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## **NORTHEAST OHIO WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN: 2021 - 2025**

### **Required by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **What is the Northeast Ohio Workforce Development Region?**

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (Pub. L. 113-128) is a federal law enacted in 2014 to reform and modernize the public workforce system. It replaced the Workforce Investment Act. WIOA requires Governors to designate local and regional workforce development areas and requires these areas to create local and regional workforce development plans. The Northeast Ohio Workforce (NOW) region was designated as a WIOA Region and is comprised of the eight counties of Lorain, Cuyahoga, Lake, Geauga, Ashtabula, Portage, Summit and Medina. There are five distinct Workforce Development Areas with their Boards (WDBs) within this Region: Ohio Workforce Areas 2 (Summit/Medina), 3 (Cleveland/Cuyahoga), 4 (Lorain), 5 (Lake), and 19 (Ashtabula, Geauga, Portage).

### **What is the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)?**

WIOA creates a public federal-state-local comprehensive workforce development system that requires a solid understanding of the region's labor market demand for workers in order to provide services and strategies to connect businesses with the skilled workforce needed; to target investments in skill training to in-demand jobs; to prioritize intensive training services to individuals who are low-income and have barriers to employment; and to create collaborations with education and support service providers across the region. The system is led at a policy level by the Chief Local Elected Officials and the Workforce Development Boards they appoint which are business-led and comprised of local leaders in business, education, economic development, organized labor and key government and community organizations. Across the Northeast Ohio region, over 60 businesses are represented across the five WDBs. Major customers of the system are businesses, jobseekers, and low-income youth and adults with barriers to employment.

As required by WIOA, each local workforce development area operates a comprehensive one-stop career center which are called Ohio Means Jobs (OMJ) centers. All WIOA-funded services as well as workforce services from the core programs mandated by WIOA are provided through the five comprehensive OMJ centers within this region.

### **How do the Comprehensive OMJ Centers Work Across Programs & Customers?**

WIOA creates a performance-based structure for providing services and each local workforce area is required to negotiate performance levels with the state annually. All workforce areas in the region have been successful in achieving these performance goals.

Ohio requires all participants of WIOA Title I Employment and Training, WIOA Title II Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE), WIOA Title III Wagner-Peyser Act, WIOA Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation, Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education (Perkins) Act, and the Senior Community Service Employment Program (Title V of the Older Americans Act) to register in OhioMeansJobs.com to ensure consistency among programs, enhance job readiness and placement efforts, and support career planning. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients enrolled in the Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program (CCMEP) and Unemployment Insurance claimants also register.

### **What is the Northeast Ohio Workforce Development Plan?**

WIOA was the first federal workforce development law to require a regional plan in addition to local workforce plans. In 2017, the first Northeast Ohio Workforce (NOW) plan was produced and approved by the state for a four-year period.

The approach to update the regional plan in 2021 consisted of a major streamlining of the document to make it more usable, an update of the data contained in the labor market analysis, and a full description of the workforce development services and strategies for the region. The document contains four substantive sections: Introduction; Economic & Labor Market Analysis, Workforce Services and Workforce Strategies. Now, it is being updated again at the midpoint of the four-year approval period; Additionally, each workforce development area updated its local plan, and these are attached and incorporated into the regional plan. Once approved, all will be in effect from July 2023 to June 2025.

### **What are the Highlights of the Labor Market Analysis for the Region?**

The three key industries which have been identified for the region are: Healthcare, Manufacturing and Information Technology (IT). Additionally, good-paying middle-skills jobs in opportunity occupations have been identified by analysts.

Many of the labor market challenges that were documented in the 2017 Regional NOW plan still persist today and are exacerbated by the current economic challenges created by the COVID pandemic and the need for ongoing economic recovery, which present a new urgency and opportunity for the workforce development system.

- Unemployment is low. During the current pandemic state, the unemployment rate in Northeast Ohio has remained below the national average.
- There are significant pockets of high poverty in the region. Five cities in the NOW region ranked in the top 25 for Ohio cities for child poverty reported in 2021: East Cleveland (50.3%). Cleveland (45.7%), Maple Heights (39.8%), Lorain (39.4%) and Ashtabula (39.4%). High poverty rates overall and for children pose barriers to the development of the current and future workforce.
- The Northeast Ohio labor market continues to be challenged by a mismatch of skills that jobseekers possess to the skills that employers are seeking. Although there are many workers

that need jobs, the skills/qualifications possessed by jobseekers do not always match employers' stated needs.

- The region is not producing enough high-skilled workers.
  - By 2025, 65% of workers will need a 2- or 4-year degree to qualify for the available jobs. Currently, 34% of the population have a 2- or 4-year degree, and 21% have some college/training but no degree.
  - The workforce in the region does not possess the skills that employers are seeking to fill their jobs in sufficient numbers. Based on the 2022 Aligning Opportunities report published by TeamNEO, the number of unfilled entry level jobs in these key industries was: Manufacturing: 5,954; Healthcare: 4,689; and IT: 3,177. This totals over 13,000 entry-level jobs going unfilled in these three industries.
- Technology is driving changes in industry products and services and job requirements are also changing to incorporate these higher technical skills. Occupations across the spectrum are being upskilled and traditionally lower-skill jobs are now middle-skill. This means that workers need more digital awareness and skills to work in traditional jobs in manufacturing, healthcare and other sectors.
- Declining population in northeast Ohio presents challenges to job growth. The population in northeast Ohio dropped by 155,000 to 4.278 million between 2001 – 2018, and the labor force dropped by 146,000 to 2.111 million. Industry employment projections covering 2016 – 2026 shows a decline in the number of jobs in the goods producing sector of the economy of 6.5% but shows an increase in job growth in the service providing sector of 11.4% for the Education and Health occupations, and 10% for Computer and Mathematical occupations. This produces a projected growth of almost 60,000 jobs in health/education and technology jobs.
- From right before the great recession in 2008, through 2021, the size of the workforce for the NOW region has contracted 125,000 workers from a high of just above 1.52 million workers in 2008 to just above 1.4 million workers. This represents a contraction of the workforce of approximately eight percent (8%). The primary reason for this is beginning in 2008, the very first of the “baby boomers” generation who were born in in early 1946, 9 months after the end of World War II, started turning 62 years of age. In addition, the pandemic created a secondary contraction containing additional baby boomer retirees, plus individuals who were otherwise needed to be home to provide care for family members displaced from care, work or school by the pandemic. This contraction has had a major effect on the ability of the region to produce enough workforce to support existing, expanding, and/or new employers to the region. This in turn has served as a drag on the ability of the region to meet its maximum possible potential for economic growth.
- Growth is expected to continue for middle- and higher-skill jobs. Opportunity employment represents a larger share of the jobs available in Northeast Ohio than in other areas. It is defined as: employment accessible to workers without a bachelor’s degree and typically paying above

the national annual median wage (\$37,690). Additionally, baseline skills, often called 'soft' or non-technical skills, are critical for middle- and high-skilled jobs in today's workforce.

- Jobseekers may have hurdles to employment. These could include: Racial bias; Criminal offense history; Disability; Transportation; and Substance Abuse. Veterans report consistently facing a job market that has difficulty translating skills acquired in military occupations to civilian jobs.
- Individuals face other hurdles to their ability to pursue the training they need to acquire the skills to qualify for the good jobs that are in-demand that provide career pathways and good wages. Some of these barriers include: Post-secondary education is expensive and many are not aware that resources for job training are available; many individuals have literacy, numeracy and academic barriers to enter the desired course of training; too many lack quality information about good job opportunities and employers; there are challenges to achieving a High School Diploma or Equivalency; support services to help with transportation, child care, income support, food, etc. are not widely known to people interested in job training; many low-skilled workers are working and therefore cannot take time off or stop working to pursue training; and many still face a digital barrier to accessing virtual training or education (digital skills, equipment, and high-speed, low-cost internet access).

#### **What are the Workforce Development Services available in the Region?**

- **Job Matching:** The OMJ centers work directly with employers to find qualified job candidates. In addition, the staff work with the jobseekers to identify their skills, interests, unique employment situations, and specific barriers. The centers offer hands-on and self-directed services in the physical OMJ locations as well as a variety of online offerings. The plan articulates specific services that are available to businesses and jobseekers for job matching and also discusses the services delivered by core partner programs within the comprehensive OMJ centers.
- **Job Training:** Job training funding and services are available for eligible individuals (dislocated workers, low-income adults and youth with barriers to employment) in in-demand occupations. An Individual Employment Plan is created for each person who enters training. Success is measured by completion of training and placement into employment. There are also employer-based job training programs available: On-the-Job Training; Customized Training; Incumbent Worker Training; and Transitional Jobs. There is also training available for individuals through eligible training providers using Individual Training Accounts (ITAs).

#### **What are the Workforce Development Strategies for the Region?**

The delivery of workforce development services within the region are done within the context of strategies to achieve the overall goals of the system:

1. To be business-led and to focus on in-demand occupations;
2. To prioritize those individuals who are most in need of services;

3. To operate within meaningful collaborations with core partner programs, secondary and post-secondary education providers as well as community organizations that provide complementary and support services to individual customers; and
4. To administer services in order to achieve results for businesses and jobseekers, to be in compliance with all laws and regulations, to be transparent and accountable for these public resources, and to be innovative and agile to meet the changing needs of the labor market.

Specific strategies to ensure that services are driven by the needs of business consist of: the leadership and participation of the business members on the WDBs; the numerous arrangements and programs that have been put in place with Economic Development entities; and strong support for regional sector partnerships that have been recently established for the three key industry sectors of Manufacturing, Healthcare and Information Technology. Additionally, the WDBs actively promote and provide information on “in-demand” jobs through specific activities during “In-Demand Jobs Week,” partnerships with the regional public service station *Ideastream’s* “American Graduate: Getting to Work,” and identifying and utilizing the labor market data that has been produced for the region regarding skills gaps.

Providing a focus on those individuals who are most in need of workforce services requires strategies to make the services easily accessible, which include: the “one-stop” availability of all WIOA services and those of the core partners in the comprehensive OhioMeansJobs centers; making available both self-service and staff-provided individualized services; providing virtual access and remote services on-line; and, collaborating with other organizations in the community to provide neighborhood-level services such as libraries. To address the barriers some may have to getting a job or entering job training, strategies for assisting with transportation are in place, and support may be provided for childcare, purchasing work equipment, or other stipends. A recent strategy of using Transitional Jobs funding for those with little or no work history has been implemented in three of the workforce areas.

Successfully operating the workforce development system in the region relies upon numerous collaborations and partnerships with and between all organizations providing services through the OMJ centers, formalized annually through Memoranda of Understanding in each local area. Additionally, strong relationships with education and training providers as well as local government and community-based organizations that can offer supplementary services are vital. These strategies are in place to enable the system to achieve results for both jobseekers and businesses.

## INTRODUCTION

### The NOW Plan's Guiding Principles

1. The NOW Regional Plan is aligned with the Combined State Plan.
2. The five Workforce Development Boards representing the eight counties of the Northeast Ohio Workforce (NOW) region collaborated to produce this plan.
3. The NOW Directors (the five WDB Area Executive Directors/Directors) meet quarterly to continue to implement the regional plan and to identify new workforce development solutions and innovations.
4. Strategies addressed in the regional workforce plan, will not be repeated in each of the five required local plans.
5. Chief Local Elected Officials (CLEOs) and members of the Workforce Development Boards were notified and invited to participate in this plan's development.
6. Workforce Boards will continue to work closely with those education institutions that provide adult basic education, career technical training and other post-secondary credentials that are in demand. The boards will also deliver Youth workforce programs to address the needs of youth who are disconnected from the education systems.
7. This plan is required by WIOA, provides strategies for the northeast Ohio workforce, and strategies for the Workforce Boards to align strategies to serve businesses and job seekers and achieve the goals of the plan.
8. For purposes of the regional plan, regional initiatives and strategies do not require all five workforce areas to sign-on. Instead, if two or more of the five WDBs are working together to achieve a goal, objective or activity, it will be considered regional.
9. This plan leverages work that has been led or conducted by others in intersecting spheres of influence to be more efficient and to utilize the needed expertise from the community. For example, other organizations are addressing the transportation issue, and excellent workforce research and labor market analyses have been produced for the region. Our goal is to create a more usable, streamlined regional workforce plan that eliminates the redundancies of the current 2017 NOW plan and links to existing analyses and information instead of repeating it.
10. The plan incorporates the major priority of addressing individuals who have been impacted by the recent pandemic recession as well as those who are low-income and/or have been left behind by the higher-skills economy to provide more choices/options for employment and careers and to provide employers with a qualified workforce.

Ohio's WIOA Combined State Plan (PY 2020-PY2023) continues Ohio's commitment to build a strong economic climate in collaboration with local workforce development partners. To support its strategic workforce vision, Ohio has identified the following four goals for preparing an educated and skilled



workforce, including youth and individuals with barriers to employment and other populations along with meeting the skilled workforce needs of employers.

- ✓ Goal 1: Coordinate efforts across entities (public, private, local, and State) to reduce unnecessary duplication and maximize resources.
- ✓ Goal 2: Leverage technology and data to create efficiencies and improve services and outcomes.
- ✓ Goal 3: Deploy locally driven programs that produce results.
- ✓ Goal 4: Invest in and promote education and training for jobs that 1. empower people with 21st Century skills and strengthen Ohio's strategic economic advantage, and 2. ensure that our State has a workforce to support the health and well-being of Ohioans, their families, and communities.

The NOW WIOA regional plan supports the goals of the State WIOA Combined Plan.

## The NOW Regional Plan Requirements

Section 106 (c) (1) of WIOA requires regional plans to address eight required areas:

- Establishing regional service strategies;
- Focusing on in-demand jobs and industry sectors for the region;
- Determining whether administrative cost arrangements are needed in the region;
- Supporting transportation improvements and other supportive services, as appropriate for the region;
- Coordinating services with regional economic development services and providers;
- Following state guidance on requirements to negotiate and reach agreement with the Governor on local levels of performance and
- Incorporating local plans.

Section 108 of WIOA contains 22 subsections regarding the elements that local plans must address. This regional plan incorporates all of the local planning elements except for those specific administrative processes of the local area (subsections 16 and 17). Also, any special initiatives of a workforce area are found in the local plans.

We have determined that there is no need for administrative cost pooling between the workforce areas in the region, therefore, no strategies regarding this element are included in this plan

## ECONOMIC & LABOR MARKET ANALYSIS

The creation of the Regional NOW plan in 2017 was assisted by an extensive labor market analysis conducted by a hired consultant. A 24-page description of this analysis was included in the Regional NOW plan itself and supplemental data was appended. The labor market update included in this plan relies on data and analyses produced by sources such as the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS), Team NEO (the state economic development entity for northeastern Ohio), the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey and other sources. Our goal here is to provide the highlights from these data sources pertaining to the workforce challenges in northeast Ohio which drive workforce development service strategies.

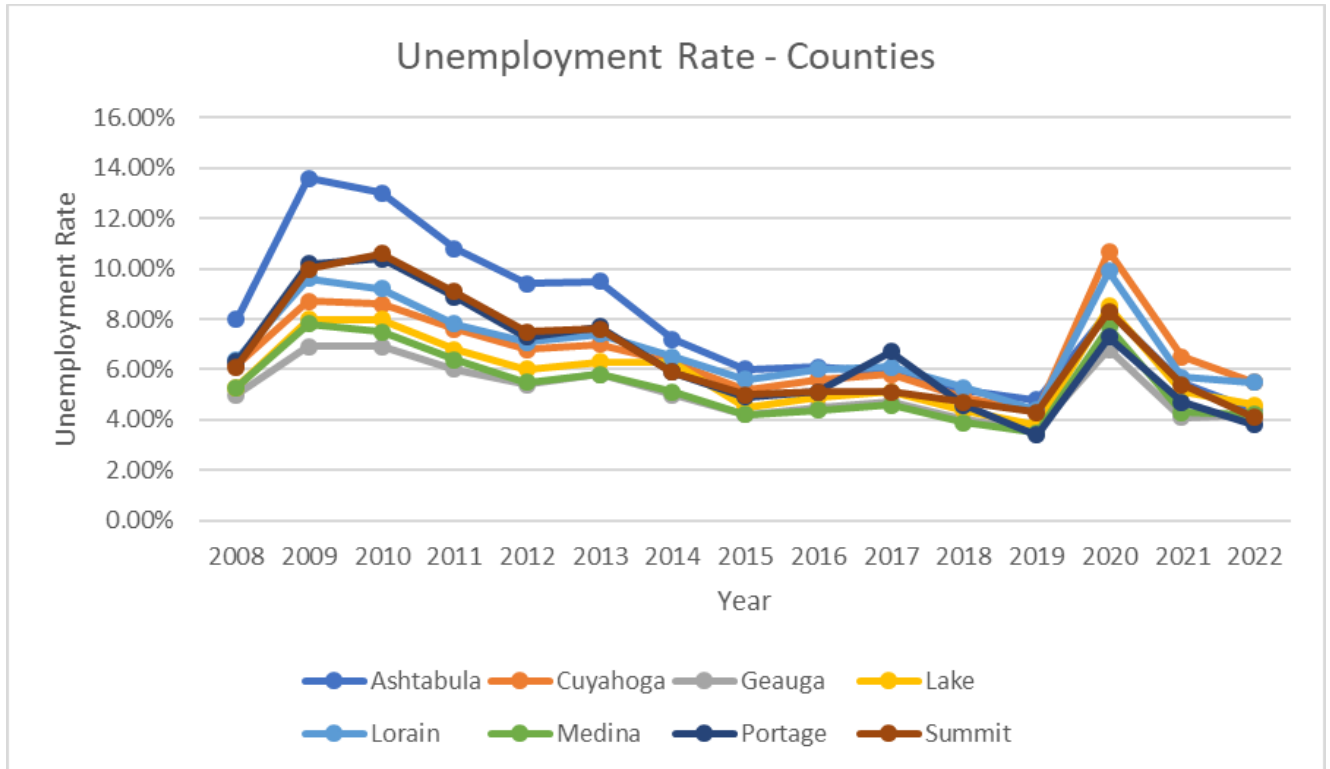
In addition to the labor market challenges that were documented in the 2017 Regional NOW plan and still persist today, the economic challenges created by the pandemic and the need for economic recovery presented a new urgency for the workforce development system. Moving out of the pandemic, the region has seen unemployment levels return close to pre-pandemic levels. According to ODJFS, the unemployment rates for the eight counties in this region in December 2022 were much lower than the previous pandemic rates – i.e.:

- Cuyahoga: 3.6%
- Lorain: 3.5%
- Ashtabula: 4.3%
- Summit: 3.9%
- Portage: 3.7%
- Medina: 3.0%
- Lake: 3.3%
- Geauga: 2.9%

Also, for December 2022, the BLS reported the following data based on the region's two metropolitan statistical areas.

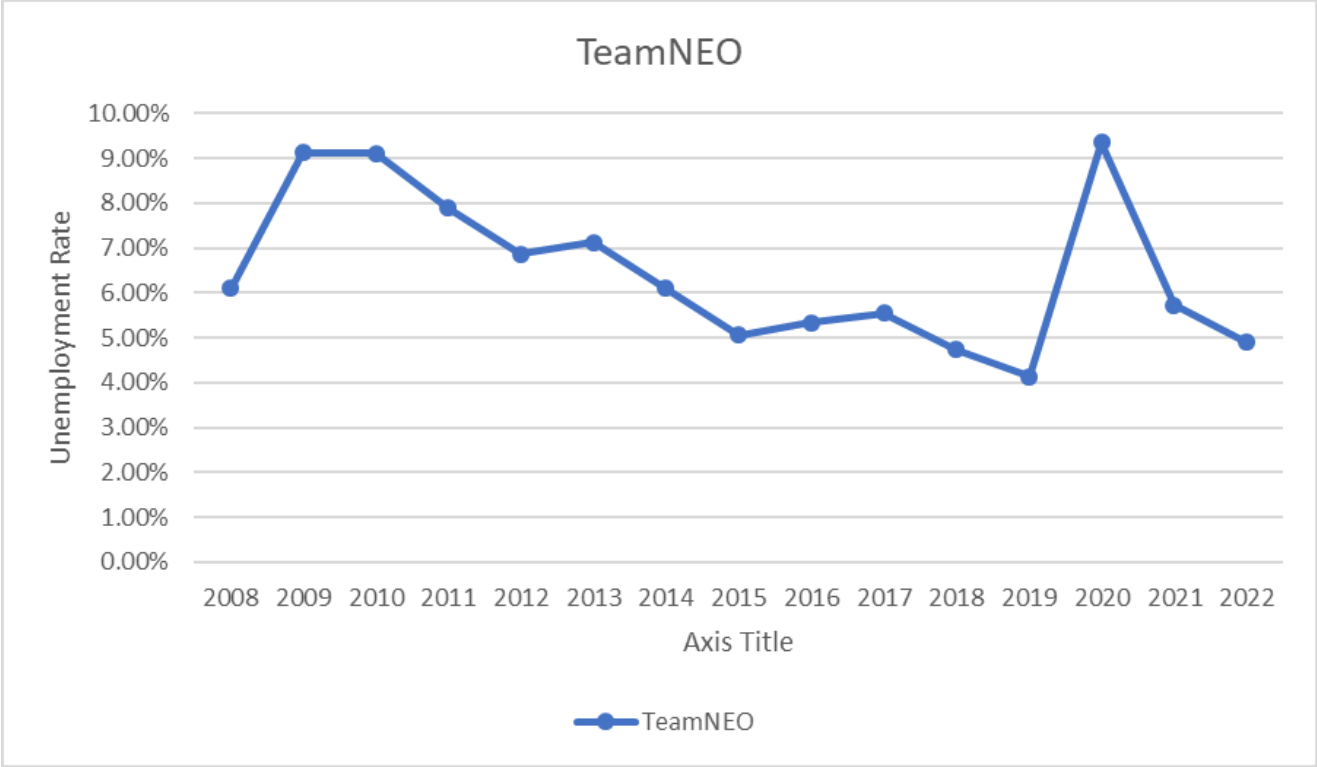
- Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor MSA:
  - Employed: 975,700
  - Unemployed: 34,500
  - Unemployment Rate: 3.4%
- Akron MSA:
  - Employed: 332,300
  - Unemployed: 13,400
  - Unemployment Rate: 3.9%

The following graph demonstrates the historic unemployment rates for each of the NOW Region's 8 counties for the time period from 2008 through 2022. This graph demonstrates that each of the eight counties are similarly situated in their unemployment patterns for that fourteen year period of time. All eight counties had a spike of unemployment in 2009 as an effect of the great recession that occurred during 2008-2009. Then, each of the eight counties saw their unemployment rates recede to lows in 2019, followed by a large one short, sharp spike in 2020 during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, the region has returned to unemployment rates between three and five percent (3%-5%).



The graph above was generated using labor market information data provided on a monthly basis for each of the eight counties situated within the NOW region. Each month was averaged into a yearly unemployment rate and then plotted onto the graph above.

The following graph also demonstrates the unemployment rate for the same period as the previous graph, for the fourteen year period from 2008 until 2022, but in this instance, as a collective eight county area, and not weighted by population of the respective counties. It shows the same general trends, with a spike in unemployment during the great recession for 2009 and into 2010, and a shorter spike during 2020 in the first year of COVID.



The impact of the pandemic on nearly 48,000 unemployed workers in this region was worse for low-skilled workers in jobs such as hospitality, restaurants and tourism. Job losses for African American, Hispanic and other minority workers is much higher than those for white workers. Additionally, the unemployment rate does not reflect those who have dropped out of the labor force altogether. It has been widely reported that the COVID pandemic has forced far more women than men out of the labor force. Analysis conducted by Cleveland State University’s Levin College of Urban Affairs for the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County WDB documented that a much lower rates of labor force participation exists in poorer neighborhoods pre-pandemic. This too has declined since the COVID pandemic, as BLS reported that nationally, the Labor Force Participation rate was 95.6% in January 2022 compared to a rate of 61.4% in January 2021.

Overall, this has produced what some economists refer to as a “K – shaped” recovery where high-skilled workers continue to prosper while comparatively-lower-skilled workers, especially African Americans, Hispanics, other minorities, and those living in disadvantaged neighborhoods continue to lose ground economically. This is a critical time for the public workforce development system to focus on these populations.

The intent of this section of the NOW Plan is to provide the WDB leadership in Northeast Ohio with data-based insights, implications, recommendations and the labor market dynamics needed to inform the regional as well as local plans for the five workforce areas (Areas 2, 3, 4, 5 and 19) that include counties from the Cleveland and Akron MSAs, plus Ashtabula County.

Other important aspects of the regional labor market were identified and documented in the NOW regional plan and remain important to workforce development strategies. The regional plan for this

eight-county area of northeast Ohio reflects the joint efforts of the five WDB Boards and OMJ Centers to agree on strategic directions to guide local goals and actions over the next four years. Understanding these issues can help WDB leadership to agree on their role in addressing them and how to develop a quality workforce system within the region, while meeting industry workforce needs, and helping all segments of the workforce achieve their full potential.

The three key industries which have been identified for the region are: Healthcare, Manufacturing and Information Technology (IT). Additionally, good-paying middle-skills jobs in opportunity occupations have been identified by analysts.

According to the Census Bureau’s 2021 American Community Survey 5-year data estimates, the following data describe pertinent economic and demographic factors for The Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor MSA and the Akron MSA.

### Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor MSA

|                             |           |
|-----------------------------|-----------|
| Population 16 & Older       | 1,697,380 |
| In Labor Force              | 63.7%     |
| Not in Labor Force          | 36.3%     |
| Median Household Income     | \$61,320  |
| % Earning < \$50,000        | 41.7%     |
| % on Cash Public Assistance | 2.8%      |
| % on SNAP                   | 13.5%     |
| White                       | 71.6%     |
| Black                       | 19.5%     |
| Asian                       | 2.3%      |
| Hispanic                    | 6.2%      |

### Akron MSA

|                         |          |
|-------------------------|----------|
| Population 16 & Older   | 576,222  |
| % in Labor Force        | 65.1%    |
| % not in Labor Force    | 34.9%    |
| Median Household Income | \$63,331 |
| % Earning < \$50,000    | 40.1%    |

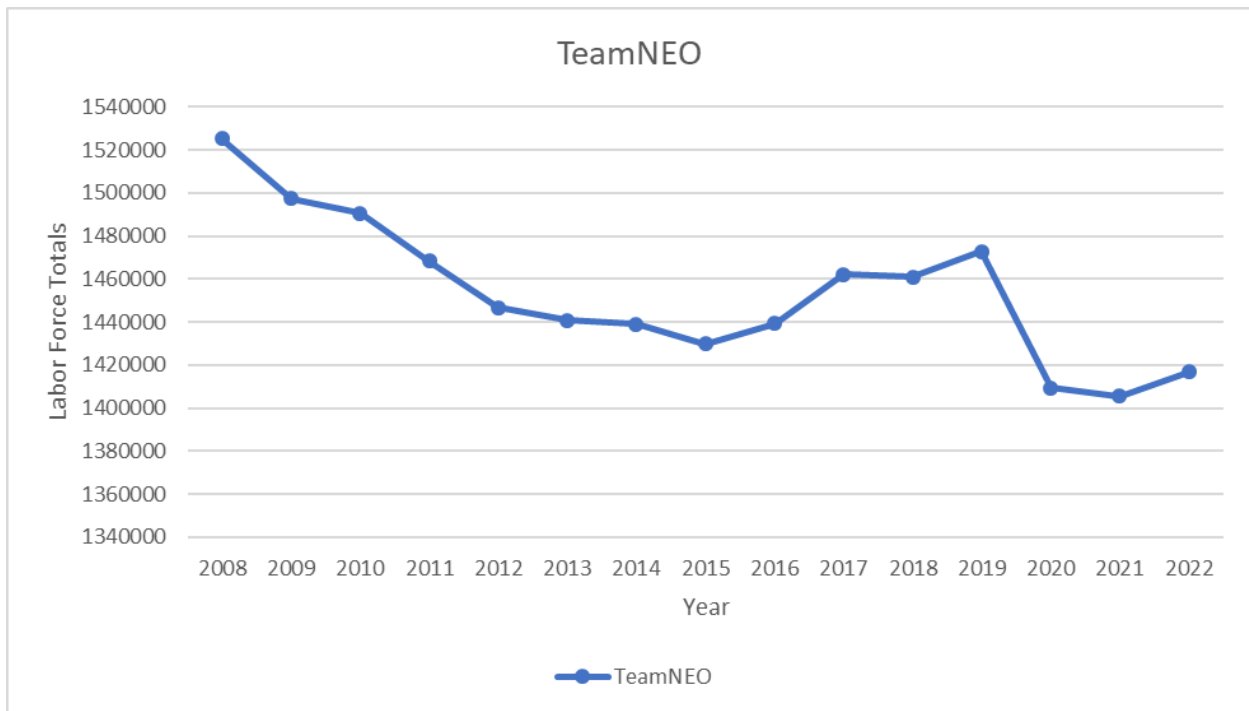
|                             |       |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| % on Cash Public Assistance | 4.8%  |
| % on SNAP                   | 13.0% |
| White                       | 79.6% |
| Black                       | 12.0% |
| Asian                       | 3.3%  |
| Hispanic                    | 2.3%  |

An article in [Cleveland.com](http://Cleveland.com) on 1/3/20 by Rich Exner titled, "Every Ohio City and County Ranked for Poverty, Child Poverty: Census Estimates," was based on ACS data from 2014-2018. Living in poverty was defined as income less than or equal to \$24,465 for a family of four with two parents; or \$20,231 for a single parent with two children. Three cities in the NOW region ranked in the top 10 for Ohio cities for child poverty: East Cleveland (56.5%). Cleveland (50.9%), and Ashtabula (50.5%). High poverty rates overall and for children pose barriers to the development of the current and future workforce. Poverty rates across the eight County region are:

| County        | Rank      | Poverty Rate | Child Poverty Rate |
|---------------|-----------|--------------|--------------------|
| Ashtabula     | 7         | 20.3         | 30.5               |
| Cuyahoga      | 18        | 18.1         | 26.7               |
| Lorain        | 42        | 13.7         | 20.9               |
| Summit        | 52        | 13.1         | 18.7               |
| Portage       | 60        | 13.1         | 17.0               |
| Lake          | 74        | 8.3          | 12.1               |
| Medina        | 83        | 6.4          | 8.9                |
| <b>Geauga</b> | <b>85</b> | <b>6.1</b>   | <b>8.2</b>         |

In addition to the pockets of high poverty in this region, the region has experienced a significant contraction in the size of its total workforce for the twelve (12) year period from 2008 through 2022. In 2008, the NOW's region hit its historically largest workforce in the modern era, just shy of 1.53 million workers. Then, in mid 2008, the first group of baby boomers turned 62, and the great recession started. Those two events together combined to produce a significant sharp contraction of approximately 6.6% of the NOW region for the following seven (7) years. By 2015, the NOW region had shed approximately 100,000 employees from its peak in 2008.

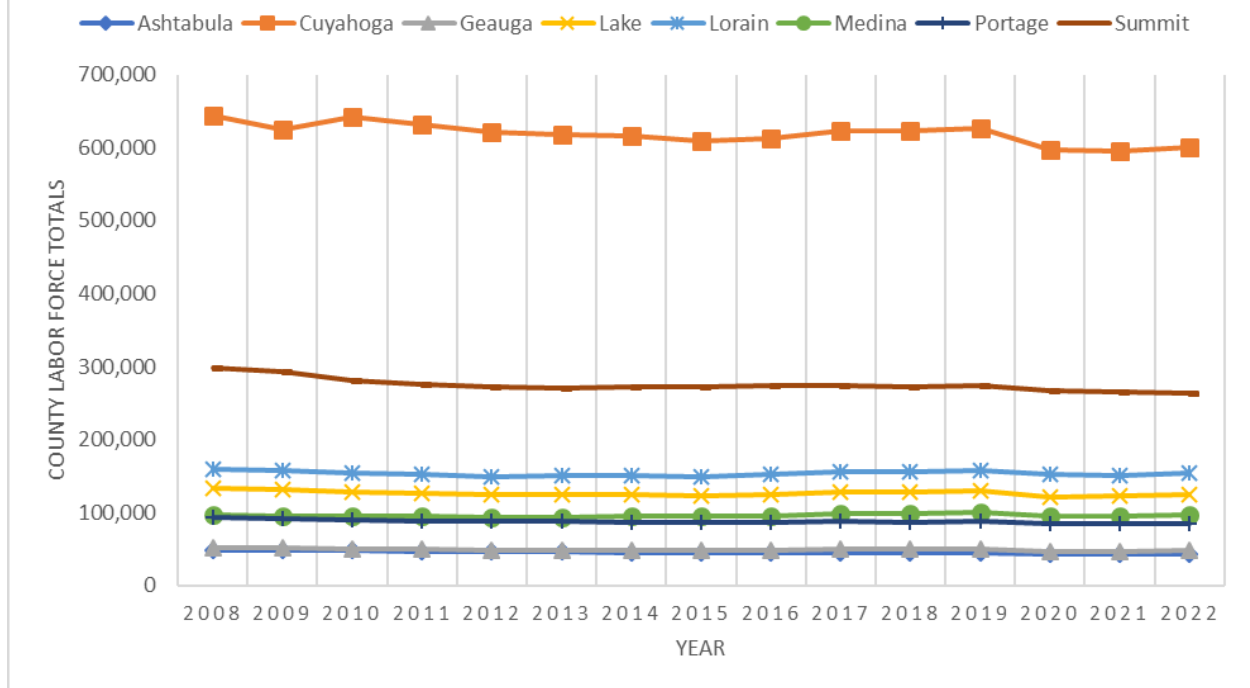
From 2015 through the end of 2019, the NOW region recovered slightly, gaining back approximately 40,000 of the 100,000 workers lost. Then the pandemic arrived in March of 2020, triggering another significant contraction of the workforce. The combination of the deaths from the pandemic, plus the need for many workers who are immune-deficient, or had to stay at home to provide care to children who were displaced from school, all contributed to this contraction of the workforce. In addition, the transition to online or remote work skills required of all workers, combined with the concern that the pandemic would cause greater health problems or even death, caused many of those baby boomers who had not retired in the previous decade to take that option in 2020 and 2021. Unlike during the great recession, during the pandemic, the stock market remained strong, and so did the value of the housing market. With retirement plans and home values strong, this, combined together with all of the other pandemic factors, produced a second wave of contraction of the workforce shown on the graph below from 2020 through 2021.



In all, from the high in 2008 to the low in 2021, the entire NOW region contracted by approximately 125,000 workers, for a total loss of approximately 8% of the workforce during that 13 year time period. While 2022 has shown some modest gains and recovery, economists project that the size of the workforce will remain at or near these contracted levels for most of the remainder of the decade while the baby boomers continue to cycle out of the workforce.

The following graph shows the contraction of the workforce, but on a county-by-county basis for the same fourteen year period, from 2008 through 2022. It should be noted that while the NOW region's overall workforce contraction was approximately 8% from 2008 through 2021, that in some of the individual counties, the contraction was much sharper and deeper.

## EACH COUNTY'S YEARLY LABOR FORCE, NOT SEASONALLY ADJUSTED



In addition to the issues of pockets of high poverty and contracting workforce within the region, the content of the plan below describes other challenges the region faces in developing its workforce: the mismatch of jobseeker skills with skills sought by employers; the up-skilling of jobs resulting from technology advances; local labor markets extend beyond the boundaries of local workforce boards; and opportunities for workforce development to prepare workers for careers and higher wages in middle-skill jobs and opportunity occupations.

The Northeast Ohio labor market continues to be challenged by the mismatch of skills that jobseekers possess to the skills that employers require.

The biggest issue presented by the current situation is that although there are many workers that need jobs, the skills/qualifications possessed by jobseekers do not match employers' needs for new workers. This produces a confounding result:

- Employers are frustrated that they cannot find qualified workers to fill their open jobs which impedes their ability to grow their businesses;
- Unemployed workers in need of jobs are unable to connect to open jobs because they lack the qualifications;
- This creates a drag on the economic recovery needed for the region.



The state and regional workforce development system has a keen focus on prioritizing strategies and services on “in-demand” jobs and, as described in this plan, has implemented and will continue to implement actions to address these mismatches.

Team NEO continues to initiate a “deep dive” analysis of this issue in northeast Ohio as published in the organizations’ “Aligning Opportunities in Northeast Ohio” Report. This report provides excellent documentation regarding in-demand skills and related credentials being produced. This work focuses on the three key industries in this region. ([Job Demand & Skills Gaps in Northeast Ohio | Team NEO](#)). Some of the key findings are:

- The region is not producing enough high-skilled workers.
  - By 2025, 65% of workers will need a 2- or 4-year degree to qualify for the available jobs. Currently, 34% of the population have a 2- or 4-year degree, and 21% have some college/training but no degree.
  - The workforce in the region does not possess the skills that employers are seeking to fill their jobs in sufficient numbers. In 2021, the number of unfilled entry level jobs in these key industries was: Manufacturing: 5,954; Healthcare: 4,689; and IT: 3,177. This totals approximately 13,800 entry-level jobs going unfilled in these three industries.
  - African American, Hispanic and other minority groups have lower levels of educational attainment, higher unemployment rates, and are more likely to work in lower wage occupations.

Technology is driving changes in industry products and services and job requirements are also changing to incorporate these higher technical skills.

As industries adopt new methods, occupational structures and jobs are being impacted. The end result is that occupations across the spectrum are being up-skilled and traditionally lower-skill jobs are now middle-skill jobs, many of which are entry-level jobs. This means that workers need more digital awareness and skills to work in traditional jobs in manufacturing, healthcare and any other sector.

Relatively fewer jobs are available for workers with no more than a high school credential. The chances of being employed today in NEO jumps dramatically as workers complete some college, and even more so when Associate’s and Baccalaureate degrees are attained. ODJFS data for Northeast Ohio regarding online job adds between 1/1/22 and 10/1/22 shows that the majority of jobs require higher educational achievement:

- 41.4% GE/HS
- 14.8% Associate’s Degree
- 38.9% Bachelor’s Degree
- 4.8% Doctoral Degree

Not all workers have kept pace with the rate of change in skill and job requirements. Moreover, many workers face barriers that prevent them from gaining the necessary skills to benefit from the region's jobs and wage gains.

The region's primary infrastructure for improving an existing and emergent workforce are the very entities that make up our workforce system: postsecondary education (especially colleges and universities); the public workforce system (funded by federal and state resources); economic development organizations; and other efforts to support talent development that address the region's gaps. Greater alignment and partnership among these regional workforce development partners is vital to hastening the pace that improves workforce quality for the employer. The NOW Regional Plan embraces the challenges and opportunities that are possible in a collaborative system, one in which WDB leadership and roles are articulated clearly and agreed upon.

The NOW Region is a confluence of overlapping *local* labor markets where significant shares of residents of one county or workforce area work in another.

The regional plan reflects the reality that the majority of jobs are in two counties (Cuyahoga and Summit) that are part of two different workforce areas; and that the labor market opportunities for workers and employers alike are not aligned with the political boundaries created for the five workforce areas. However, there are many ways for the five local workforce systems to work together to improve outcomes for the region as a whole. The regional and local plans identify ways to pursue regional cooperation.

Declining population in northeast Ohio presents challenges to job growth. Opportunity employment represents a larger share in northeast Ohio.

TeamNEO reported that the population in northeast Ohio dropped by 155,000 to 4.278 million between 2001 – 2018, and the labor force dropped by 146,000 to 2.111 million. Northeast Ohio industry employment projections covering 2018 – 2028 provided by ODJFS shows a decline in the number of jobs in the goods producing sector of the economy of 6.8% but shows an increase in job growth in the Personal Care & Service providing sector of 12.2%, an increase in job growth for Healthcare Support occupations of 11.3%, an increase for Computer and Mathematical occupations of 8.6% and an increase in Construction & Extraction Occupations of 7.7%. This produces a growth of almost 26,300 jobs in those occupations with expected increases and a loss of over 13,000 manufacturing jobs. However, even with the number of manufacturing jobs declining, open jobs go unfilled for that industry due to the skills gap, as discussed above.

The Federal Reserve Banks of Cleveland, Philadelphia and Atlanta have conducted research helpful to the workforce development system regarding "Opportunity Employment." Opportunity employment is defined as employment accessible to workers without a bachelor's degree and typically paying above the national annual median wage (\$37,690), adjusted for regional differences in consumer prices. It found that opportunity employment accounts for 21.6 percent of total employment in the 121 metro areas analyzed in this report.

For the Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor area, the share is 30.1% which makes it the 7<sup>th</sup> highest share among these metro areas. The top ten occupations are:

- Registered Nurses, (Note: However, most major hospitals in the region require a BSN degree for employment or at least a commitment to attain a BSN degree within a period of time.)
- Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive,
- General and Operations Managers,
- Customer Service Representatives,
- Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks,
- Maintenance and Repair Workers, General,
- Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers,
- First-Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support Workers,
- First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers, and
- Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses

The Akron MSA was not one of the 121 areas reviewed in the comparison report. However, an earlier analysis of Ohio's eight large metropolitan areas, listed the top ten opportunity occupations for Akron:

- Registered Nurses,
- Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers,
- Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive,
- General and Operations Managers,
- Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks,
- First-Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support Workers,
- Maintenance and Repair Workers, General,
- Medical Secretaries,
- First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers, and
- Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses.

Using this valuable information for career counseling and investments of WIOA training funds enables individuals to choose those areas of interest that are in-demand and will yield higher-paying career opportunities.

Growth is expected to continue for middle- and higher-skill jobs.

In the region, jobs in demand for skilled workers are evenly split between middle- and higher-skill jobs, based on a comparison of total job ads for middle- and higher-skill jobs for the eight-county region. Demand for lower-skill jobs is declining in in-demand industry sectors where employers are up-skilling these jobs.

The level of postsecondary education that employers typically seek serves as a proxy for differences in skill level. Middle-skill jobs typically require less than a bachelor's degree and pay better than average earnings. Thousands of these in demand jobs exist in the region and present the best employment opportunities for the two-thirds of the region's workforce who lack a four-year degree.

According to researchers at the Bureau of Labor Statistics, “A number of them (jobs) are in growing STEM fields – science, technology, engineering and math. We’ve identified a number of STEM jobs that need less than a bachelor’s degree to get started, and also pay close to or above the median for all occupations in May 2015: \$36,200.”

Regarding digital skills, the NOW 2017 Regional Plan found that:

1. Foundational digital skills are needed throughout the economy at every level. There is a tremendous demand in Northeast Ohio for middle-skill jobs where digital skills are as important to employers as the specific technical skills needed for the positions.
2. Digital proficiencies include a multitude of office and organizational software skills that are needed to be productive on the job. These start with Excel, Office Suite, and VPN, ERPs, etc. The demand for these skills in a wide range of technician and support jobs throughout the economy are well documented in real-time online job postings and are the reason these jobs are predominately middle-skill in today’s economy.

The research completed for the NOW plan showed that up to 90%<sup>1</sup> of job postings include a digital component ranging from knowledge of different software to coding skills and beyond. Further, the research supported the notion that all employees (both current and future) need to have foundational skills in digitization, which will enhance their employment outlook in the northeast Ohio marketplace and qualify them for moving into middle- and higher-skilled positions.

3. In many technology-based industries in NEO, and not just in IT occupations, the ability of workers to *write code* is the key to meeting employer expectations for higher-skill jobs and qualifies job seekers to advance along or between career paths.
4. The impact of Disruptive Technologies, such as 3-D fabrication, advanced uses of robotics, and the digitizing of data on just about everything has led to challenges of managing Big Data and increased attention to how to analyze and use masses of data to improve success of industry and consumer experiences. These technologies are impacting Advanced Manufacturing; Healthcare and Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services. As evidenced in job posting data, there is a merging of engineering, IT and business intelligence and process skills, and transforming job assignments and occupational structure.

Additionally, **baseline skills**, or what are often called ‘soft’ or non-technical skills are critical for middle- and high-skilled jobs in today’s workforce. These are not the typical ‘show up on time’ workplace attributes. Rather skills mentioned in job ads that are more germane to successful performance on the job. These include communication, writing, problem solving skills, etc. Baseline [soft] skills are most emphasized in roles that involve higher levels of personal interaction relative to technical activities. In Customer Support roles, over half of all requested skills are baseline skills. Clerical and Administrative, Human Resources, Hospitality, Sales, and Management are the other areas where employers place the greatest emphasis on baseline skills.

Burning Glass has conceptualized the broad range of soft or foundational skill sets into six clusters that are required for some occupations and industries. Those skill sets are: Customer Service; Presentation and Persuasion; Detail Oriented; Supervision; Positive Disposition; and Project Management, Research and Strategy.

This analysis makes it clear that the workforce development system must be focused on preparing and connecting workers to jobs. To do so, policies and strategies must also address barriers workers have to obtaining employment as well as hurdles faced by individuals who need to improve their skills to qualify for these good jobs.

#### Jobseekers often have additional barriers to employment:

- Racial bias;
- Criminal offense history;
- Disability;
- Transportation: Public means of transit in the NOW Region, outside of Metro areas, can be difficult (especially time schedules) or non-existent.
- Substance Abuse: Ability to pass a drug test is still a requirement of hire and a challenge for many job seekers.
- Employers have difficulty in translating skills acquired in military occupations to civilian jobs. (A “crosswalk” to enable this comparison is available through [OhioMeansJobs.com](http://OhioMeansJobs.com).)

#### Hurdles to improving skills:

In addition to the barriers listed above, individuals face other hurdles to their ability to pursue the training they need to acquire the skills to qualify for the good jobs that provide career pathways and good wages. Some of these barriers include:

- ✓ Post-secondary education is expensive which is a deterrent to some. Many individuals are not aware that resources for job training are available through WIOA, the Perkins Act and other places, and these may go unused. The number of hours of minimum wage work needed to pay for 4 years of a public college for a millennial is 4,459 hours as compared to the cost for a boomer which was 306 hours. 56% of millennials have student loans. Paradoxically, there was \$87 million in unused federal funds in Ohio in 2019 through FAFSA which could have funded the post-secondary education of 21,600 more students.
- ✓ Literacy, numeracy and academic skills are too low to enter the course of training they want to pursue. This typically requires remedial education to address reading, math, etc. before starting job training/skill upgrading courses, which ultimately increases the amount of time and the cost of pursuing the training
  - ✓ 58.5% of those pursuing a sub-baccalaureate credential need remedial education. Of those, 24.6% complete their remediation and courses on time.
  - ✓ 25% of those pursuing a bachelor’s degree need remedial education. Of those, 38.4% complete their remediation and courses on time.

- ✓ Many lack access to basic information about what are the good jobs, career paths and how to access job training at community colleges, career technical training institutions, apprenticeship programs, etc.
- ✓ Similarly, new freshmen commence and complete post-secondary courses in fields with little labor market value or low demand for workers.
- ✓ For those who dropped out of High School, there are challenges to achieving a High School Diploma or Equivalency. In recent years, the GED has become more challenging academically, is more expensive to take, and is only accessible on the internet.
- ✓ Support services to help with transportation, child care, etc. are not widely accessible to assist people in job training.
- ✓ Many low-skilled workers are working and cannot take time off or stop working to take training. Many low-skilled jobs have irregular schedules which create obstacles to taking a course with a standing schedule. There is a strong need to increase the number of "Earn and Learn" opportunities like: apprenticeships, internships, co-ops, work experience opportunities, etc.
- ✓ Too many still face a digital barrier to accessing virtual training or education (digital skills, equipment, and high-speed, low-cost internet access).

The services and strategies available through the public workforce development system are focused on providing the assistance needed to individuals who are facing barriers and hurdles to acquiring the needed skills to obtain good jobs on a career pathway.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

WIOA creates a public federal-state-local comprehensive workforce development system that requires a solid understanding of the region's labor market demand for workers in order to provide services and strategies to connect businesses with the skilled workforce needed; to target investments in skill training to in-demand jobs; to prioritize intensive and training services to individuals most in need who have barriers to employment; and to create collaborations with education and support service providers across the region. The system is led at a policy level by the Chief Local Elected Officials and the Workforce Development Boards they appoint which are business-led and comprised of local leaders in business, education, economic development, organized labor and key government and community organizations. This section addresses the services provided by this system in the NOW region according to the major customers of the system: businesses, jobseekers, and youth and adults with barriers to employment.

As required by WIOA, each local workforce development area operates a comprehensive one-stop career center which are called Ohio Means Jobs (OMJ) centers. All WIOA-funded services as well as

workforce services from the core programs mandated by WIOA are provided through these OMJ centers and in other locations in the community. WIOA creates a performance-based structure for providing services and each local workforce area is required to negotiate performance levels with the state annually. All workforce areas in the region have been successful in achieving these performance goals.

The OMJ centers work directly with employers to find qualified job candidates. In addition, the staff work with the job seekers to identify their unique employment situations and develop strategies to overcome specific barriers. The centers offer hands-on and self-directed services in the physical OMJ locations as well as a variety of online services.

Additionally, the state operates [OhioMeansJobs.com](http://OhioMeansJobs.com) which is more than a job board and resume bank as it provides a multi-faceted online career counseling center that provides a menu of career services options for all Ohioans, especially those residing in rural areas with limited access to a physical OMJ center location. [OhioMeansJobs.com](http://OhioMeansJobs.com) also provides a front door for individuals and businesses that are interested in employment programs. Virtual online services are available for use by individuals who can access it online through [OhioMeansJobs.com](http://OhioMeansJobs.com). The state of Ohio has completed a complete overhaul and update of this tool and it was just launched in March 2021.

The site offers registered users step-by-step instructions to help register for online services including:

- ✓ A virtual “backpack” that includes a document storage element, school, scholarship, career and employment program searches;
- ✓ Information on local career fairs and workshops; and,
- ✓ Free practice testing including ACT, SAT, GED, WorkKeys.
- ✓ Information on apprenticeship program and internships.

The following sections describe the services available at comprehensive OhioMeansJobs Centers.

[OhioMeansJobs Centers in the NOW Region offer the following \*Job Seeker Services\*:](#)

- ✓ Career Counseling
- ✓ Basic Skills Assessment
- ✓ Career Advancement Education and Training Opportunities
- ✓ Job and Labor Market Information
- ✓ Informational Interviews
- ✓ Preparation of an Individual Employment Plan
- ✓ Information about Job Openings, Skills and Education Requirements, Wages and Benefits
- ✓ Resume Preparation and Job Interviewing Skills
- ✓ Job Referral and Placement
- ✓ Skill and Interest Inventories

- ✓ Job-Search Workshops and Seminars
- ✓ Links to Programs at community colleges and other job training providers
- ✓ Funding for training programs for eligible individuals
- ✓ Career Information and Guidance Assistance in Identifying Financial Resources to Support Employment, Education and Training Related Expenses
- ✓ Connections to Community Resources

OhioMeansJobs Centers in the NOW Region offer the following *Employer Services*:

- ✓ Assistance in preparing job openings
- ✓ Posting job openings
- ✓ Recruiting, screening and referring qualified candidates for job openings
- ✓ Providing pre-employment skill testing
- ✓ Scheduling and hosting employer interviewing sessions
- ✓ Providing funding for skills training for newly hired or incumbent workers through WIOA
- ✓ Creating services for mass recruitments and customized training programs
- ✓ Participating in the state-led “rapid response” activities for businesses that are experiencing mass layoffs or shut-downs
- ✓ Providing employers with access to resources for hiring and workforce development

OhioMeansJobs Centers in the NOW Region offer the following *Training Services*:

Individual Training Accounts (ITA)

Individual Training Accounts can be established on behalf of an eligible individual customer to purchase training services from an eligible provider (on the State approved eligible training provider list) that he/she selects in consultation with an OMJ Center case manager. Eligible individuals include low-income adults and youth who have barriers to employment and dislocated workers who were laid-off and cannot return to their previous occupation. ITAs account for the largest amount of training investments made in the region through WIOA. As required by WIOA, the training must be targeted to “in-demand” occupations and the state requires that 85% of WIOA training funds must be used for in-demand training. OMJ staff engage in eligibility determinations, career counseling and assessments of individuals in order to create an Individual Employment Plan for each person who will enter training. The Workforce Development Boards in the region work closely with the four community colleges that serve this area as well as other training providers in coordination with those programs also funded by the Carl Perkins Act. Regionally, these investments are focused on in-demand jobs in the key industries



of Manufacturing, Healthcare, and IT. The five Workforce Boards have worked to review each policy regarding local ITAs and have acted to make these policies more complementary across the region. To do so, policy changes were made in areas such as the amount of the cap for training and the duration of training.

### OJT (On-the Job Training)

The OJT model involves training that is provided by an employer (or in combination with a designated training entity) under a contract between the OMJ Center and the employer. As part of that contract, the paid participant (employee) is engaged in productive work in a job that provides:

- knowledge or skills essential to the full and adequate performance of the job;
- reimbursement to the employer for the extraordinary costs of providing the training and additional supervision related to the training up to a capped amount;
- limited duration training as appropriate to the occupation for which the participant is being trained, taking into account training content, the participant's prior work experience, and the participant's service strategy, as appropriate.

The five Boards also worked together to review all OJT policies in order to build on the best of each other's policies and work toward clarity for the business community.

### Customized Training

- designed to meet the special requirements of an employer (or a group of employers);
- developed and carried out through a commitment by the employer to employ, or in the case of incumbent workers, continue to employ, an individual upon successful completion of the training; and
- employers are required to contribute a significant amount of the cost of training as determined by the local Workforce Development Boards.

### Incumbent Worker Training (IWT)

Provides both workers and employers with the opportunity to build and maintain a quality workforce. Incumbent worker training can be used to help avert potential layoffs of employees, or to increase the skill levels of employees so they can be promoted within the company and create backfill opportunities for the employers. Under section 134(d)(4) of WIOA, local boards can use up to 20 percent of their adult and dislocated worker funds to provide for the cost of providing Incumbent Worker Training. IWT takes into account:

- The characteristics of the participants in the program;
- The relationship of the training to the competitiveness of a participant and employer; and
- Other factors the state or local boards may determine appropriate (e.g., the number of employees participating in the training, wage and benefit levels of those employees (both pre-

and post-participation earning), and the existence of other training and advancement opportunities provided by the employer).

Employers are required to pay for a significant cost of the training for those participants in IWT; this can be done through both cash and/or in-kind payments. Wages paid to participants, while in training, may be considered as a source of matching funds. Under section 134(d)(4)(D) of WIOA, the minimum amount of employer share in the IWT depends on the size of the employer:

- At least 10 percent of the cost, for employers with 50 or fewer employees;
- At least 25 percent of the cost, for employers with 51 to 100 employees; and,
- At least 50 percent of the cost, for employers with more than 100 employees.

#### Transitional Jobs

Three WDBs in the region (areas 2, 3 & 4) have created a program to provide transitional jobs which are targeted to jobseekers who have barriers to employment, may have little or no work history, or lost their jobs in the service industry during the pandemic and have no work experience in other industries who are hiring. This program provides incentives to employers to hire these workers by reimbursing businesses up to 100% of wages for a minimum of 20 hours per week and a minimum of \$10 per hour. The duration per worker is two to 12 months. The work experience provides the worker with a work history in order to build a resume and affords him or her with the opportunity to develop new and basic skills. As with all WIOA training, individuals must be eligible and an individual plan is developed for each worker with the hiring employer regarding job, wages, duration, etc.

#### OhioMeansJobs Center Services offered through Core Partner Programs

In addition to the services available in the OMJ centers described above which are authorized and funded by Title I of WIOA, the following related services are also offered through core partner programs. Each Workforce Development Board creates a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with these programs for the provision of these services as well as their financial contributions toward the operations of the OMJ centers.

- ✓ WIOA Title II authorizes the Adult Education and Literacy programs known as Aspire in Ohio and operated by the state. Services include education and testing for individuals in need of a High School Equivalency credential and English as a Second Language courses as well as other literacy programs. These services are available in the OMJ centers as well as other locations such as libraries and community-based organizations.
- ✓ WIOA Title III amended the Wagner-Peyser Act which provides employment services to jobseekers and businesses with a focus on the re-employment of unemployed workers. This program is operated by the state and WIOA requires these staff to be located in the OMJ centers. This close relationship with the state's employment services also provides the OMJ centers with strong connections to the state-run Unemployment Insurance system. The Boards receive information regarding unemployed claimants in the region so that a quick and pro-active approach is taken to contact them, inform them of the free services available and assist them in their reemployment.

- ✓ WIOA Title IV amended the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and requires the state agency tasked to deliver these services for jobseekers with a disability (Ohio Office of Disabilities) to ensure they are also available in OMJ centers. Additionally, all of the OhioMeansJobs Centers comply with WIOA Section 188 and comply with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 in terms of physical and programmatic accessibility. The state requires a One-Stop certification process to be conducted by the Workforce Boards for the OMJ centers to ensure compliance with Section 188 and ADA.
- ✓ The federally funded, county-operated Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program provides access to its services at the OMJ centers, including cash assistance, childcare, housing assistance, food stamps (SNAP), etc.
- ✓ The federally operated Job Corps program is also authorized by WIOA Title I and is required to locate services for information, outreach and recruitment in the OMJ centers. This program serves economically-disadvantaged individuals ages 16 – 24 who have barriers to employment. There is one Job Corps center located in the region in the city of Cleveland.

### OhioMeansJobs Center Services for Youth

WIOA services for youth are available at or through OMJ centers in the region. The priority is to serve out-of-school youth, and 75% of WIOA funds are required to be used for this cohort. Out-of-school youth are defined as 16 to 24 years of age, not attending any school, and meeting one or more of the following conditions: a school dropout; being within age of compulsory attendance but not having attended for at least the most recent complete school year calendar quarter; basic skills deficient; an English language learner; subject to the juvenile or adult justice system; homeless, runaway, in foster care or aged out of the foster care system; eligible for assistance under Section 477 of the Social Security Act, or in out-of-home placement; pregnant or parenting; an individual with a disability; low income person who requires additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure and hold employment. In-school youth must be aged 14-21, attending school, be low income, and meet one or more of the following conditions: Basic skills deficient; English language learner; an offender; homeless, runaway, in foster care or aged out of the foster care system; pregnant or parenting; an individual with a disability; person who requires additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure and hold employment. There is an emphasis on work-experience, with at least 20 percent of local WIOA Youth formula funds required to be used for work experiences, such as summer and year-round employment, pre-apprenticeship, on-the-job training, internships and job shadowing.

Services for youth include career exploration and guidance, continued support for educational attainment, opportunities for skills training in in-demand industries and occupations, culminating with a good job along a career pathway or enrollment in post-secondary education.

Ohio created a new program for WIOA youth with the TANF program which became effective on July 1, 2016 called the Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program (CCMEP). Ohio has developed a common application, initial assessment strategy and tools, and individual opportunity plan and case management system for WIOA youth and TANF programs, through CCMEP. Ohio requires

each county Department of Job and Family Services and each workforce development area to develop a county CCMEP plan that details how the two program funding sources and entities will coordinate, align services, focus on individualized case management and employment planning, address each individual's barriers to employment, and provide supportive services. The County Executives and County Commissioners for each of the eight counties in the region were required to designate a lead agency for the operation of the CCMEP program. All counties except Lorain County have designated the county department of Job and Family Services as the lead agency. The Workforce Development Agency has been designated as the lead in Lorain County. Each of the region's Workforce Development Boards remain responsible for the oversight of the WIOA services and resources within the CCMEP program.

WIOA youth services in the region are also coordinated with special programs developed by the state of Ohio for this cohort. It developed an "OhioMeansJobs Readiness Seal" to provide a formal designation that students can earn on their High School diploma and transcript. This Seal indicates that the student has the personal strength, strong work ethic, and professional experience that businesses need. Another tool that was developed to aid in the delivery of services to youth is the "K-12 Portal" on OhioMeansJobs.com. This enables each individual student to create a virtual backpack which can be used by schools, OMJ centers and other service providers to capture data, store transcripts, individual development plans, progress toward goals, etc. for each student.

### OhioMeansJobs Center Priority of Services

OMJ Centers provide "universal services" to anyone seeking employment and training assistance. However, funding for training services and other intensive services are finite and the following priorities are used for their investment:

- ✓ Veterans and eligible spouses receive priority of service consideration for all DOL-funded job training programs, including WIOA programs. Further, representatives funded through Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG), a required partner program under WIOA, are located in many OMJ Centers.
- ✓ Recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, or individuals who are basic skills deficient also receive priority for services provided with WIOA adult formula funds.

### OMJ Accountability for Services Provided

The intake and case management system for services provided through programs carried out under WIOA by the local workforce system is state-operated, enables integrated case management and is technology-enabled. Participant data is entered into the state's Ohio Workforce Case Management Systems (OWCMS) which is used for client tracking, providing data on enrolled participants in the various programs, and outcomes for the individual participants. The state creates performance reports for the workforce development areas on a quarterly and annual basis which track each area's progress toward achieving their performance goals which are established annually through negotiations with the state. The state submits detailed reports regarding participants, services and performance to the U.S. Department of Labor annually which maintains the national WIOA data base for reports to Congress.

Ohio requires all participants of WIOA Title I employment and training, WIOA Title II Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE), WIOA Title III Wagner-Peyser Act, WIOA Title IV vocational rehabilitation, Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education (Perkins) Act, and the Senior Community Service Employment

Program (Title V of the Older Americans Act) to register in OhioMeansJobs.com to ensure consistency among programs, enhance job readiness and placement efforts, and support career planning. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients enrolled in the Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program (CCMEP) and unemployment insurance claimants also register.

### OMJ Center Locations in the NOW Region:

#### **Medina County – WDA #2**

##### **OhioMeansJobs | Medina County (affiliate/satellite center)**

72 Public Square, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor

Medina, OH 44256

(330) 723-9675

#### **Summit County – WDA #2**

##### **OhioMeansJobs | Summit County (comprehensive center)**

1040 East Tallmadge Ave.

Akron, OH 44310

(330) 633-1050

#### **City of Cleveland / Cuyahoga County – WDA #3**

##### **OhioMeansJobs -Downtown Location (comprehensive center)**

1910 Carnegie Ave.

Cleveland, OH 44115

(216) 777-8200

#### **Ashtabula County – WDA #19**

##### **OhioMeansJobs | Ashtabula County (comprehensive center)**

2247 Lake Avenue

Ashtabula, Ohio 44004

(440) 994-1234

**Geauga County – WDA#19**

**OhioMeansJobs | Geauga County (affiliate/satellite center)**

12611 Ravenwood Dr.

Chardon, OH 44024

(440) 285-9141

(440) 285-1218 Fax

**Portage County – WDA#19**

**OhioMeansJobs | Portage County (affiliate/satellite center)**

253 South Chestnut St.

Ravenna, OH 44266

(330) 296-2841

(330) 296-7805 Fax

**Lake County – WDA#5**

**OhioMeansJobs | Lake County (comprehensive center)**

Lake County Employment & Training Division

177 Main Street, Painesville, OH 44077

(440) 350-4000 Main

(440) 918-4000 Lake County West

(440) 428-4838 Lake County East

**Lorain County – WDA#4**

**OhioMeansJobs | Lorain County (comprehensive center)**

Main Office

42495 North Ridge Road

Elyria, OH 44035

(440) 324-5244

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

The delivery of workforce development services within the region are done within the context of strategies to achieve the overall goals of the system:

1. To be business-led and to focus on in-demand occupations;
2. To prioritize those individuals who are most in need of services who have barriers to employment;
3. To operate within meaningful collaborations with core partner programs, secondary and post-secondary education providers as well as community organizations that provide complementary and support services to individual customers; and
4. To administer the services to achieve results for businesses and jobseekers, to be in compliance with all laws and regulations, to be transparent and accountable for these public resources, and to be innovative and agile to meet the changing needs of the labor market.

### Business-led; Focused on In-Demand Jobs

As required by WIOA, all Workforce Development Boards in the region are chaired by a business executive and over 50% of the members represent key businesses in the areas. This enables regular input and oversight of the workforce system from local business representatives. As described above, each OMJ center offers a wide range of business services that can be customized to meet the specific needs for skilled workers of businesses. Strategies also support:

- **Economic Development.** Strong collaborations have been created between the WDBs and numerous economic development entities throughout the region to coordinate OMJ centers' workforce services with economic development activities. In addition to these long-standing partnerships that are considered "best practices," there are some new initiatives to note.
  - **Amplification of OMJ Services Through "Ohio to Work" Pilot:** The State of Ohio's economic development entity is JobsOhio, and it recently launched the Ohio to Work initiative to help employers find the workers they need and to ensure workers have the skills employers desire. OMJ is an essential partner in this pilot initiative. Ohio To Work enhances existing resources, designed to connect job seekers to career coaching and training services that help individuals transition into promising, long term careers with leading local employers in Manufacturing, Information Technology and Healthcare who have immediate openings. OMJ in collaboration with other local partners provide job seekers with access to life-changing, career resources. Amplified resources provided through this collaboration include:
    - Personalized career coaching and career navigation support,

- Talent evaluation tools that help match an individual’s skills to real job opportunities with local employers,
- Access to accelerated career training options,
- Virtual career fairs with employers who need help immediately.

While the Ohio to Work initiative was an original three-month pilot, this has been extended through calendar year 2022 due to the initial success. OMJ looks forward to continuing collaborating on this initiative with the goal of assisting 2,000 residents find employment and 500 residents successfully receiving in-demand career training.

- **Sector Partnerships:** Two regional economic development entities: TeamNEO which is the state of Ohio’s regional entity, and the Greater Cleveland Partnership (GCP) which has business members across the northeast Ohio region and describes itself as the “largest metropolitan chamber of commerce in the nation,” joined an effort with the Deaconess Foundation, the Cleveland Foundation, the Fund for our Economic Future, Cuyahoga County, the City of Cleveland, and the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Workforce Development Board to create industry sector partnerships in Manufacturing, Healthcare and Information Technology. MAGNET (Manufacturing Advocacy and Growth Network) and GCP have developed the Manufacturing sector partnership; RITE-GCP is developing the IT sector partnership; and NewBridge, together with New Growth Group and major hospital systems, is developing the Healthcare partnership. The funds to create these were provided, in part, by WIOA funds and targeted training in these industries are available through WIOA and marketed to jobseekers.

### In-Demand Jobs

WIOA requires services to be targeted to occupations that are in-demand and the state of Ohio has established goal for all OMJ centers that 85% of training resources must be dedicated to in-demand jobs. A challenge in northeast Ohio is to get the information out to educators and individuals regarding the opportunities that are available in our area for workers that have the skills for good-paying middle-skill jobs in our major industries (see discussion in section II of this plan). New efforts within recent years to compile and broadcast this important information are:

- **In-Demand Jobs Week.** In recent years, the state announced an annual In-Demand Job week to provide a focus for events to highlight the importance and availability of these jobs. All WDBs in the northeast region plan and conduct events including job fairs, seminars, and other activities during this week to get information to jobseekers and educators/career counselors regarding these occupations.
- **Better Information on In-Demand Jobs and Skill Gaps.** As described in Section II of this plan, in recent years, new information has been developed regarding in-demand jobs in the region and the misalignment of the production of skilled workers with the jobs that are available. This information is excellent and actionable for all entities engaged in workforce development. TeamNEO published “Aligning Opportunities in Northeast Ohio, 2020 Report” with two additional publications on “Top In-Demand Careers in



Northeast Ohio” and “Misaligned Opportunities; how Racial Inequities Influence the Skill Gaps in Northeast Ohio.” The Federal Reserve Banks of Cleveland, Philadelphia and Atlanta have published their research on Opportunity Occupations which contain good information for this region.

1. **Priority Services to those Most in Need.** As described in Section III, services provided under the Adult and Youth programs through WIOA are focused on those who are low-income and have barriers to employment. This ensures that OMJ centers serve those most in need of assistance to prepare for and obtain a good job on a career path. However, as discussed in Section II, those who are most in need of workforce development services may face barriers and hurdles to accessing and taking advantage of those services. WDBs in this region address these impediments through a variety of strategies.
  - **Access to Services.** WIOA creates a “one-stop career center” in the comprehensive OMJ centers by requiring that all WIOA services and services provided by the core partner programs as described in Section III are available in one location for ease of use and navigation by individuals. Those who have difficulties in accessing these services in-person may be provided with bus tickets or other means of transportation to attend job preparation classes, etc. Also, OMJ centers offer services virtually and have increased the ability to provide them remotely during this past year. The OMJ center service delivery strategies across the region also includes taking the services directly to locations within the community, especially in poor neighborhoods, to improve access by local residents. These locations in northeast Ohio include libraries, city recreation centers, and community colleges.
  - **Transitional Jobs.** As described in the section on training available under WIOA, several areas have adopted a strategy to provide transitional job assistance to job seekers with little or no work history and barriers to employment in order to develop skills and build a resume for permanent employment.
  - **Transportation & Supportive Services.** The WDBs in the region have adopted policies to enable the provision of supportive services to individuals to enable them to participate in the activities created for their Individual Employment Plans by OMJ centers. These services are customized to the individual’s needs and include assistance for childcare, work equipment needs, stipends to help with the costs of participating in training, and especially transportation issues. Resources are available to help workers get to the training and/or job locations in the form of bus tickets and other arrangements created for the workers and the businesses on a case-by-case basis. The WDBs have also worked with the Northeast Ohio Area Coordinating Agency (NOACA) which has produced an extensive analysis of public transportation routes.
  - **Work with other Resource Providers in the Community.** The OMJ centers across the region also collaborate with other entities that provide services to specific populations to further assist individuals with barriers. These include programs that assist ex-

offenders, those recovering from addiction, those with disabilities, those that help individuals access technology, those in need of remedial education, etc.

2. **Meaningful Collaborations.** As described in this plan, the delivery of workforce development services by OMJ centers requires the creation, maintenance and constant adaptation of collaborations between core partner programs, community service providers, and secondary and post-secondary education institutions. Each of the five local WDBs maintains a strong working relationship with its area's community college, and they provide much of the training through ITAs. Northeast Ohio has a strong postsecondary educational presence that includes four community colleges: Cuyahoga Community College (CCC); Lakeland Community College (LCC); Lorain County Community College (LCCC); and Stark State College (SSC). In addition, the region hosts several public universities and private colleges, including: Cleveland State University; the University of Akron; Kent State University; Case Western Reserve University; Baldwin Wallace University; Hiram College; Notre Dame College; John Carroll University; and Oberlin University.

Another critical element that the WDBs, the community colleges and the region's employers place great value on is work-based educational experiences. The value of work experience – connecting education to on-the-job experiences – cannot be overstated. At both the local and regional levels the workforce and higher education are working together with industry to expand work-based learning opportunities for students. In addition, the state is working with public and private colleges and universities, as well as employers, to embed work experiences (including co-ops and internships) for in-demand jobs into the curriculum of degree programs. Students, educators and employers may access OhioMeansJobs.com for work experience information and opportunities.

3. **Achieving Results, Innovation & Accountability.** The workforce development services and strategies provided through the WDBs in the region are aimed at achieving tangible results for individuals and businesses. In addition to service-delivery strategies, the WDBs also have strategies to move toward continuous improvement of services, to ensure quality and accountability of operations, to shift strategies when conditions in the region require change or new action, and to work on being a high-performing Board. In addition to the performance goals negotiated with the state for workforce services that was discussed previously, other performance-driven strategies have been implemented. For example, some WDBs have implemented performance-based contracting for training providers. Performance-based contracts hold training providers accountable for job placement. The providers (excepting public institutions) are paid at three milestones: 50 percent on enrollment; 25 percent when training is completed; and 25 percent when the job seeker is placed in a job

## REGIONAL PLANNING AND PUBLIC COMMENT PROCESS

WIOA, passed in 2014, was the first federal workforce development law to require a regional plan in addition to local workforce plans. In 2016, after the Governor designated our eight counties as the northeast Ohio workforce region, the five Directors of the Workforce Development areas planned an extensive process to hire a contractor, conduct consultations in the region and produce the plan. The

2017 NOW plan reflects that year-long effort and is packed with information regarding workforce development services and strategies.

In our approach to update the regional plan in 2021, we determined that we needed to streamline the regional plan to make it more usable while ensuring that we refresh the data contained in the analysis of the labor market, recap the workforce development services and strategies we are pursuing and ensure compliance with the plan requirements of WIOA and the state of Ohio. Additionally, each workforce development area updated its local plan.

The five area Directors collaborated to hire a consultant to assist in development of the 2021 regional plan. The draft regional plan was circulated for review and comment to the members of the five Workforce Development Boards, the Chief Local Elected Officials and the core partner programs.

A draft of the NOW Regional Plan, which incorporated input gathered from the internal review and comment process, and all Local Plans were made available in mid-April, 2021 for public comment by being posted on each of the WDBs' websites for 30 days. One common email address was established to collect comments at [NOWregion@gmail.com](mailto:NOWregion@gmail.com). Comments received on the plan were accepted and incorporated.

### Assurances

The following assurances are being provided by the local WDBs as required in WIOA Policy Letter 16-03 regarding regional planning:

- The local Workforce Development Boards within the planning region assure that they will establish fiscal control and fund accounting procedures to ensure the proper disbursement of, and accounting for all funds received through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.
- The local WDBs assure that they will keep records that are sufficient to permit the preparation of reports required by the Act and shall maintain such records, including standardized records for all individual participants, and submit such reports as the State may require.
- The local WDBs assure that they will collect and maintain data necessary to show compliance with the nondiscrimination provisions of the Act.
- The local WDBs assure that funds will be spent in accordance with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, regulations, written Department of Labor Guidance, written Ohio Department of Job and Family Services guidance, and all other applicable Federal and State laws.
- The local WDBs assure that veterans will be afforded employment and training activities authorized in the Jobs for Veterans Act and 20 C.F.R. Part 1010.
- The local WDBs assure that they will comply with any grant procedures prescribed by the Secretary which are necessary to enter into contracts for the use of funds under WIOA, but not limited to the following:
- General Administrative Requirements – Uniform guidance at 2 C.F.R. Part 200 and 2 C.F.R. Part 2900.

- Assurances and Certifications – SF424B – Assurances for Non-Construction Programs; 29 C.F.R. Part 31,32 – Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity Assurance (and Regulation); 29 C.F.R. Part 93 – Certification Regarding Lobbying (and Regulation); 29 C.F.R. Parts 94 and 95 – Drug Free Workplace and Debarment and Suspension; Certifications (and Regulations).

## Signature Pages

The signature pages for the regional plan attest that all assurances have been met and that the regional plan and accompanying local plans represent the local workforce development boards' efforts to maximize resources available under Title I of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and to coordinate these resources with other State and Local programs in the planning region.

The effective date of the regional plan and the local plans will be July 1, 2021 and remain in effect through June 30, 2025, a period of four years.

These signatures further certify that the local workforce development boards in the planning region will operate the WIOA program in accordance with the regional plan and applicable Federal and State laws, regulations, policies, and rules.

Below are the signature pages for Areas #2, #3, #4, #5, and #19 respectively. Each Area's sign-off on the NOW Plan depicts a signatory line for the local WDB Chairperson, the local workforce area's Director or Executive Director, and the Chief Local Elected Official for the workforce area, with their typed name and position on the line below the signature.

Area 2

By signing my name below, I hereby attest each of the following for the NOW Regional Plan and the Area 2 Local Plan Addendum, effective from July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 through June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025

- All of the Assurances indicated on page 36 of the NOW Regional Plan and of the Area 2 Local Plan Addendum Have been met and that this plan represents the Local Area WDB’s efforts to maximize resources available under Title I of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and to coordinate these resources with other state and local programs within the planning region.
- Area 2 WDB will operate the WIOA program in accordance with the regional plan and applicable federal and state laws, regulations, policies, and rules.

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Chair, Area 2 Workforce Development Board Date

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Christine Marshall, Director, Area 2 Workforce Development Board Date

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County Executive, County of Summit Date

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Medina County Commissioner Date

Area 3

By signing my name below, I hereby attest each of the following for the NOW Regional Plan and the Area 3 Local Plan Addendum, effective from July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 through June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025

- All of the Assurances indicated on page 36 of the NOW Regional Plan and of the Area 3 Local Plan Addendum Have been met and that this plan represents the Local Area WDB’s efforts to maximize resources available under Title I of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and to coordinate these resources with other state and local programs within the planning region.
- Area 3 WDB will operate the WIOA program in accordance with the regional plan and applicable federal and state laws, regulations, policies, and rules.

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Ethan Karp, Chair, Area 3 Workforce Development Board Date

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Michelle Rose, Director, Area 3 Workforce Development Board Date

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Justin M. Bibb, Mayor, City of Cleveland Date

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Chris Ronayne, County Executive, Cuyahoga Date

Area 4

By signing my name below, I hereby attest each of the following for the NOW Regional Plan and the Area 4 Local Plan Addendum, effective from July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 through June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025

- All of the Assurances indicated on page 36 of the NOW Regional Plan and of the Area 4 Local Plan Addendum Have been met and that this plan represents the Local Area WDB’s efforts to maximize resources available under Title I of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and to coordinate these resources with other state and local programs within the planning region.
- Area 4 WDB will operate the WIOA program in accordance with the regional plan and applicable federal and state laws, regulations, policies, and rules.

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Anthony “Tony” Gallo, Chair, Area 4 Workforce Development Board Date

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Mary Murphy, Director, Area 4 Workforce Development Board Date

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David J. Moore, President, Lorain County Board of Commissioners Date



## Area 5

By signing my name below, I hereby attest each of the following for the NOW Regional Plan and the Area 5 Local Plan Addendum, effective from July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 through June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025

- All of the Assurances indicated on page 36 of the NOW Regional Plan and of the Area 5 Local Plan Addendum Have been met and that this plan represents the Local Area WDB's efforts to maximize resources available under Title I of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and to coordinate these resources with other state and local programs within the planning region.
- Area 5 WDB will operate the WIOA program in accordance with the regional plan and applicable federal and state laws, regulations, policies, and rules.

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Scott Seaholm, Chair, Area 5 Workforce Development Board

Date

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Cory Vojack, Director, Area 5 Workforce Development Board

Date

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John Hammercheck, President, Lake County Board of Commissioners

Date

Area 19

By signing my name below, I hereby attest each of the following for the NOW Regional Plan and the Area 2 Local Plan Addendum, effective from July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 through June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025

- All of the Assurances indicated on page 36 of the NOW Regional Plan and of the Area 2 Local Plan Addendum Have been met and that this plan represents the Local Area WDB's efforts to maximize resources available under Title I of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and to coordinate these resources with other state and local programs within the planning region.
- Area 2 WDB will operate the WIOA program in accordance with the regional plan and applicable federal and state laws, regulations, policies, and rules.

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Ned Sherry, Chairperson, Area 19 Workforce Development Board Date

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Craig Sernik, Executive Director, Area 19 Workforce Development Board  
Date

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Commissioner James Dvorak, Chief Elected Official, Northeast Ohio Consortium  
Council of Governments Date

## Addendum Section

1. Year 2 Review NOW Plan Addendum
2. Cleveland/Cuyahoga County Local Plan
3. Geauga-Ashtabula-Portage Counties Local Plan
4. Lake County Local Pan
5. Lorain County Local Plan
6. Summit-Medina Counties Local Plan

YEAR TWO REVIEW NOW PLAN ADDENDUM

Area 2 Special Projects Grant 2022

In the Fall of 2021, members of the ConxusNEO board ('board') in Summit County (one of Area 2's two counties), began to explore the disconnect between employers and workers, which became evident as the world reopened post the COVID-19 pandemic. The largest question posed to various members of the board was from concerned employers who were asking the community leaders "*where are the workers?*". Using several funding channels, the board was determined to uncover answers through a research project that would interview employers and ask working age adults how they were feeling about work. The research had an initial footprint which mirrored the Greater Akron Chamber, consisting of Medina, Portage, and Summit Counties. For the purposes of the NOW Plan, Medina and Summit Counties are local workforce Area 2 and Portage County is one county in local workforce Area 19. The project commenced with a set of surveys to obtain insights from employers about their challenges in hiring talent and to determine the average working adult's commitment to work. The next phase of the project invited response from workers. Spoiler alert: the research showed the direct impact from the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything about work as we know it. We knew it would be important to understand where employers and workers were coming from to find solutions to fill job openings, retain workers, and address the skills gap. The impact of this research extends beyond our own organizations and into the region's economic, education, and workforce development systems.

### *Methodology*

The employer research began in the late Fall of 2021, funded by the board and TeamNEO (the northeast portion of JobsOhio with an 18-county footprint) with a distribution of surveys to employers across the three counties and follow-up focus groups for a deeper dive into the survey responses. With 254 survey responses received, TeamNEO determined it wanted to expand the research to additional northeast Ohio counties and recovered an additional 512 employer responses across an 11-county footprint. The 766 surveys revealed 80% of employers were facing a talent shortage, 65% experiencing higher turnover, 95% did not have a sufficient pool of qualified candidates, 18-30 years old were the hardest to recruit and retain, and finding workers interested in full-time positions were the hardest to locate. Finally, employers reported that raising wages and providing bonuses aren't enough of an incentive to attract or retain workers. Workers were reportedly looking for more emphasis on company culture and creation of flexible policies which include hybrid work. Bottomline is employers continue to struggle to find motivated employees.

The second portion of the research began with a survey for the working age adults made possible by U.S. Department of Labor funds through a grant to the Summit/Medina Workforce Area Council of Governments (Area 2) from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. The survey's content was collected from various community partners across the three counties. The research firm, Center for Marketing and Opinion Research, LLC (CMOR) was selected to develop the final tool, transmit the surveys, collect the data, conduct focus groups, and produce reports based upon the findings. A total of 2,400 surveys (800 from each county) were collected between mid-February and the end of the first week in May of 2022. The working age adults research project was expanded by the *Fund for Our Economic Future (FFEF)* a think tank organization based in Cleveland and serving northeast Ohio communities, who also consulted with CMOR to replicate the tool to gather more information across eight additional northeast Ohio counties: Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, Mahoning, Stark, Trumbull and Wayne resulting in an additional 2,587 survey responses. Four of the eight additional counties are part of the NOW Plan: Cuyahoga (Area 3), Geauga (Area 19), Lake (Area 5) and Lorain (Area 4).

### *Results*

Of those who responded as employed and/or looking for work, the findings showed:

- 98% say a wage is somewhat or very important;
- 92% say meaningful work is somewhat or very important;
- 91% say flexibility in the workplace is somewhat or very important;
- 55% are looking for part-time work; and
- 24% desire more training.

Additionally, we learned most respondents quitting their jobs did not have a new job lined up and many planned to quit in the next year. The number one reason expressed for quitting was a “toxic” work environment. 43% of the respondents' declared work is less of a priority after the pandemic. 18-30-year-olds were the number one age group involved in the “Gig” economy with 69% starting this type of work during the pandemic and 84% of respondents in that age group enjoyed the freedom of working for themselves. Both Gen Z and unemployed respondents expressed a desire for employers to provide access to mental health benefits.

Themes emerged from the working age adults' responses include:

1. Wage matters
2. "Flexibility" is desired
3. Want "meaningful work" (i.e. to feel a part of something/contributing)

4. Gig work is a large part of the current employment landscape
5. Access to mental health services as a benefit is desired
6. Half of the respondent looking for work desire part-time work
7. High interest in job related training and education
8. COVID has had a significant impact on defining what work means

The responses were analyzed during May 2022. The findings determined what topics would drive five focus groups. The data has been sliced into various demographic categories including but, not limited to gender, race, age, household income, educational attainment, generation, geographic (major cities and by county), and employment status.

*Call to action*

It is our desire to share our research findings with employers and workers to foster equitable, community-based solutions to this massive shift in the way our workplaces and economy perform. The current phase of the research project has shifted to collecting and sharing solutions. We invite you to visit [www.conxusneo.jobs/watw](http://www.conxusneo.jobs/watw) for a slide presentation specific to the three-county research project. Finally, FFEF is leading our post-survey work for the region and has created a virtual tool kit for employers and an interactive website. For more information visit the FFEF website at [www.thefundneo.org/watw](http://www.thefundneo.org/watw).