

**Meeting held via Zoom**

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**Attendees:** Sara Tracey, Jessica Fortner, Aaron Poynter, Bill Sandell, Brandon Combs, Correy Eimer, Donna Taylor, Erin White, Jessica Fletcher, John Sadosky, Jon Sowards, LeeSa Page, Lori Ulrich, Taskforce Chair, Lynn Baker, Mark Hohmann, Kristina Slattery, Mary Jackson, Melanie Tapp, Myra Wilson, Rolando Thacker, Sam Keathley

**KWIB Staff:** Alisher Burikhanov, Debbie Dennison, LaChrista Ellis, Sara Jagers, and Elishah Taylor

**9:31am Welcome/Background**

**Lori Ulrich, Taskforce Chair**, welcomed the taskforce members and **Alisher Burikhanov, Executive Director, Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (KWIB)**, provided an overview of the background information of the Work Ready Communities program.

The Work Ready Communities program was launched in 2012 under Governor Steve Beshear as a joint initiative between economic development and workforce development. Communities participated by holding meetings, providing a narrative and metrics requested in an application and if certified as “Work Ready” or “Work-Ready in Progress”, displaying signs at their county entrances, showcasing their readiness to attract and grow investment.

The program initially gained momentum, but the COVID-19 pandemic shifted economies, interests, and investments. In 2022, state leaders began reassessing whether Work Ready Communities remained relevant in Kentucky. Through tours, focus groups, and stakeholder meetings—including with the Kentucky Association of Economic Developers and U.S. Southern Economic Development Council —feedback confirmed that the program was valued and needed to evolve to reflect the current economy rather than the 2012 metrics.

In 2024, the Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (KWIB) adopted updated objectives for the program. In 2025, a vendor was selected to develop metrics to define communities as work-ready, in-progress, or not meeting requirements. These new objectives are more qualitative than quantitative, making the task of measurement more complex.

The updated framework emphasizes both economic and talent attraction, with a focus on regional collaboration rather than a county-by-county approach. Successful economic development often requires multi-county efforts, as shown by Toyota in Scott County, for example, which draws workers from across 80+ counties.

The next step is to review the proposed metrics, gather honest feedback, and refine them with subject matter experts before adoption. Collaboration remains the foundation of the program, uniting economic developers, workforce developers, local boards, and other stakeholders to strengthen Kentucky as a unified state.

**Work Ready Communities – Next Generation Metrics Review**

**Sara Tracey, Vice President of National Workforce and Education, TPMA**, and **Jessica Fortner, Senior Consultant, TPMA**, delivered an update on the Work Ready Communities initiative and introduced the newly recommended metrics.

Jessica Fortner explained the scope of work with a timeline overview of completed and upcoming work.

- **July 2025:** Stakeholder input was gathered from a variety of groups, including the KWIB, focusing on defining strategic and talent-ready objectives. Subject matter experts were also consulted on specific objectives.

- **August 2025:** Input was synthesized into key findings, which were presented publicly. Draft metrics were then developed based on this feedback.
- **September–October 2025:** Activities include revising the application process, program details, data sources, and designing templates and toolkits. Website enhancements will also be made. Best practices recommended by stakeholders will be reviewed, with the goal of making them broadly accessible.
- **November 2025:** Updates to the website will continue, alongside further integration of best practices.
- **January–March 2026:** The incentive program, technical assistance framework, and marketing outreach efforts will be finalized.
- **April 2026:** The project will close with a final report and recommendations.

Sara Tracey shared findings from stakeholder engagement sessions with leaders in education, economic development, broadband, childcare, and housing highlighted three key themes: the value of collaboration, the need for an active and adaptable designation, and the importance of recognizing regional differences in workforce needs. Metric development centered on establishing standardized benchmarks while allowing flexibility to reflect local achievements and circumstances. These efforts align with eight objectives—three strategic and five talent-ready.

#### Strategic Objectives:

- Supply and demand of regional skills – connecting supply and demand to ensure that workforce development matches industry skill needs.
- Growing talent pools – engaging underserved populations such as foster youth, formerly incarcerated individuals, veterans, and people with disabilities.
- Work-based learning – expanding opportunities such as apprenticeships and internships.

#### Talent-Ready Objectives:

- Childcare access – ensuring affordable and accessible options.
- Housing availability – promoting affordable housing options in the community.
- Transportation – assessing public transportation infrastructure for commuting to work.
- Digital access and broadband – ensuring internet availability and affordability.
- Talent attraction and retention – bringing new residents to the region and encouraging graduates to stay.

Following the presentation and discussion, attendees were invited to share feedback on the new metrics by emailing [Sara Tracey](#) or [Jessica Fortner](#). The next phase, and discussion for the October meeting, will focus on reviewing the application process.

#### **Closing Comments & Next Steps**

Alisher Burikhanov asked the group to brainstorm incentive ideas to support the organizations that will lead this work, such as local workforce development boards, chambers of commerce, or other entities. The structure of these incentives has not yet been determined. Suggestions from stakeholders will help shape the most effective investment approach. Tourism-based talent attraction and cost of living were also discussed. While cost of living remains a relevant consideration, it should not be viewed as the primary benchmark, as its impact is limited and influenced heavily by broader economic conditions.

Lori Ulrich thanked attendees for their participation and encouraged everyone to provide any feedback and ideas to TPMA colleagues. Any major concerns should be voiced early in the process to ensure they are addressed effectively.

#### **3:24 pm ET Adjournment**

The Work Ready Communities Taskforce meetings will take place on the first Wednesday of each month, with the next meeting scheduled for October 1, 2025, at 9:30 a.m.

**AGENDA**  
**9:30 – 11:00 am EDT**

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82645089883?pwd=uYFb4FnRElrkLPDPT7FfvRRpez4k0b.1>

Meeting ID: 826 4508 9883 / Passcode: 663549

Dial via phone: 1 646 931 3860

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**9:30 CALL MEETING TO ORDER**

**Welcome/Housekeeping** ..... *Lori Ulrich, Chair*  
*Fleming-Mason Energy*

**Background** ..... *Alisher Burikhanov, Executive Director*  
*Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board*

**9:45 Work Ready Communities – Next Generation Metrics Review** ..... *Sara Tracey, Vice President*  
*National Workforce & Education*  
• *Timeline and Progress to Date* ..... *TPMA*  
• *Review and Validate Metrics*  
• *Next Step and Upcoming Meetings*

*Jessica Fortner, Senior Consultant*  
*TPMA*

**10:45 Closing Comments & Next Steps** ..... *Lori Ulrich, Chair*

**11:00 ADJOURNMENT**

**Meeting Schedule:**

- First Wednesday of the Month at 9:30 ET
- Next Meeting: October 1 at 9:30 ET

| Objectives                                                            | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Quantitative Metrics                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Qualitative /Narrative Questions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Scoring Recommendations + Notes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
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| Strategic Objective 1:<br><b>Supply and Demand of Regional Skills</b> | How are communities addressing local talent supply and employment demands?<br>What strategic efforts are being made to meet the needs/goals of the industry through an aligned education vision? What are the strategies to meet the local in-demand industries as defined by Local Workforce Development Boards?                                                                                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top 5 industries (by # of jobs)</li> <li>• Top 5 occupations (by # of jobs)</li> <li>• Top 5 skills based on employer input</li> <li>• Residents earning CTE Pathways or Credentials in key industries (as compared to jobs in key industries)</li> <li>• # of relevant training/ education programs + # of graduates annually</li> </ul>                                                                        | <p>How does your LWDB work with employers, job seekers, and partners to meet the needs of local in-demand industries? Is there a formalized public-private partnership to address industry-specific workforce needs?</p> <p>How does your region ensure educators are responsive to industry needs?</p> | <p><b>Not Work Ready:</b> No evidence of strategic alignment between workforce, education, and industry. Residents are not earning relevant credentials or enrolling in relevant pathways.</p> <p><b>In Progress:</b> Workforce Board and education providers have engaged industry, and relevant training programs are in place or under development. Residents are earning relevant credentials, but metrics indicate significant skill gaps remain.</p> <p><b>Work Ready:</b> One or more sector partnerships (or similar public-private collaboratives) exist in top industries. Region has strategic plan addressing industry alignment and demand for skilled talent. Metrics indicate residents are upskilling/reskilling as industry demands.</p>                          |
| Strategic Objective 2:<br><b>Growing Talent Pools</b>                 | Does the community have awareness and engagement of all the non-profit organizations targeting untapped talent pools (individuals with disabilities, veterans, immigrants/ refugees, formerly incarcerated, recovery, foster youth, those with food insecurities, etc.)? What are the strategic coordination efforts being made to create pipelines into employment? Kentucky's Workforce Pipeline can be used as a guide to potential talent. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall labor force participation rate</li> <li>• <i>Each region identifies top target population(s) to focus on for the following metrics</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ # of [untapped population] in the region / % employed</li> <li>○ # of non-profit organizations serving [untapped population] and providing training/ employment related services (e.g., KY Valor)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | Describe your region's collaborative efforts to grow the talent pool by engaging untapped populations and the organizations that serve them. What measurable outcomes are your region tracking and what are the results?                                                                                | <p><b>Not Work Ready:</b> Region does not have a strategy to create pipelines into employment. Non-profit organizations serving untapped talent populations are not active in the region.</p> <p><b>In Progress:</b> Region is able to describe collaborative efforts or strategies in place to increase labor force participation in at least one key population, but results are not available or measured to date.</p> <p><b>Work Ready:</b> Region has clear, collaborative strategy for increasing labor force participation in at least two key populations and measurable results of pipeline development are available.</p> <p><i>Consider a year-over-year metric that shows # or % of [population] employed as compared to previous years (use 2026 as baseline)</i></p> |

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| Strategic Objective 3:<br><b>Work-Based Learning</b>   | What strategies are used to grow skills and fill employment needs through the various work-based learning opportunities, such as career exploration, internships, co-ops, registered apprenticeships, on-the-job training, etc.?                                                                                                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of WBL programs available (including paid internships, co-ops, registered apprenticeships)</li> <li>• # of employers participating in WBL programs</li> <li>• # of registered apprentices + # of registered apprenticeships completed annually</li> <li>• Average # of WBL hours HS graduates or CTE students complete annually</li> </ul> | What is your region's approach to work-based learning at the high school, post-secondary, and adult/workforce development levels? What partners are involved in promoting, coordinating, and/or delivering WBL?                                                                                                                     | <p><b>Not Work Ready:</b> Region does not have a WBL strategy in place; WBL that is available is not coordinated or measured reliably.</p> <p><b>In Progress:</b> Region has at least one coordinated WBL initiative (e.g., expanding registered apprenticeship, required High School internships, etc.).</p> <p><b>Work Ready:</b> Region has WBL options available for adults and students at all levels; significant coordination between workforce system and employers is evident.</p>                                                                                                                    |
| Talent Ready Objective 1:<br><b>Childcare</b>          | What is the existing landscape of access and affordability, and what strategies are being taken to address the needs of the community? Data and strategy can include utilizing KYSTATs ( <a href="https://kystats.ky.gov/Reports/Reports">https://kystats.ky.gov/Reports/Reports</a> ) capacity data and services offered by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Education. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• # of registered childcare providers in the region</li> <li>• # of Early Childhood workers in the region</li> <li>• Average cost of childcare (as compared to average income in the region)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                        | How does your region ensure the availability and affordability of childcare for working parents? Are there strategies in place to grow and retain the early childhood workforce? What strategies are in place or in development to address the barriers to affordable childcare? How do local employers contribute to the solution? | <p><b>Not Work Ready:</b> Metrics indicate insufficient childcare providers (business and/or individual workers) and unclear plans to address the shortage.</p> <p><b>In Progress:</b> Metrics indicate gaps in childcare availability or affordability, but one or more collaborative strategies are in place/in development to address the gap.</p> <p><b>Work Ready:</b> Metrics indicate adequate availability of providers/workers, or the region has a coordinated strategy to recruit and retain providers. Region shows evidence of employer support (e.g., on-site childcare, financial support).</p> |
| Talent Ready Objective 2:<br><b>Affordable Housing</b> | What kind of housing trends are seen in the community (for example, the number of units being added annually) and what strategies are utilized to meet the demand? How are communities addressing affordable housing? Data gathering could incorporate the local                                                                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Median housing costs for renters/owners</li> <li>• % of residents who are cost burdened by median housing costs</li> <li>• # of new units added</li> <li>• Mix of housing types available</li> <li>• Housing vacancy rates (goal: 4-8%)</li> </ul>                                                                                           | Describe your region's efforts to ensure affordable housing is available for all residents. What strategies are in place or in development to encourage home ownership (e.g., home repair or preservation funds, home maintenance courses)? Does the community offer                                                                | <p><b>Not Work Ready:</b> Metrics indicate insufficient housing availability or significant cost burdens for majority of residents.</p> <p><b>In Progress:</b> Metrics indicate gaps in availability or affordability of housing, but programs are in development to address those gaps.</p> <p><b>Work Ready:</b> Metrics indicate adequate housing is available and affordable. The region has strategic</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

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|                                                                                   | energy companies to gauge growth by understanding new meters added.                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | rental assistance or other transitional/supportive services for low-income residents? If housing availability is a concern, are there incentives available for developers? Are zoning laws friendly to new unit development?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | plan to ensure housing stock continues to meet the needs of growing population/ new employers.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Talent Ready<br>Objective 3:<br><b>Transportation</b>                             | What are the strategies used to grow transportation access and infrastructure to meet community and business needs? Can communities quantify the demand for transportation? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average cost of commuting relative to household income</li> <li>• Average commuting distance/time</li> <li>• # of residents commuting in/out of region for work daily</li> <li>• # of registered vehicle owners (as compared to # of working age population)</li> <li>• # of individuals using public transportation daily/weekly</li> <li>• In rural communities, # of low cost transit options available</li> <li>• # of bus stops/transit stops</li> </ul> | Describe how your region is addressing/planning to address transportation demand and barriers? How do key employers in your region support workers' transportation needs? If public transportation is available, how does coverage compare to workers' needs (e.g., do busses run for 3 <sup>rd</sup> shift workers? How far do individuals have to travel to reach a bus stop?)? Are there non-profit or private companies offering micro-transit options? | <p><b>Not Work Ready:</b> Metrics indicate that residents are spending significant time and/or money on their daily commute (as compared to household income), and no plans are in place to address the disparity.</p> <p><b>In Progress:</b> Metrics indicate gaps in transportation availability or affordability, but the region has plans in place or in development to improve infrastructure, availability, or assistance.</p> <p><b>Work Ready:</b> Metrics indicate transportation is adequate and affordable in the region and/or strategies and initiatives are in place to improve infrastructure, availability, or assistance. Public-private partnerships and employer assistance are evident.</p> |
| Talent Ready<br>Objective 4: <b>Digital Access &amp; Broadband Infrastructure</b> | What is the internet availability across their rural and urban centers? Does a community have a digital access plan or strategy to ensure access for all?                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of residents with access to broadband at home</li> <li>• % of region covered by broadband access</li> <li>• Speed of broadband access (% of residents who can access top speed)</li> <li>• # of public facilities with free wifi available to residents</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                          | Describe your region's digital access plan or strategy to ensure broadband access for all.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <p><b>Not Work Ready:</b> Significant portion of region does not have broadband access or public wifi available. No digital equity plan in place.</p> <p><b>In Progress:</b> Adequate public wifi is available for residents who do not have broadband access (or slow broadband) at home. Digital access plan is in place or in progress to ensure all residents of working age have access to digital literacy programs if needed.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

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|                                                              |                                                                                                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li># of digital literacy programs available / capacity of those programs</li> </ul>                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>Work Ready:</b> Broadband access and speed is widely available. Region has clear digital access plan and digital literacy programs available.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Talent Ready</b><br><b>Objective 5: Talent Attraction</b> | What strategies are being used to actively attract talent locally or regionally? Are these strategies aligning with business demand? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>% population growth (working age)</li> <li>Cost of living (as compared to nearest MSA)</li> <li>Web and social media traffic related to talent attraction campaigns</li> </ul> | Describe your region's efforts to attract new residents. Is there an individual or organization dedicated to talent attraction and community development? Does the region have a marketing or social media strategy, and if so, how is it measured? Do strategies align with business needs? How do local business needs inform strategies? | <b>Not Work Ready:</b> Region does not have a strategy for attracting new talent. Population growth is stagnant or decreasing.<br><br><b>In Progress:</b> Region is developing a strategy for attracting new talent or has recently launched a strategy, but results are not evident to date. Population growth is stagnant or decreasing.<br><br><b>Work Ready:</b> Region has coordinated talent attraction strategy with demonstrated results. Population growth is steady or increasing. |

**General Considerations:**

- Each category is worth up to 3 points (1 – Not Work Ready, 2- In Progress, 3 – Work Ready). Region must have a score between 8-15 to be rated In Progress, 16-24 to be rated Work Ready. Financial incentives and/or recognition for regions scoring 22 or better.
- Consider using letters of partnership, MOUs, or similar partnership agreements to demonstrate formalized collaboration—include as a requirement for Work Ready or In Progress designation?