

WEST CENTRAL WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD

THREE YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

(January 1, 2007 through December 31, 2009)

Mission Statement: The West Central WIB will continue to improve on efforts to institute a world-class, local and regional, career development system, which complements Pennsylvania's overall education and economic strategy to guide federal, state and local resources in a customer focused and user friendly manner, in order to enhance the indigenous competitive advantages for business, industry and the workforce operating in the area.

Goal 1: Establish a standard for work readiness focused on basic employability skills including team interaction and work ethic.

Employer surveys and interviews have suggested that many applicants coming to their businesses lack basic employability skills such as how to present oneself in a professional manner, proper attire, timeliness, appropriate verbal skills, grooming and other social or so-called soft skills. Additionally, others lack basic education skills such as reading and fundamental mathematics not to mention lack of a high school diploma or equivalency. Also, it is reported that many individuals who successfully meet initial employer expectations do not possess essential job maintenance skills to keep employment. Considering that between 2002 and 2015 combined new and replacement jobs in Lawrence/Mercer Counties are projected to increase by 41% and that 2011 is a watershed year in which the number of potential retirees will grow at a faster rate than the potential number of new entrants into the workforce, this suggests a possible scarcity of human resources in the near future. Thus, it is imperative that current systems are assessed and modified to increase effectiveness in establishing basic work readiness/employability skills for individuals and groups who traditionally have been unsuccessful in attaching or maintaining themselves in employment.

Goals 2: Promote earlier intervention with youth to begin development of workforce essential skills.

Goal # 2 is a recognition that the preceding one is more easily attainable when presented and reinforced from an earlier age. The Youth Council meeting held on 12/5/06 included discussion suggesting that a pre-K through 12 strategy would be the most effective manner to inculcate these essential skills. Recently, the WIB piloted support to a United Way Success by Six program utilizing TANF Youth Funds whose current regulations allow workforce awareness and preparation services to children 5 through 18 years of age at 235% of the federal poverty level. WIA funding is limited to serving youth whose family income falls at or beneath the lower living standard. The WIB must, therefore, widen its focus to devise a strategic objective to align and support relevant local youth programs and education beyond its direct funding by making available labor market information, career pathway maps, local business/industry needs and

expectations as well as promoting networks that link educators, employers and skilled trade associations toward the end of enriching curricula and lessons with intelligence gathered from non-academic sources. This should be structured to assist and/or enhance the recently distributed PA Department of Education Academic Standards for Career Education and Work (22 Pa. Code Chapter 4 - Appendix E) with its emphasis on workforce preparedness. The Youth Council approved an application on its behalf for submission by staff seeking seed funding for a Regional Career and Education Partnership grant. Although Pennsylvania's Project 720 high school reform strategy is highly prominent in this grant, other aspects of youth career awareness are also items that this partnership should address.

Goal 3: Develop more integration between education/training sector and distinct employer needs.

More emphasis will be given at all levels to facilitate meaningful dialogue between the local and regional education/training provider communities and employers to better deliver direct services, as in the case of industry specific training, as well as impacting the pre-K through post secondary education network in the formative process of students who eventually will enter the world of work. Industry partnerships, employer focus groups, chambers of commerce, economic development agencies and other relevant business concerns will be engaged to interact with education/training providers in various forums, roundtables, training consortia meetings or summits to address divergent views, identify common issues and establish joint projects that will be beneficial to the community. The WIB will act as a convener or intermediary for this process to occur utilizing networks developed through the CareerLink partners and the workforce system in general.

Goal 4: Facilitate better communication between employers and applicants through the medium of the workforce system.

The WIB through the auspices of the one-stop CareerLink system will seek to better define employer specifications for job openings and match applicants that most closely meet the criteria designated. Evaluation of the means and manner by which information is collected should be undertaken. Once this evaluation has taken place a committee composed of CareerLink Administration, Operators and employers should review the findings and determine if additional drill down below current required information should be developed. Local Business Service Teams could be brought in to collaborate with the committee on how to supplement information. The objective would be to outline more exactly what aptitudes, skills, experience or other qualities the employer seeks. Additionally, tools to collect these more defined specifications would need to be instituted for applicants as well if necessary. A job seeker customer focus group may be assembled to work with the committee in order to consider their perspective.