planning process was vital to create a comprehensive and inclusive plan that establishes buy-in with partners and the community. The request for participation was done primarily through listening sessions, planning sessions, and electronic communication. Partner and public input was also requested in various ways including email to all contacts, press release to local media, and marketing on social media sites.

- B. **(R)** Provide a regional analysis of the economic conditions, including existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations, as well as the employment needs of employers in those industry sectors and occupations. This is in line with [WIOA Sec. 108 (b) (1) (A)] and [20 CFR 679.560 (a)].

The Bluegrass, Lincoln Trail, and Northern Kentucky Area Development Districts represent a diverse and evolving economic landscape in Central and Northern Kentucky. These regions include both urban centers and rural communities, each with unique workforce challenges and opportunities. An analysis of existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations, along with employers' workforce needs, provides insight into the region's

economic conditions and workforce priorities under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Sec. 108(b)(1)(A) and 20 CFR 679.560(a).

Regional Analysis of Economic Condition

The largest sector in the Central Kentucky Region is Health Care and Social Assistance, employing 103,637 workers. The next-largest sectors in the region are Manufacturing (97,832 workers) and Retail Trade (76,422). High location quotients (LQs) indicate sectors in which a region has high concentrations of employment compared to the national average. The sectors with the largest LQs in the region are Manufacturing (LQ= 1.58), Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting (LQ = 1.46), and Transportation and Warehousing (LQ = 1.41).

Sectors in the Central Kentucky Region with the highest average wages per worker are Management of Companies and Enterprises (\$119,894), Finance and Insurance (\$87,952), and Utilities (\$87,198). Regional sectors with the best job growth (or most moderate job losses) over the last 5 years are Transportation and Warehousing (+12,884 jobs), Health Care and Social Assistance (+8,235), and Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (+6,349).

Existing and Emerging In-Demand Industry Sectors

The economic foundation of these three development districts is built upon several high-demand industry sectors, including:

Advanced Manufacturing – A key driver in all three regions, advanced manufacturing continues to be a high-demand sector, particularly in Lincoln Trail, which is home to BlueOval SK Battery Park in Hardin County. The growth of electric vehicle (EV) battery production, automotive manufacturing, and industrial automation is creating an increasing need for engineers, production technicians, robotics specialists, and maintenance workers.

Healthcare and Social Assistance – With a growing aging population and increased demand for healthcare services, occupations in nursing, allied health, medical technology, and behavioral health are among the fastest-growing. The Lincoln Trail and Bluegrass regions face significant shortages in registered nurses (RNs), licensed practical nurses (LPNs), home health aides, and behavioral health professionals, particularly in rural areas. The expansion of nursing and allied health programs at local colleges aims to address this demand.

Logistics and Transportation – Northern Kentucky's proximity to Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport (CVG) and major interstates has positioned the region as a key hub for logistics and distribution, with major employers including Amazon Air, DHL, and UPS. In Lincoln Trail, the presence of major industrial and distribution centers along the I-65

corridor continues to drive demand for CDL drivers, warehouse workers, and supply chain specialists.

Technology and IT Services – The IT sector is expanding in all three regions, with a growing need for cybersecurity specialists, software developers, data analysts, and IT support professionals. The increasing adoption of automation, cloud computing, and artificial intelligence (AI) is creating new job opportunities, particularly in Lexington (Bluegrass) and Northern Kentucky.

Construction and Skilled Trades – The construction industry remains strong, with major projects such as BlueOval SK, growth within the distillery industry and regional infrastructure development driving demand for electricians, welders, HVAC technicians, and heavy equipment operators. Apprenticeship programs and trade school partnerships are essential in meeting the labor demand across all three regions.

Agribusiness and Food Production – The Lincoln Trail and Bluegrass regions have a strong presence in agriculture, distillery operations, and food processing. Employers in these industries require agricultural technicians, food scientists, machine operators, and supply chain workers to support ongoing growth.

Business and Financial Services – The Bluegrass and Northern Kentucky regions serve as financial hubs, with demand for accountants, financial analysts, human resources specialists, and business operations managers. Lincoln Trail’s growing business sector in Elizabethtown and Hardin County also contributes to demand for business professionals.

Employment Needs of Employers in High-Demand Occupations

Employers across these key sectors consistently identify skills gaps and workforce shortages as primary challenges. Workforce data and employer feedback highlight the following employment needs:

Soft Skills and Workforce Readiness – Many employers report a lack of soft skills among job seekers, including communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and professionalism. Workforce development programs in all three districts are integrating soft skills training to address these gaps.

Technical and Industry-Specific Skills – Employers in manufacturing, healthcare, and IT are seeking workers with specialized certifications, technical training, and hands-on experience.

Programs such as registered apprenticeships, on-the-job training (OJT), and credentialing programs help bridge these gaps.

Workforce Participation and Retention – Labor force participation remains a challenge, particularly in rural areas, where transportation barriers, childcare access, and digital literacy impact employment. Initiatives such as HB 499 childcare incentives and employer-supported training programs aim to enhance workforce engagement and retention.

Second-Chance Employment – Employers are increasingly recognizing the benefits of hiring justice-involved individuals, with reentry programs, soft skills development, and employer partnerships playing a crucial role in reducing barriers to employment.

Workforce Aging and Succession Planning – Many industries, particularly healthcare, skilled trades, and manufacturing, are facing an aging workforce, creating a need for mentorship programs, knowledge transfer initiatives, and early career engagement to develop the next generation of skilled workers.

The Central Kentucky Workforce Region is well-positioned for continued economic growth, with strong employer engagement, expanding workforce training initiatives, and emerging industry opportunities. However, addressing skills gaps, workforce participation challenges, and evolving employer needs remains a priority. By aligning education and training programs with industry demand, expanding access to career pathways, and enhancing employer-driven workforce solutions, these regions can continue to strengthen economic sustainability.

The Lincoln Trail Workforce Development Area (LTWDA) continues to see its demand sectors grow, especially in advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and construction. More efficient technologies and robotics continue to change the dynamics of manufacturing by eliminating some low-skill job functions but at the same time creating jobs requiring higher skills with more technical responsibilities. Production Occupations from 2022 to 2032 are expected to grow in the LTWDA by .85%, higher than the .19% statewide. Manufacturing employment in the LTWDA totals 23% with annual average wages of \$65,879.

The healthcare sector continues to expand as it has in the past. There are no Healthcare occupations that are currently in decline. In the LTWDA Healthcare jobs are projected to grow 6%, twice as much as the 3% statewide. Post-pandemic, it appears the Healthcare industry is seeing an increase in demand in the region. Increasing demands by an aging population needing specialized care will influence hiring trends for nursing, occupational and physical therapy as well as other specialties. According to a report by Forbes, 10,000

baby boomers are retiring every day and by 2030 the entire generation will be 65 years or older.

Skills shortages in the Construction sector sometimes cause delays in new commercial projects as well as new residential construction. Construction occupations in the region are anticipated to grow 3.4% by 2032 which is slightly more than the Statewide projection of 3%.

Since 2022, the Tourism industry in the region has experienced notable growth. This uptrend aligns with broader state-level increases in tourism – Kentucky saw a 4.5% increase in tourists in 2023. Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historical Park had 239,950 visitors in 2023. The Kentucky Bourbon Trail attracted over 2 million visitors in 2022. The overall positive trend in the state’s tourism suggests potential growth in the Lincoln Trail regions tourism industry. Travel expenditures in the region brought over \$422.1 million to the Lincoln Trail Region in 2023. Employment in tourism and travel industry is expected to see a 1% growth by 2032.

The entrepreneurial spirit and small business environment continue to thrive in the Lincoln Trail Area, specifically in the Elizabethtown-Fort Knox Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) which includes Hardin, Meade, and Larue Counties. Resources such as the KY Small Business Development Centers, the Kentucky Small Business Credit Initiative (KSBCI), the LTADD Revolving Loan Fund Program (RLF), and local venture groups provide opportunity for small businesses in the region.

The region continues to adapt to the fluctuation in personnel, both military and civilian, at Fort Knox. In 2023, the post had a total of 57,200 employees which is an 8.5% increase since 2020. In 2020, the Fifth Corps (V Corps) was activated, bringing 635 soldiers to Fort Knox as well as their dependents. Army Cadet training for future officers now takes place on post as well as a major portion of ROTC training in the summer months. These incremental increases in the military have also brought in additional civilian personnel, boosting other sectors such as retail trade, accommodation and food services, and real estate. An added bonus is the increase in military spouses coming to the area giving business and industry another labor force with varied experience to recruit from.

- C. **(R)** Provide an analysis of the regional workforce, including current labor force employment (and unemployment) data and information on labor market trends and the educational and skill levels of the workforce in the region, including individuals with barriers to employment. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(1)(C)] and [CFR 679.560(a)]

The 33-county Central Kentucky Region is an economic engine of Kentucky, stretching from Boone County in the north to Lincoln County in the south and Breckinridge County in the west to Powell County in the east.

This region has 28.3 percent of Kentucky’s counties and has 38.8 percent of its labor force – 779,336 jobs in total, according to the most recent Kentucky Labor Market Information website (kystats.ky.gov). The jobs are more concentrated than the workers are; among a 33 - county labor force of over 800,000, the largest counties represent only 61.1 percent of the total workers. Indicating that many people commute from surrounding counties into the job centers.

2 Digit Industry	Employed	Avg Annual Wages	LQ	Annual Demand	Forecast Annual Growth
Health Care and Social Assistance	103,636	\$64,068	0.89	11,079	0.9%
Manufacturing	97,832	\$75,453	1.58	10,220	0.4%
Retail Trade	76,422	\$37,094	1.00	10,374	-0.1%
Accommodation and Food Services	71,401	\$23,840	1.05	13,113	0.6%
Educational Services	64,738	\$53,901	1.03	6,198	0.2%
Transportation and Warehousing	54,638	\$59,135	1.41	6,526	1.1%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	48,115	\$43,844	1.01	5,744	0.6%
Construction	42,879	\$66,657	0.92	3,953	0.7%
Public Administration	41,673	\$64,338	1.15	3,934	0.3%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	39,141	\$85,292	0.69	3,538	1.0%
Remaining Component Industries	138,861	\$67,196	.76	15,268	0.5%
Total - All Industries	779,336	\$58,105	1.00	88,946	0.6%

As of November 2024 , the three counties with the lowest unemployment rates were Woodford County at 3.6 percent, and Carroll and Washington County at 3.9 percent. However, several counties in the region are experiencing higher unemployment. Rural counties with the smallest labor forces have some of the highest unemployment rates; Estill County, with a labor force of 5,306 has an unemployment rate of 5.9 percent. Lincoln County, with a labor force of 9,519 has an unemployment rate of 5.8 percent. Larue County had an unemployment rate of 5.2 percent.

According to ACS data, the Central Kentucky Region has a healthy labor force participation rate of 63.7 percent, noticeably exceeding the Kentucky rate of 58.2 percent and even the national labor force participation rate of 62.5 percent. Still, the labor force participation rates also vary quite a bit, from 47.4 percent in Estill County to 69 percent in Kenton County.

An overwhelming majority of the population over the age of 25 in the Central Kentucky Region-- some 91.7 percent--have a high school diploma or higher. However, only 33 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher.

Unfortunately, many individuals in the Central Kentucky Region with barriers to employment are struggling. Roughly 13.3 percent of residents have a reported disability and only 42.8 percent are active in the labor force. Single parent families make up 32.3 percent of the population. While barriers like poverty make-up 13.3 percent, lack of transportation (6.3 percent), English as a second language (ESL) (4.4 percent), and disconnected youth (2.0 percent) make up much of the top challenges for employment for individuals in the Central Kentucky Region.

Leading Industries

The Central Kentucky Region is well diversified. According to quarter 4 data for 2024 from the Industry Snapshot for the Central Kentucky Region, Healthcare is the largest industry, comprising about 103,636 jobs in the Central Kentucky Region. Manufacturing is next with 97,832 jobs, followed by Retail at 76,422 jobs, Accommodation and Food Services at 71,401 and Educational Services at 64,738 . This shows a significant shift since 2016, with Retail falling from the top spot to third with more projected losses to the industry over the next five years. Industries showing the greatest potential growth over the next five years continues to be Transportation and Warehousing with an annual growth forecast of 1.1 percent,

Professional, Scientific and Technical Services at 1.0 percent, and Health Care and Social Assistance at 0.9 percent.

The highest regional average wages are in Management of Companies and Enterprises (\$119,894) and Finance and Insurance (\$87,952) . The lowest is in Accommodation and Food Service (\$23,840) (This analysis uses average wages because median wages are unavailable at the county level; however, in many cases, median wages would be a preferable measure of wages.)

Between 2000 and 2019, the biggest industry gains in the Central Kentucky Region were in Healthcare (19,006 new jobs), and Transportation and Warehousing (5,947). Manufacturing has actually lost a net 2,163 jobs in the last 19 years, though the sector is up 12,746 jobs since 2010. In some ways, that simply points to how badly manufacturing jobs suffered in the Great Recession; but that the long-term trends for manufacturing have been declining jobs. Construction is likewise up since 2010 (6,049 new jobs) but down since 2000 (-1,931 jobs). Retail jobs in 2019 were close to 2000 levels (73,360 jobs) after losing 9,669 jobs in the Great Recession.

Since 1990, the biggest growth has come in the Business Services sector. In fact, the growth of the Business Services sector is one of the underappreciated stories in Northern Kentucky's economic transformation over the last 25 years. In 1990, this sector was half the size of Manufacturing; now it is larger than Manufacturing. The Business Sector has grown nearly 100 percent in the last 25 years.

Additional Lincoln Trail Response: Economic and workforce conditions continue to improve in the LTWDA. The civilian labor force at the end of 2023 was 211,231 an increase of 88,914 from 2022. The number employed increased by 1,205 and those unemployed increased by 119. The unemployment rate continued to be low for the Lincoln Trail Area. The annual rate for 2022 was 4.2% and for 2023 it was 4.1%. The labor force participation rate (LFPR) has slightly increased to 54.6% in 2023 from 54.4% in 2022. Rates for counties in the region range from a 49% rate in both Breckinridge and LaRue Counties to 65% in Washington and Marion Counties. Increases in the LFPR can be attributed to local economic growth, increases in the working-age population and enhanced access to education, vocational training and supportive services in the region. Contributing factors to decreases of the LFPR are lack of industry, generational poverty, an influx of retirements among the baby boomer generation and a lack of skilled workers required for many open jobs in the region. Covid-19 also had an adverse effect previously on the LFPR through 2021 due to school closures, childcare and family health issues that kept some workers out of the labor force. Some counties continue to see residual effects.

The Lincoln Trail Workforce Board, in partnership with the South Central Workforce Development Board and Western Kentucky University, has collected key data metrics related to the state of the workforce in the 8-county region. This data includes generalized workforce participation in Lincoln Trail (with a breakdown by county and age group) to detailed metrics on specific populations (childcare, New Americans, high school pathways, commuters, etc.) This data provides an understanding of the healthiness of the Lincoln Trail workforce in comparison to state and national averages.

- D. **(R)** Provide an analysis of workforce development activities, including education and training in the region. This will include an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of workforce development activities and the capacity to provide workforce development activities to address the education and skill needs of the workforce, including individuals with barriers to employment and the employment needs of employers in the region.

Note: *Per WIOA Sec. 108(c), existing economic regional and/or local area analyses may be used if sourced data and/or derived analyses are economically relevant and current (i.e., within two years of the issuance of this guidance).*

Each of the three Workforce Development Boards in the Central Kentucky Region have their own approach to workforce development activities. There are, however, many themes in common: Regional economic expansion in the Central Kentucky Region has caused a shortage of job candidates with the necessary skills both “hard” and “soft”. Most employers offering good paying jobs require training beyond high school whether it is a short-term certification/credential or an associate degree. Workforce, education, and economic development partners in the Central Kentucky Region include the Kentucky Career Centers, secondary school systems, post-secondary institutions, economic development offices, training consortiums, chambers of commerce, SHRM groups, jails, public libraries, and innovation centers. They are all working together to develop and implement customized curriculums and certifications to meet the soft skills as well as the technical skills requirements that employers need.

Examples of these include: soft skills workshops at the KCC-Lincoln Trail Office utilizing the CareerEDGE platform in Elizabethtown and provided virtually in the Bluegrass area; WIN Career Readiness Courseware which includes the Kentucky Essential/Soft Skills Certificate; National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) through adult education centers; work ethic certifications in several school systems in the region; Workforce Solutions with Elizabethtown Community and Technical College (ECTC); Tech Ready Apprentices for Careers in Kentucky (TRACK) that has been established in several school systems in the Lincoln Trail area; Area Technology Centers in Breckinridge, Marion, Meade, and Nelson Counties offer career and technical education pathways; Hardin County Schools Early College and Career Center (EC3)

in Elizabethtown that allows juniors and seniors ready for college-level curriculums a pathway to learn in-demand sectors (if a student completes two years at EC3 they will have two years of college credit); Bardstown Independent Schools in Nelson County has opened a Polytechnic Center with state of the art classrooms, advanced training equipment and expert instructions; Project Lead the Way; Knox Coding Academy; Putting Kentuckians First which introduced a welding certification program for individuals in the Nelson County Detention Center.

In Bluegrass, efforts to reduce recidivism is a focus with providing employability/soft skills trainings to inmates who are close to release. These individuals complete soft skills training through a workshop coordinator, then are introduced to a Case Manager who assists them with a job search, resume assistance and possible work experience. The Kentucky Employes Youth (KEY) initiative is growing in the Bluegrass, as well, starting as an out-of-school youth only initiative the project has grown to include school systems in multiple counties. The KEY program allows youth aged individuals to do real-life career exploration through work experience in fields of interest for up to 480 hours.

STRENGTHS

Employer Involvement: Without employers, no one would get jobs. That is why workforce efforts in the Central Kentucky Region are developed with deep employer engagement and continuous feedback. Programs are designed and modified to meet employer needs.

Sector Focus: Healthcare, Logistics, and Manufacturing are the core sectors identified as most important in each region based on the regional analysis. Some regions have also identified other sectors of focus, such as Business Services, Information Technology, Construction, and Installation, Maintenance, & Repair, Retail Trade and Food Service.

In an effort to address a long-term problem that has been worsened by the COVID19 pandemic, the Bluegrass LWDA has added Childcare and Education as a sector in an effort to address the shortfall of childcare workers, teachers, and businesses. With the addition of this sector, the Bluegrass can work to increase the number of licensed childcare facilities in the Bluegrass. The lack of childcare facilities and workers for those facilities was a repeated concern to both employers and job seekers during their strategic planning public forums.

The Northern Kentucky LWDA addressed the employment issues in the Childcare and Education sector by partnering with EC LEARN to provide workforce services to childcare providers and dislocated employees.

Also in Northern Kentucky, regarding Career Pathways and Education Alignment: From career counseling to individual training accounts, to increasing collaboration with higher

education and K-12 institutions, Northern Kentucky workforce boards are working to improve our education-workforce pipeline and ensure that it meets the needs of a 21st century workforce. A great deal of that coordination comes from an involved board which reflects the employers seen throughout the region. These employers work closely with education representatives on the local workforce boards to guide board support staff through discussion of their needs and an understanding of the present and future labor market from a first-hand perspective. In February 2025, the NKWIB Business Services Committee undertook the process of surveying regional companies in our high-demand sectors to solicit their feedback about Career and Technical Education (CTE) approved credentials. This process was incorporated into the development of the new Local Workforce Plan. Additionally, the NKWIB intends to facilitate conversations with local businesses about the benefits of hiring and placing employees within school systems to provide instruction, primarily at Area Technology Centers (ATCs). We know that it is extremely challenging for school systems to identify an experienced tradesperson who is willing to work for the school at a substantially lower salary than they would be able to earn working in the private sector. However, we understand the benefits that a private sector employer would experience by hiring an employee and assigning them to work at an ATC; they would be able to provide customized instruction and have direct access to the talent coming out of that school system. A few employers, such as Riegler Blacktop are already doing this and have realized the benefits of this arrangement. Our goal is to increase the number of employers who are willing to do the same.

The Lincoln Trail Workforce Development Board identified additional strengths during a recent planning session:

Work-based Learning Opportunities: Lincoln Trail has significantly increased work-based learning opportunities. Project Opportunity is an initiative that identifies employers who are interested in providing work-based learning opportunities and matches student co-ops from area high schools to those positions. As part of upskilling workers to avoid layoffs, LTWDB offers Incumbent Worker Training in high demand sectors. On the Job Training is a critical step in customized training program models for companies such as Baptist Health Hardin and Your Recruiting Company.

Youth Services: Development of a youth career services program has been a priority since 2024. The model that was developed consists of the following modules/services. In-school, out-of-school and opportunity youth are receiving the following services:

- **Work Readiness:**
 - Pre-Employment Orientation
 - Essential Skills

- **Sector Training:**
 - Virtual Reality Career Exploration
 - Ready for Industry Training
- **Path to Employment:**
 - On-the-Job Training
 - Paid Internships
 - Individual Training
 - Connection to Local Employers
- **Employment Support:**
 - Follow-Up
 - Workforce Related Assistance

Business Services Team

The Bluegrass Workforce Innovation Board (BGWIB) offers a comprehensive array of business services aimed at supporting local employers and enhancing workforce development in the region. One key service is recruitment and hiring assistance, where the BWIB helps businesses identify qualified candidates by providing access to a pool of pre-screened job seekers through the Kentucky Career Center and various job boards. Additionally, the BWIB offers On-the-Job Training (OJT) programs, which help offset the costs for businesses to train new employees. This initiative allows businesses to provide hands-on training to new hires while receiving financial support for the training process, ensuring workers acquire essential skills specific to the company's needs. For businesses with more specialized needs, the BWIB also develops customized training solutions by partnering with educational institutions and community colleges to create tailored programs that address specific skill gaps.

The BGWIB further supports employers by providing access to valuable labor market information (LMI) that includes regional economic trends, workforce availability, and skill gaps. This data helps businesses make informed decisions about hiring and workforce development. Additionally, the BWIB offers consulting services to assist businesses in understanding labor trends and aligning their workforce strategies with current market conditions. The board also helps businesses with long-term workforce development strategies, including guidance on workforce retention, employee development, and succession planning. Lastly, the BGWIB connects employers with apprenticeship and internship programs, providing pathways for individuals to gain practical experience while contributing to the businesses' future talent pipeline. Through these services, the BWIB plays a pivotal role in aligning workforce development with the evolving needs of regional employers.

The Bluegrass Workforce Innovation Board (BGWIB) continuously seeks to enhance and streamline its services to better meet the needs of local employers. One effective way it gathers feedback is through surveys completed by businesses, which provide valuable insights into the challenges employers face and the effectiveness of the workforce development services offered. These surveys allow BGWIB to better understand employers' specific skill gaps, recruitment needs, and training requirements, ensuring that the services provided are aligned with the evolving demands of the local labor market. The feedback collected from businesses helps identify areas for improvement, allowing the BWIB to refine existing programs, tailor services, and introduce new initiatives that are more responsive to employer needs.

Incorporating survey results into workforce development planning enables BWIB to customize its offerings, such as adjusting recruitment strategies, developing targeted training programs, and enhancing business outreach efforts. Moreover, the surveys help the BGWIB monitor employer satisfaction and make data-driven decisions on how to improve the overall quality and impact of business services. By consistently collecting and analyzing business feedback, the BWIB ensures that its workforce development programs remain relevant, efficient, and effective in addressing the workforce challenges faced by employers in the Bluegrass region.

CHALLENGES

Post-secondary Education, Technological Disruption & Need for Quality Short-Term Training:

One of the greatest economic challenges of our time is the speed with which technology is changing the labor market landscape. As one example, the Central Kentucky Region employs approximately 20,000 22,000 Truck Drivers, according to data from JobsEQ, many or all of whom may be susceptible to automation in the next 10-15 years.

This is part of a larger trend: jobs that pay family-supporting wages now overwhelmingly require some form of post-secondary education. Workforce development activities that emphasize flexibility, short-term training options, and durable skill sets will be well positioned to guide the Central Kentucky Region through the coming years. Analysis of KYLMI data indicates that the short-term training (two-years or less) most likely to connect to jobs that pay above a family-supporting wage are: computer technician, automotive technicians, tractor trailer drivers, and engineers.

Shortage of Available Workforce: Our region is facing a severe shortage of available talent, which mirrors the national workforce landscape. As we face an aging population combined with low birthrates, we have people retiring in large numbers and not enough young workers to fill their spots. Additionally, economic development has been strong,

meaning that there are many jobs being created across the state that have become increasingly more difficult to fill.

Outreach: Public outreach efforts need to be increased through a planning process in order to create a clear vision; this has been seen as a need for some time and Bluegrass has written it into their strategic plan.

Barriers to Employment: As discussed, there are many individuals in the Central Kentucky Region who, for a variety of reasons, are having a harder time getting a job than the general population. The local Workforce Development Boards are working to address barriers to employment in various ways, such as:

Transitions 2 Transformation is a program that focuses on individuals with highly challenging barriers to employment. Individuals in recovery, reentering the workforce after incarceration, disabled, homeless, ESL, etc. are all provided a special case manager who focuses on these unique barriers and works with employers to transition them into the workforce at a slower and more managed pace. Workforce staff also make referrals to partnering agencies who specialize in individuals with barriers to employment. WIOA staff attempt to work closely with programs like Jubilee Jobs, Child Care Council, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, and others in providing additional support for individuals with significant barriers to employment.

The Objective Assessment is the first personal communication visitors to the Kentucky Career Center - Bluegrass have with the participant; it lays the framework for the services the Talent Development Specialist and participant agree upon for the participant to successfully complete their pathway to self-sufficient employment. All potential participants are given an objective assessment, which includes: a review of academic and occupational skill levels, career goals, and strengths of each participant. The purpose of the objective assessment is to identify the appropriate services and career pathways to develop an Individual Employment Plan/Individual Service Strategy along with the participant.

In Northern Kentucky, the 'Lift Up' project creates a one-stop delivery system for job training and transition to employment for individuals in treatment for SUD (Substance Use Disorder) living in the Northern Kentucky area. The project is funded by a federal SAMHSA grant and is a collaboration between St. Elizabeth Healthcare, Life Learning Center and the Northern Kentucky WIB. Lift Up participants work on increasing independence and productivity by providing pre-vocational training, substance use treatment and transitional services to employment. The KCC-NKY work with local employers to encourage transformational employment hiring. The goal of the grant is to serve 350 participants per year for five years.

Northern Kentucky has identified getting individuals dealing with substance addiction recovery into gainful employment as one of its four priorities. According to the 2022-2024 Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA), an estimated 70,000 people in Northern Kentucky have a substance use disorder. That is a percentage of the labor force that we cannot continue to function without.

The Lack of Accessible Childcare is a workforce barrier that plagues our entire state and certainly the Central Region. It has been estimated that 45,000 nonworking caregivers, statewide, indicated that they would be in the workforce if they had childcare. Northern KY has been partnering with EC LEARN to help employers realize the benefits of investing in childcare solutions for their employees (or prospective employees) by capitalizing on House Bill 499 which was passed in 2022 by the KY General Assembly making it possible for employers to secure match funds from the state for any investment they make into childcare solutions for their employees. Part of this issue is due to the lack of qualified childcare providers; the Central Region plans to leverage the State's Early Childhood Education Apprenticeship Program which will make it easier for individuals to earn marketable credentials such as the Child Development Associate (CDA) degree. This will hopefully result in more childcare options for non-working caregivers.

Areas of Opportunity

Sharing Best Practices: Some local Workforce Development Boards have begun using the Kentucky Center for Education and Workforce Statistics to measure the efficacy of workforce programs and interventions. When programs are identified as particularly effective, they should be shared with all Boards in the region, so that they can become best practices and standards for success.

Increasing Work-Based Learning (WBL) Opportunities: Northern KY identified increasing WBL opportunities across the region as a priority. We need more employers to offer/host WBL activities (apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, co-ops, internships) and we need more advertising to increase communication and better linkage to our target populations to build demand. Northern KY is building an online platform called NKY Career Jumpstart that will house all regional WBL experiences. Employers will provide opportunities to be housed within NKY Career Jumpstart and these opportunities will be accessible to primarily, but not exclusively, Opportunity Youth. It is anticipated that this new platform will make it easier for individuals to identify and enroll in WBL experiences.

Bluegrass response:

Virtual Career Center: Since the onset of the pandemic, it has become clear an area of opportunity for the Bluegrass area is the creation of a virtual career center. The brick-and-

mortal career centers have been closed to the public for nearly a year, yet the career centers continue to provide services virtually. Today there are more individuals with access to a cell phone or Wi-Fi service than there are individuals with reliable transportation. These individuals could benefit from an entirely online career center, where they can connect with a Talent Development Specialist and receive the same services, referrals, employability classes, and personal assistance they receive when they visit a physical location. A virtual career center could provide access to a new group of previously unserved or underserved residents, who could be transitioned into training and employment.

Videos: The pandemic has also increased the use of social media platforms and the internet as a way to share information with clients and the general public. The Bluegrass area, since the onset of the pandemic, has started creating videos regularly for posting on social media and the career center website. Three unique categories of videos are produced each week with new content.

Workforce Wednesday: This video series started as a live question and answer session about services in the career center at the beginning of the pandemic and has evolved into a series on all things workforce related. The video series is hosted by the career center's Workshop Coordinator and covers topics that range from: what is needed to be a successful employee, interviewing skills, budgeting, and how to overcome barriers to employment. Guests from employers to entrepreneurs are often scheduled to record tips from their perspective.

Community Resource Minute: The Community Resource Minute is hosted by our One Stop Operator. This video series hosts short interviews with various community partners throughout the Bluegrass area. It allows the organization to explain firsthand what they do and how individuals who may need their services can access them.

Business Minute: The last is the Business Minute, a short two to five-minute video highlighting a business in the Bluegrass who is hiring. It covers a brief history of the business and in-depth information on the position(s) they are hiring for. Videos for this are done in a variety of ways from animation, interviewing, or content provided by the business itself and is submitted by any of the four Business Services Representatives in the Bluegrass.

Chapter 2: Strategic Vision and Goals – N/A (refer to Local Plans)

Chapter 3: Alignment of Local Area Partnerships and Investment Strategies

- A. **(R)** Describe efforts to coordinate supportive services provided through workforce investment activities in the local area, including facilitating childcare, transportation, and other appropriate supportive services for customers. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(11)]

The Lincoln Trail Workforce Development Board currently leverages community programs/services and partners to provide supportive services in addition to those offered by WIOA funding. The LTWDB supportive services include transportation, childcare, emergency assistance, lodging while attending training, and assistance with job related needs such as uniforms and tools. Regional coordination to maximize supportive services will occur as appropriate.

In the Bluegrass Local Workforce Development Area, efforts to coordinate supportive services for individuals involved in workforce investment activities are central to ensuring that all customers, including those with barriers to employment, can fully participate in and benefit from workforce development programs. These services are essential for helping individuals overcome challenges such as transportation, childcare, and other personal barriers that could otherwise prevent them from accessing job training, education, or employment opportunities.

Childcare Services: Recognizing that many individuals, especially single parents, may struggle to find affordable and reliable childcare, BGWIB coordinates with local childcare providers and community organizations to offer subsidies or vouchers for childcare services. These subsidies help ensure that parents can attend job training, interviews, or employment without worrying about the cost or availability of care for their children.

Transportation Services: For many individuals in rural areas of BGWIB, reliable transportation is a major barrier to employment. To address this, local workforce development programs partner with public transportation systems and local transportation providers to offer discounted or subsidized transit passes to job seekers and employees. Additionally, BGADD has explored alternative transportation options, such as ride-sharing programs and volunteer driver networks, to help individuals in rural or underserved areas access job opportunities.

Other Supportive Services: Beyond childcare and transportation, BGWIB works to address other barriers to employment, such as housing instability, healthcare, and access to technology. The district collaborates with local non-profits, social service agencies, and government programs to connect individuals with resources that can help them stabilize their living situation and improve their overall well-being, thereby enhancing their ability to

successfully participate in workforce programs. Services may include assistance with rent or utility payments, healthcare access through Medicaid or other programs, and help with securing the necessary technology and internet access for online learning and job searches. In addition to these direct services, BGWIB focuses on building partnerships with community organizations, employers, and educational institutions to create a more comprehensive support system. For example, local employers are encouraged to develop flexible work schedules or offer on-site childcare to assist employees with balancing work and family responsibilities. Collaboration between workforce development programs, local businesses, and educational institutions also helps ensure that the skills being taught are aligned with local labor market needs, leading to more sustainable employment opportunities. By coordinating these supportive services, BGWIB ensures that individuals facing barriers to employment are not only trained and prepared for work but are also supported in overcoming the practical challenges that can prevent them from entering and sustaining employment. This holistic approach helps to create a more inclusive and effective workforce development system for the region.

In Northern Kentucky, realizing the importance of childcare support, NKY Works has devoted one of its focus areas to early childhood education and related programming. One of the objectives of this focus area strives to encourage our employers to invest in childcare solutions for their workers by capitalizing on HB499 which was passed by the KY General Assembly in 2022. Additionally, the most often utilized supportvie service in NKY involves reimbursement for transportation expenses to commute to and from training or to and from work. This has proven beneficial to our customers, particularly considering the high cost of gas over the past couple of years.

Chapter 4: Program Design and Evaluation – N/A (refer to Local Plans)

Chapter 5: Compliance/Performance/Administrative Cost

Responses should be focused on the local area’s compliance with federal or state requirements.

- A. **(R)** Describe the replicated cooperative agreements, as defined by WIOA 107(d)(11), between the local board and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) to enhance the provision of services to individuals with disabilities and other individuals. This may include cross training of staff, technical assistance, use and sharing of information, cooperative efforts with employers, and other efforts of cooperation, collaboration and coordination. WIOA Sec. 108(b)(14)

While the Lincoln Trail Workforce Development Board does not have a current replicated cooperative agreement in place with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the

Memorandum of Agreement between partners identifies the efforts and services provided by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. OVR staff are co-located at the Kentucky Career Centers in Elizabethtown (full-time), Bardstown (part-time), and Lebanon (part-time) to enhance services for individuals with disabilities. Guidance will be requested for cooperative agreements.

The Northern Kentucky Workforce Development Area Memorandum of Understanding between partners delineates the efforts and services provided by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. Guidance will be requested for cooperative agreements. WIOA 107(d)(11) states: “The local board shall coordinate activities with education and training providers in the local area, including providers of adult education and literacy activities under Title II, providers of career and technical education and local agencies administering plans under Title I of the Rehab Act of 1973.” The Northern Kentucky WIB and OVR/ collaborate to enhance services to individuals with disabilities, individuals with other barriers to employment and individuals living in poverty. Services are co-located in two Kentucky Career Centers, Covington (comprehensive) and Florence (affiliate) to provide access to a wide variety of services.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the Bluegrass Local Workforce Development Area outlines the roles and services provided by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR). Additional guidance will be sought regarding cooperative agreements. As outlined in WIOA Section 107(d)(11), “The local board shall coordinate activities with education and training providers in the local area, including providers of adult education and literacy activities under Title II, providers of career and technical education, and local agencies administering plans under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.” The Bluegrass Workforce Innovation Board (BGWIB) and OVR collaborate to strengthen services for individuals with disabilities, those facing employment barriers, and individuals experiencing poverty. OVR services are co-located within three Kentucky Career Centers: Lexington, Danville, and Richmond, ensuring broad access to a comprehensive range of support services.

- B. **(R)** Describe the establishment of the administrative cost arrangement, including the pooling of funds for administrative costs, as appropriate for the region.

There are no administrative cost arrangements or pooling of funds for administrative costs at this time. However, at which time projects require such discussion, all local areas are agreeable to meet and negotiate arrangements.

Local Workforce Development Directors meet on a monthly basis and share best practices. This allows all areas to benefit from the most effective strategies and enhance program efficiency across the Commonwealth.

- C. **(R)** Describe the establishment of an agreement concerning how the planning region will collectively negotiate and reach an agreement with the Governor (via the Department of Workforce Development) on local levels of performance for and report on the performance accountability measures described in WIOA sec. 116(c) for local areas or the planning region.

The Central Kentucky planning region has agreed to look at ways to collectively negotiate local levels of performance. Several items are needed for this to become a reality; a complete commitment from all core partners to work more collaboratively to achieve performance and most importantly a technology platform that all partners can utilize to capture, collect analyze, and negotiate performance information. A shared data platform is critical for this to become reality.

DWD will need to amend their practices when it comes to state-negotiated performance rates in order for negotiated performance to happen at a regional level. Presently, after DWD negotiates performance with the U.S. Department of Labor, DWD initiates negotiations with each Local Workforce Area regarding performance rates at the local level. There is currently no process in place to allow for regional negotiations.

Public Comment Period: March 21 – April 21, 2025.

Comments: None

Public Hearing Held: April 16, 2025.

Attendees: None