

Mid-Hudson Region

# Regional Plan

July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2025; rev. July, 2023

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## Regional Service Strategies

- a. Identify regional plan strategies and specifically provide detail on how regional plan strategies relate to the workforce needs of local businesses as well as the priority projects from the Regional Economic Development Council (REDC).

The workforce development boards of the Mid-Hudson Region (“the LWDBs”) comprise a diverse area, with a mix of urban cities, waterfront communities, rural villages and hamlets, farmlands and forests. It is comprised of the workforce boards of Dutchess, Orange, Rockland, Sullivan, Ulster and Westchester-Putnam counties, along with the City of Yonkers in Westchester County. Although each local area has unique challenges, the LWDBs, collectively, share common workforce challenges and priorities. The historically major regional challenges facing our planning process have been compounded by the impact of COVID-19. Those challenges include:

- Addressing the aging workforce
- Engaging youth
- Coordinating employer needs with education and training programs in the region
- Creating jobs through small business development
- Developing a sustained and coordinated outreach and public relations campaign
- Identifying support services to overcome barriers to employment

The LWDBs intend to look and think beyond the impact of COVID-19 and the recession it caused and pivot to recovery. The regional plan will address aspects of workforce development that continue to challenge the region, particularly the region’s goal to leverage strategic partnerships that support employers’ access to a short-term talent pool and long-term talent pipeline. To achieve this goal at the local level requires a suite of solutions focused on the needs of the individual worker and remove the barriers workers face. The LWDBs regional strategy calls for:

- Apprenticeship programs
- Sector-based planning through industry partnerships
- Employer-led training programs
- Career pathways which allow for short-term and long-term employment goals, while providing the flexibility of multiple onramps and off-ramps to skills development.

By taking a collaborative approach to some of the toughest issues in workforce development through pooling expertise and resources, the LWDBs are committed to finding solutions by developing on the ground programs and services which address:

- Moving impoverished people into jobs that can sustain them and their families;
- Collaborating with strategic partners to provide training and education for target sectors resulting in apprentice and credentialing programs that can address the shortage of middle-skilled workers. These partners include businesses, education providers, social service agencies and community-based organizations;
- Developing job readiness and soft skills training programs of particular need by priority populations, such as the formerly incarcerated, long term unemployed, young adults with limited education, veterans, and recipients of public assistance;

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- Collaborating with other counties to address the barriers to employment - such as transportation and childcare – both cited as obstacles to the region increasing its talent base and labor force participation in the Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council’s (MHREDC) progress reports. The collaboration will assist the region and the State in prioritizing childcare needs and solutions;
- Conducting evaluation and benchmarking research to identify best practices and future needs;
- Sharing knowledge and expertise among the partnering counties and building upon past regional program collaborations;
- Coordinating training programs for consistency of content and collaborative marketing; Joint fundraising for advanced training facility upgrades serving the regional work force;
- Replicating success of models for local engagement of K-12 students, youth in early stages of their careers, displaced workers and career-changers to raise awareness and motivation toward green careers;
- Gathering data and insights on employer needs through regional focus groups and similar initiatives;
- Sharing best practices on candidate recruitment and employer services;
- Maintaining intelligence on industry trends and workforce needs to support proactive planning of regional work force development services.

The LWDBs will partner with Sustainable Hudson Valley, a regional organization with experience in green job program development, research and marketing, on initiatives that target the green sector. The partnership will explore:

- Convening a regional strategy session of workforce developers, state resource agencies, training providers and community outreach program representatives to identify needs and opportunities for regional collaboration.
- Developing program recommendations based on the results of this session.
- Providing ongoing coordination of the regional partnership.

The regional plan aligns with the vision of the MHREDC’s Live, Work and Play strategy by expanding the education and training routes that lead to skills valued by employers (“**WORK** component”), to transition job seekers to higher paying jobs that provide a sustainable living wage (**LIVE** component) and through stronger alignment between economic development and workforce development actions train workers for new business opportunities in the hospitality and tourism sectors (“**PLAY** component”). **The overall goal is to insure that workforce development results in equitable economic development with the opportunity for sustainable jobs.**

- b. Provide a list of executed cooperative agreements where applicable and define how local service providers, including additional providers, will carry out the regional strategies.

While there are no cooperative service delivery agreements between the counties, the LWDBs have a long history of collaborating to achieve maximum collective impact in producing a highly skilled workforce available to existing and prospective employers on a regional scale. That collaboration includes work on regional efforts to deliver services to adults, youth and dislocated workers who are most in need, especially the long-term unemployed. Working together on previous regional U.S. DOL grants has resulted in the employment of over 425 individuals in well-paying jobs in bio-technology, information technology, healthcare and advanced manufacturing. Although there are no active regional projects as of this writing, the

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LWDBs will continue to explore ways of working together on a regional level.

The strength of the workforce development activities in the region is based on a true partnership among workforce development members and stakeholders. LWDBs are a community of leaders leveraging resources to support the economic vitality of the county through workforce development.

### **Sector Initiatives for In-demand Industry Sectors or Occupations**

#### **a. Identify in-demand industry sectors and occupations.**

The MHREDC's target sectors have been identified as Healthcare; Bio-Tech, High-Tech Manufacturing, and Information Technology. There is also increased demand in Distribution, Hospitality, Financial and Professional Services, Food and Beverage, Construction and Education. All LWDBs in the Mid-Hudson region fund training programs that provide skills in high demand occupations in the industries identified in the MHREDC's progress reports. These training programs tend to be specific to an occupation.

Following are the Mid-Hudson's target sectors along with the industry specific worker skills required:

- i. Bio-Tech – Advanced degrees and specialized training in Chemical / Biological Engineering, Pharmacology, etc. According to EMSI, 25% of all jobs require doctoral degrees and 64% require Bachelors or Masters level degrees. The LWDBs will assist in funding this training for eligible participants but only up to each LWDB's maximum training funding amounts.
- ii. High-Tech Manufacturing – Advanced degrees and specialized training in Mechanical and Electrical Engineering. Lower level workers need a specific set of math skills. Machine operators need industry specific training on certain machines and may need training in CAD or CNC for more advanced machines. The LWDBs will assist in funding this training for eligible participants but only up to each LWDB's maximum training funding amounts. **The CHIPS Act will also provide new opportunities for high skilled workers in the region.**
- iii. Information Technology – This sector requires a wide range of computer skills from basic to advanced. EMSI data reveals that 17% of the jobs require either High School or Associate Degree. 79% of highly technical software and hardware positions in Information Technology, Networking, and similar areas require BS and MS degrees. The LWDBs will assist in funding this training for eligible participants but only up to each LWDB's maximum training funding amounts.
- iv. Distribution – The skills required for this sector include CDL Class A & B, forklift certification, and general work readiness training. High School or GED is usually the only requirement except for Management positions that require a college degree. The LWDBs will assist in funding this training for eligible participants but only up to each WIB's maximum training funding amounts.
- v. Financial & Professional Services – This sector features jobs that cross all sectors and require proficiency with computers and other technologies along with customer service and sales skills. The LWDBs will assist in funding this training for eligible participants but only up to each LWDB's maximum training funding amounts.

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- vi. Food and Beverage – This sector features a wide range of job skills and education requirements. A high school dropout could perform entry level jobs; a chef would require a specific set of skills and training. General work readiness skills are required for most jobs in this sector as well as customer service skills. The LWDBs will assist in funding this training for eligible participants but only up to each LWDB’s maximum training funding amounts.
  - vii. Healthcare – This sector also contains a wide spectrum from high school graduates to those with medical degrees. Most jobs require specific training, even for lower end jobs, such as home health aides and C.N.A’s and janitorial and food service positions. Mid-Level jobs include LPNs, phlebotomists and dental hygienists. Higher end jobs include RN’s, MRI Tech and radiologists. The LWDBs will assist in funding this training for eligible participants but only up to each LWDB’s maximum training funding amounts.
  - viii. Hospitality and Leisure – New ventures, particularly in Sullivan and Orange counties, such as Resorts World Catskills, LEGOLAND, and YO1 Wellness, ensure the demand for workers of all skill levels and expertise are currently in-demand.
  - ix. Green /Clean Energy- Clean, environmentally advanced technologies are a growing and vital part of mid-Hudson economy. In order to grow and support these industry segments (and their use in the economy as a whole), workforce and economic development agencies need to collaborate to offer resources and align assets. The LWDB’s regional strategy will enhance the Hudson Valley region’s global competitiveness through a focus on talent development and retention activities that integrate workforce development, economic development and education providers.
- b. Identify and describe sector initiatives that address the needs of the identified in-demand industry sectors and occupations.

Currently, the LWDB’s do not have established sector initiatives. When opportunities become available the LWDB’s will work collectively to coordinated activities both regionally and locally. This approach will allow us to implement initiatives that align with the region’s in-demand sectors. Rockland County, specifically, has added education as a demand industry. Additional collaborations have also been established in the region. For example, Mid-Hudson workforce boards and career centers have formed a partnership with the Pyramid Group (owner of the Palisades Center Mall) to sponsor job fairs, including a “Back to school back in business career fair.”) The Westchester-Putnam WDB has collaborated with the Westchester County Executive’s office on a number of targeted job fairs, including a “Diverse Abilities” job fair in several Westchester cities. A similar event will be held in Rockland County in September, 2023.

### Regional Labor Market Analysis

- a. Include an analysis of regional economic conditions incorporating the existing emerging demand sectors and occupations, the employment needs of businesses in those sectors and occupations, as well as noting if the information used in the analysis was provided by the New York State Department of Labor’s (NYSDOL) Research and Statistics (R&S) Division (if not, provide what source was used for complete analysis).

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Prior to COVID-19, the unemployment rate in the Mid-Hudson region had dropped by 3.4 percentage points since 2011, bottoming out at 3.4%. Average annual wages had increased across all sectors and was \$59,760 as of November, 2019. Within a month of COVID-19 lockdowns, the regional outlook changed dramatically, with the unemployment rate rising to 15.7% in April, 2020.

The Hudson Valley economy has largely recovered from the effects of COVID: The June 2023 unemployment rate for the Hudson Valley Region is 3.0 percent, up from 2.8 percent in May 2023; down from 3.1 percent in June 2022. In June 2023, there were 35,600 unemployed in the region, up from 32,500 in May 2023 and down from 36,600 in June 2022. Year-over-year in June 2023, labor force increased by 14,700 or 1.2 percent, to 1,203,000.

The Hudson Valley's private sector job count grew by 13,200, or 1.6 percent, to 818,800 in the year ending June 2023. Gains were centered in leisure and hospitality (+10,200), private education and health services (+7,300), other services (+1,600) and mining, logging and construction (+300). Employment losses were focused in professional and business services (-3,800), information (-900), financial activities (-600), trade, transportation and utilities (-500) and manufacturing (-400).

Leisure and hospitality remained the region's leading job generator. Year-over-year in June 2023, the sector grew by 10.5 percent, to reach 107,600 – its highest June employment count on record.

Within the region, Sullivan County's private employment sector grew the fastest year-over-year, up 2.5 percent. The second fastest growth was recorded in the Orange-Rockland-Westchester labor market area (+2.1 percent), followed by the Kingston MSA (+0.4 percent). The Dutchess-Putnam Metropolitan Division declined by 0.6 percent over the period.

- b. Describe the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to meet the employment needs of businesses in those sectors and occupations.

Employers struggle with business closures or reductions, supply chain disruptions, changes in consumer demand, and lack of a reliable skilled workforce. Employers in nearly all industry sectors are in need of entry level staff with "soft-skills" including timeliness, appropriate workplace communication, responding appropriately to feedback from supervisors and demonstrating a strong work. Ninth grade or better reading and math skills are a necessity in every employment sector, with the exception of some jobs in the tourism/hospitality sector, along with basic computer skills (Excel, Word, PowerPoint and Outlook). Middle skills, along with some prior experience in a field, sometimes coupled with a need to better develop or refine skills for a particular industry, are also increasingly sought.

A strong and collaborative regional approach, coupled with distinct local solutions, is required to get people back to work

- c. Provide an analysis of the regional workforce

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COVID-19 has exacerbated those with historically challenging barriers to employment. Those populations affected are those in poverty, the immigrant population, ex-offenders those in foster care and individuals with disabilities. Wage disparities exacerbated barriers during the pandemic, impacting reemployment options and raising the risk to the regional recovery efforts. Workers struggled with job loss due to layoff or an inability to work. Access to computers and broadband internet is a more recent but critical workforce component.

COVID-19 has expedited the retirement of a large cohort of experienced “baby-boomer” workers who are aging out of their prime working years. Those positions must be filled with skilled replacements and may require individuals coming out of retirement who have retained their skills and may need to be retrained.

An impressive proportion of the region’s population holds a four year or greater degree with 4-year and even advanced degrees, yet many residents lack the literacy and numeracy skills to thrive in the region’s increasingly knowledge-based economy. Low numeracy, in particular, represents a significant barrier to local efforts to prepare or upskill adult residents to meet projected employer needs for skilled technology workers in the decade ahead

While the future economic climate is unknown, the region likely faces the unfortunate reality that some residents may be left behind without concerted and successful strategies to address the crisis. Some of those most affected are those that had previously held employment in the accommodation and food services industry which has been highly impacted by the pandemic. Older, formerly highly paid professionals who remain long-term unemployed or under-employed are also in need of special attention. The LWDBs will work collectively to address the need of those most vulnerable in the COVID-19 emerging economy.

### **Regional Spending Plan**

- a. Include a regional spending plan that includes administrative cost arrangements between LWDBs and the pooling of funds where applicable.

The LWDBs do not have established a regional spending plan, but have agreed to provide training services and funds, within their funding ability, providing either the business or employee reside within their LWDB area.

### **Supportive Services**

- a. Describe how supportive services will be coordinated throughout the region.

The LWDBs recognize that supportive services can be critical to the success of WIOA participants in training programs, retaining employment, and getting back to work. The LWDBs are committed to thinking creatively about how to reach residents who are considered hardest to serve and support the organizations and services in the region that interact regularly with these participants. The LWDBs will partner with community based organizations and trusted leaders in communities with high unemployment by bringing work support services, such as child care, housing and transportation assistance, to workers who experience multiple challenges to maintaining consistent employment.

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The LWDBs agree to share their supportive services policies with all regional workforce staff for their reference so that they can provide the most informed services and referrals to participants and potential participants.

### **Economic Development**

- a. Describe how economic development and workforce investment activities will be coordinated in the region and specifically provide detail how continued coordination can further relationships between the region and its respective REDC.

The LWDBs recognize the need to align initiatives with the MHREDC and coordinate with economic development partners. A representative from each LWDA's economic development agency/organization sits on each LWDB. Local Workforce Board Directors meet individually on a regular basis with their economic development counterparts on business attraction and retention. Pattern for Progress, a regional Hudson Valley think tank, has initiated monthly meetings with the nine workforce development and economic development directors of the Mid-Hudson region (including Columbia and Greene counties). Workforce professionals in Orange, Rockland and Westchester counties also meet regularly on a workforce task force established by the Westchester County Association. Working in tandem, economic development agencies market workforce initiatives to businesses and the LWDBs ensure that job seekers are trained and have access to future jobs. This coordination improves and refines the region's economic development strategy and make the local area more competitive in attracting new business.

### **Performance Accountability Measure Negotiation and Reporting Agreement**

- a. Include an agreement concerning the Performance Accountability Measure Negotiation and Reporting. Performance Accountability Measure Negotiation and Reporting may be negotiated by LWDBs individually, involving strategies and methods collaborated on at the regional level. If this is the case for the region, include a statement that reflects that the measures were negotiated individually and any collaborative efforts devised and agreed to by the region.

The LWDBs agree to review quarterly performance reports as a regional team to identify issues of performance and to develop performance improvement plans that benefit not only each individual LWDB's performance, but the region as a whole. Once performance improvement plans have been developed, this information will be shared with workforce staff to give them a better understanding of how the delivery of services may impact on performance. The LWDBs will discuss performance measure negotiations prior to negotiations with NYSDOL, to ensure coordination and collaboration between the LWDBs.

### **Public Comment**

- a. Describe the process used by the region to provide a period of no more than 30 days for public comment and input into development of the plan by representatives of business, labor organizations, and education prior to submission.

Pursuant to NYSDOL Technical Advisory 17-8, a public comment period of no more than 30 days is

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provided. Electronic mailings will be provided to all partners, career center staff, workforce development board members and chief elected officials. The regional plan will be available electronically on each LWDB website.

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