

# Bristol Workforce Investment Board

## Strategic Plan 2013-2015



**Bridging the Region's Workforce Needs  
for a Competitive Future**

# Table of Contents

<b>Section 1: Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Section 2: Labor Market and Workforce Analysis.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Section 3: Strategic Priorities.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Section 4: Addressing the Challenges and Goals.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Section 5: Measuring Progress.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Section 6: Conclusions and Next Steps.....</b>	<b>32</b>

## Section 1: Introduction

The Bristol Workforce Investment Board is comprised of a broad cross-section of leaders from business, government, education, labor, economic development and community agencies who are committed to developing a workforce development system capable of meeting the employment and training needs of the businesses and citizens of the Bristol Workforce Investment Area.

The Bristol Workforce Investment Board will continue to adhere to the principle that we must enable job seekers to maximize their opportunities for economic prosperity. The workforce development system in Bristol will serve as a repository of resources that will provide its customers with the knowledge necessary for them to make individual decisions based upon the most current and reliable information. Bristol shall make increased efforts to incorporate a diversity of resources, funding streams and partnering opportunities that will be presented in a seamless manner to maximize the scope and effectiveness of services throughout the region.

The goal of the Workforce Investment Board is to develop a truly universal, world class system serving the current and future workforce and all workforce entities. The WIB will strive to increase the occupational skill attainment, employment, retention and earning of participants, and as a result improve the quality of the workforce, reduce dependency on public assistance, and enhance the productivity and competitiveness of the region. In order to achieve these goals, the Bristol Workforce Investment Board has established the following strategic objectives:

1. Raise Awareness of the WIB and Career Center's role in workforce development.
2. Expand education, training, employment and career opportunities for at-risk target populations.
3. Strengthen services for at-risk youth.
4. Strengthen the connection between the region's employers and the workforce development system.
5. Develop and sustain key partnerships that strengthen the region's workforce development system.
6. Utilize current labor market information to better guide resource allocation and programmatic activity.

By identifying strategies to achieve each of the above goals, the WIB will directly address many of the challenges faced by the region.

## Section 2: Labor Market and Workforce Analysis

The following analysis primarily centers on the Bristol Workforce Investment Area which includes the cities of Fall River, Taunton and Attleboro and the towns of Berkley, Dighton, Mansfield, North Attleboro, Norton, Raynham, Rehoboth, Seekonk, Somerset, Swansea and Westport

According to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD) and the Department of Career Services (DCS) Economic Analysis Office, the Bristol Workforce Investment Area's unemployment rate was 8.9% through June of 2012. Continuing a long term trend, Bristol's unemployment rate exceeds the Massachusetts unemployment rate for the same period (6.9%). In Fall River, the region's largest city, the difference was even more pronounced with an unemployment rate of 12.6% during the same period.

Within the Workforce Investment Area's communities, employment is offered in several groupings. The following chart attempts to illustrate the trends in employment by sector through a comparison of data from 2000 - 2012.

	Bristol WIB Community Audit (2000)	DCS Data (2006)*	DCS Data (2012)*
Trade, Transportation & Utilities	32.6%	25.5%	26.9%
Manufacturing	23.7%	14.8%	11.2%
Health	10.2%	13.9%	17.3%
Government	10.7%	11.4%	11.2%
Leisure and Hospitality	9.2%	10.2%	10.2%
Professional & Business Services	2.2%	9.2%	8.6%
Construction	3.0%	4.5%	4.3%
Other Services	3.0%	4.2%	4.8%
Financial Services	3.6%	3.5%	3.3%
Information Services	1.2%	1.8%	2.0%
Natural Resources	0.6%	0.3%	0.2%

\*Employment and Wages (ES-202) Reports

The above chart illustrates regional trends that have remained somewhat consistent throughout the past decade. Analysis shows a continued decline in the percentage of the workforce employed in manufacturing.

Despite these declines, Bristol still maintains a higher percentage of manufacturing jobs than many other Workforce Investment Areas. Unfortunately, the trends around this industry remain similar to citations in earlier plans. For example, a portion of the persons in manufacturing in the Bristol region are in positions affording employees limited transferable skills, should they be laid off. Additionally, language and educational deficiencies are not uncommon among employees in this area. As a result, the Bristol area has had significant challenges in finding full time employment that offers wage retention for individuals within the manufacturing field. It is clear that these combined challenges within such a significant regional industry cluster will continue to have a wide ranging impact on how the WIB and its Career Centers formulate education, training and job development strategies over the course of time.

Consistent with prior years, an industry cluster that continues to show steady growth in Bristol is allied health. The medical field clearly remains an important employment cluster in the Workforce Investment Area. The Workforce Investment Area provides a variety of jobs in its hospitals, nursing homes, group homes and physicians' offices. Historically, the WIB has provided training and employment to hundreds of individuals in these institutions annually. Additionally, the WIB has worked with area health care employers in recent years to expand employment opportunities in this field through such initiatives as the WCTF and BayStateWorks. The WIB will continue to prioritize allied health in its workforce development strategies.

The priority of allied health is also supported by the fact that career opportunities and wage potential are stronger in health than in other growth industry clusters. For example, it is noted in past DCS Bristol labor market profiles that two of the region's largest sectors, Retail Trade and Leisure and Hospitality "had wages that were considerably lower than the Bristol average wage." In contrast, there are many positions within allied health that exceed the average annual wage in Bristol.

Some of the growth occupations that were identified in the statistical analysis may be accessed without formal training. However, based on the demographic characteristics of our region's job seekers (see below), occupational training is necessary in many cases to ensure wage retention and placement in targeted occupations that afford opportunities for career growth. In addition to occupational skills, it is important to note that literacy skills through ESOL and GED classes are clearly needed across the board in our industry clusters. This is particularly true in the manufacturing sector. Still, even in manufacturing,

emphasis on higher technology and lean principles has resulted in higher skill levels required.

A 2012 report issued by the Commonwealth Corporation and New England Public Policy Center of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, *Labor Market Trends in the Southeast Region*, shows similarities between the more broadly defined southeastern portion of the state and our local region. More specifically, the report notes that healthcare support occupations had a large number of job vacancies and above average vacancy rate during 2010. The report further notes that vacancy rates in occupations hit hardest by the Great Recession were low in the region, such as Construction and Production.

Broadening the analysis beyond the local Workforce Investment Area and southeastern portion of the state, additional data on occupational and industry trends can be gleaned. **Career Moves**, Published by MA Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, notes the following:

- Of the 20 fastest growing occupations, 11 are concentrated in health care and information technology
- An additional four are found in life sciences
- The remaining five are primarily community service and social service and personal service jobs
- 14 of 20 fastest growing occupations will require an associate's degree or higher

The report further cites the Massachusetts Industries that will generate the most jobs through 2016.

Hospitals, Private	23,530
Management, Scientific, and Technical Consulting	19,100
Computer Systems Design and Related Services	17,600
Food Services and Drinking Places	16,450
Individual and Family Services	12,870
Residential Care Facilities	11,320
Offices of Health Care Practitioners	10,510
Colleges and Universities	10,300
Scientific Research and Development Services	9,370
Home Health Care Services	9,000

Based on occupational data analysis primarily focusing on the local Workforce Investment Area, below is the listing of fields targeted by the Workforce

Investment Board for training. However, continued analysis and feedback from employers may result in additions to this list.

Occupations	Skills Needed	Training Needed
Human Service Workers	Disability sensitivity, Customer service skills, some require first aid certification	On the job, short term; Longer vocational training (6-24 mon) is an option
Secretaries, Receptionists, Data Entry, Administrative Assistants & Miscellaneous Clerks	Clerical skills, computer literacy, Customer service skills, Microsoft certification helpful	Vocational training (4-12 mon)
General Maintenance & Repairs (especially plumbing and heating)	Customer service skills, some fields require certification or state licenses	Vocational training (6-18 mon)
Computer Network Engineers, Network Administrators, Programmers, Support Technicians	Computer literacy, Networking requires Microsoft Certification	Vocational training (6-24 mon); Some require college degree
<u>Trades</u> : Construction, carpentry, cabinet making, electricians, welders, metal fabrication	Customer service skills, some fields require certification or state licenses	Vocational training (6-24 mon)
Internet Programmers	Computer Literacy, Advanced reading & writing, Customer service skills	Vocational training (6-24 mon); some positions require a college degree
Truck Drivers	Clean driving record, CDL licenses required for most	Vocational training (6 mon)
Licensed Practical Nurses	Advanced math, reading, writing, science, Customer service skills	Vocational training (12 mon)
Medical Assistants	Bilingual a plus, Customer service skills	Vocational training (6-12 mon)
Home Health Aides & Personal Care Aides	Bilingual a plus, Customer service skills, some positions require certification	Short term training (one mon)
Nursing Aides	Bilingual a plus, Customer service skills, requires certification	Short term training (one mon)
Therapy Aides: Physical, occupational & respiratory	Bilingual a plus, Customer service skills, requires certification	Associates Degree or higher
"Green Jobs" including Weatherization and Energy Auditing	Customer service skills, certification or licenses	Vocational Training (6 - 24 mon)

Examining labor market trends is only a first step in overall workforce development planning. Analysis of the characteristics of our local workforce is also necessary to assist in determining the best strategies for ensuring that local job seekers have the skills necessary to secure employment in growth industries.

According to the Mass, Inc. report, *New Skills for a New Economy*, 1.1 million people in the state of Massachusetts representing one-third of the overall workforce, do not have basic reading, writing or math skills. Recent data in southeastern MA shows even worse deficiencies than the state as a whole. More specifically, data gleaned from the U.S. Census as well as the MA Department of Career Services (DCS) indicate that more than half of the region’s labor force has an education level below the state average. In fact, nearly half the residents of Fall River (44.7%) do not have a high school diploma which is well above the state average of 20%. Only 21% had earned a bachelor’s degree or higher, as compared to 34% statewide. These trends have been relatively stable over the past decade. Within the Bristol Workforce Investment Area, nearly a quarter of residents do not have a high school diploma.

This data is further supported by examining some characteristics of Bristol’s Unemployment Insurance Claimants compiled by the Massachusetts Division of Career Services (DCS)

	<u>HS Grad</u>	<u>College Grad</u>	<u>15+ weeks of UI</u>
March 2008	49.0	10.1	27.4
March 2009	47.1	13.3	27.4
March 2010	48.4	12.1	29.8
March 2011	48.6	12.4	25.7
March 2012	49.2	12.6	29.2

To provide additional illustration, examination of the general Career Center population reveals that most job seekers have one or more significant barriers to attaining education, training and employment goals. Statistical data through the end of Fiscal Year 2012 shows the following. Of adults served at the Career Center, 20% lacked a high school diploma and 57% were basic skills deficient (testing below a ninth grade reading or math level). Of dislocated workers served, 19% had less than a high school diploma and 42% were basic skills deficient. Of the youth served, 47% were disabled, 60% were basic skills deficient, 8% were ex-offenders and 16% were pregnant / parenting.

In examining this data, particularly the skills deficiencies among many in the region, it is important to note that additional surveys and focus groups of some of the region's largest employers also provided further evidence that basic skills were necessary among the region's workforce. Based on this analysis, it appears likely that a significant portion of our customers will be deficient in the education, basic skills, computer literacy and occupational skills necessary to successfully negotiate and navigate the rigors of today's and tomorrow's employment exigencies.

A direct correlation between skill deficiencies and earnings can be drawn. According to DCS research, the average annual wage in the Bristol Workforce Investment area during 2012 was \$44,928 which falls well below the statewide figure of \$60,892 over the same period.

To obtain good jobs and economic self-sufficiency, many of the job seekers in our region will need intervention in the following areas:

- Help in getting a GED or high school diploma and/or Basic Skills upgrading;
- Job readiness training and work maturity skills;
- Labor market information;
- Skill assessment and career counseling;
- Basic job search skills training;
- Computer literacy and skills training;
- Initial occupational skills training;
- Occupational skills re-training; and/or
- Job development and job placement services.

Clearly, the changes in the local and regional economies show a need for Bristol's workforce to possess increased work maturity and technical skills if they are to succeed in entering and advancing along a meaningful career ladder. However, the demographic and labor market analyses articulated above shows the significant challenges Bristol faces in addressing these issues.

This bleak picture of skills deficiencies is painted against the backdrop of a changing local economy that increasingly demands higher skills levels of its workers. While Bristol still relies on its manufacturing base to provide employment to many of its residents, new employment opportunities in this industry cluster that offer the opportunity for a self sufficiency wage center on high tech manufacturing.

The other industry clusters within the local and regional economies that are showing growth and employment opportunities also require higher skill levels. For example, it has been noted that the medical field clearly remains an important employment cluster in the area, with an annual increase in the percentage of area workers employed in this field. However, success in this and other growth fields is dependent on a high school diploma, strong work maturity skills and technical skills that require occupational and/or post secondary education.

According to Mass Inc.'s report *Reconnecting Massachusetts Gateway Cities*, it was noted that between 2001 and 2005, the City of Fall River generated a 7.1% increase in knowledge industry employment, while the Fall River region recorded a 26.5% increase. This gain of 450 higher-paying jobs for the city and 2,400 jobs for the region offers new opportunities for individuals who can bring solid occupational skills to the table.

Other data sources show increasing demand for individuals skilled in knowledge based industries. According to the Southeastern Regional Planning & Economic Development District's (SRPEDD) *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy*, Biomedical/Biotechnical or Life Sciences already make up a majority of employment within the knowledge and technology-intensive industry clusters throughout the state and region. This same report cites efforts throughout the region to attract bio-tech companies to the area, further noting that the Massachusetts Biotechnology Council (MBC) ranks several area communities as *BioReady* including the cities of Attleboro, Fall River and Taunton.

The major challenge in providing individual job seekers with the technical skills to meet the technical requirements of area employers is the often significant skill deficiencies that were noted in the demographic analysis above.

## **Section 3: Strategic Priorities**

The existing state Workforce Investment Act plan includes a statement that “all Massachusetts residents will have the competencies, employment skills, and education to support themselves and their families and to live a quality life. Many of the initiatives to be undertaken by the Bristol WIB will align with those goals, taking into account the local education, training and job development needs of our region’s job seekers.

The Bristol Workforce Investment Board will continue to adhere to the principle that we must enable job seekers to maximize their opportunities for economic prosperity. The workforce development system in Bristol will serve as a repository of resources that will provide its customers with the knowledge necessary for them to make individual decisions based upon the most current and reliable information. Bristol shall make increased efforts to incorporate a diversity of resources, funding streams and partnering opportunities that will be presented in a seamless manner to maximize the scope and effectiveness of services throughout the region.

In order to achieve these goals, the Bristol Workforce Investment Board has established the following strategic objectives:

### **3a.) Raise Awareness of the WIB and Career Center’s role in workforce development**

It is critical to ensure that the businesses, job seekers, political leaders and the community at large have an awareness of the workforce development system and the work of the Bristol WIB. As a result, the WIB will develop and implement a regional workforce development outreach plan with the following objectives:

- Create positive name recognition for the Bristol WIB and local One-Stop Career Centers
- Establish the WIB and Career Centers as the first point of contact to meet the needs of employers who are seeking qualified employees and/or require other workforce development services such as incumbent worker training
- Increase awareness of the WIB and Career Centers among economically disadvantaged adults and dislocated workers so that they may access available services

- Establish the WIB as the recognized regional leader in workforce development among community leaders and partnering organizations such as elected officials, government agencies, and community based organizations

### **3b.) Expand training, employment and career opportunities for at-risk target populations with educational and/or occupational skills deficiencies**

It is important to ensure that training and employment activities are maximized to reach as wide a group as possible.

- Identify additional public and private resources outside of “traditional” funding streams to increase availability of services
- Coordinate multiple grants and funding streams, particularly in the area of at-risk youth, to maximize service and avoid duplication of effort
- Utilize partnerships such as our Disability Action Committee (DAC) to access services available through partnering agencies
- Identify regional high demand, “middle-skills” positions that can be accessed with certificate and Associates Degree programs
- Establish cross regional partnerships with other WIBs to address workforce and training issues of mutual concern and opportunity
- Examine alternate modes of training such as computer based and Adult Basic Education-Occupational integrated training

### **3c.) Strengthen services for at-risk youth**

The WIB and its Youth Council place a strong emphasis on the employment and training needs of youth in the region. These youth will determine the future economic well being of the region; how successful they are will be measured by their ability to fill high growth jobs in emerging industries that require more educational and technical skills than the jobs their parents held. The WIB will Work toward ensuring that all Bristol youth will have access to the resources and support needed for educational advancement, skill development, and employment attainment, allowing them to become self-sufficient and productive adults.

- Develop more intensive and effective programs targeted to serve the most at-risk youth.
- Develop youth programming around career ladders and critical industry clusters to serve regional economic development needs and provide youth entry into career pathways, instead of low wage/ low growth jobs.
- Establish the Bristol WIB as the regional leader for youth internships, job shadowing opportunities, and apprenticeship opportunities
- Engage community leaders, educators, youth service providers, and Career Center youth staff around a cohesive strategy for youth workforce development.
- Reduce dependency on subsidized wages for youth programming and improve employment brokering for youth.
- Focus regional and funding on employment brokering and more effective work-based learning. This will create a multi-level service strategy that will lead to more systemic workforce development for youth.

### **3d.) Strengthen the connection between the region’s employers and the workforce development system**

Meeting the needs of area employers is a main priority for the Bristol WIB. Supporting area employers’ retention and expansion efforts is a necessary component in the board’s overall efforts. Through continued convening and facilitation, the Board will continue to get direct input from employers within high growth and critical industry clusters to ensure that the local workforce system meets their specific needs. The workforce development system in Bristol will ensure the delivery of quality and customized services to employers throughout the region. WIB activities in this category will include the following:

- Convene industry cluster based employer focus groups to identify skill set shortages, training needs, hiring processes and other relevant data
- Engage in regular outreach to businesses to provide information regarding available services and resources in the workforce development system

- Establish the local One-Stop Career Centers a human resource arm for area employers
- Assist employers in accessing incumbent worker training resources
- Connect employers to available services through partnering organizations such as economic development agencies
- Target training resources toward occupations in demand among area employers
- Lead sector initiatives that result in applications for funding to support local industry needs

Through continued convening and facilitation, the Bristol WIB will continue to get direct input from employers within high growth and critical industry clusters to ensure that the local workforce system meets their specific needs.

**3e.) Develop and sustain key partnerships that strengthen the region’s workforce development system**

- Build key partnerships to align education, economic development and workforce development to meet employer needs
- Formalize and expand relationship with local economic development offices to more effectively serve employers
- Regularly interface with local Chambers of Commerce to market services to employers
- Work closely with the local Community College to coordinate services to Career Center clients who wish to access post-secondary education opportunities
- Identify logical partnering organizations that have not interfaced with the workforce development system
- Maximize impact and avoid duplication of effort by identifying each partners’ resources and services

- Establish regional partnerships with other WIBs to address workforce and training issues of mutual concern and opportunity

### **3f.) Utilize current labor market information to better guide resource allocation and programmatic activity**

In determining the most effective means to link job seekers to available employer opportunities, it is necessary to have up to date labor market analysis to inform many activities in the local workforce development system. These include investment of training resources, the focus of job development activities, curriculum design in area education and training programs and assistance in customer choice.

- Analyze and identify those clusters with sustainable growth industries in the region as the primary workforce focus
- Engage in ongoing analysis of growth occupations and job vacancy rates to determine areas of special emphasis
- Engage in regular conversation with employers and convene employer focus groups to identify skill set needs and in-demand employment opportunities
- Work to align secondary and post-secondary education with employability skills required in the workplace
- Develop career ladders and lattices in targeted industry clusters to identify skill sets that cut across multiple occupational categories
- Provide One Stop Career Center staff with WIB's local labor market analysis to inform customers' training choices

## **Section 4: Addressing the Challenges and Goals**

It is anticipated that each of the above goals will not only strengthen existing activities but will also have impacts that result in new and different initiatives and partnerships. How to address the barriers and challenges to these goals while recognizing the strengths and opportunities available will be critical to an overall positive system-wide impact for the job seekers and employers we serve.

Ultimately, the strategic priorities identified above will act as a driving force behind the WIB's work to create effective and efficient strategies and systems that help to enhance the regional economy.

- Our services to employers and customers are demand driven; assisting businesses to attract and retain a skilled workforce.
- Our service to the region's workforce is to help them enter, remain in, and advance in the workplace.

Further examining existing capacity and efforts will assist the WIB in identifying areas which can be expanded and built upon in the organization's overall efforts to meet its strategic goals. While the following does not cover the entirety of existing and future strategies, it does provide a framework for implementation of the strategic plan.

### **Raise Awareness of the WIB and Career Centers**

While the Bristol WIB has strong connections with a multitude of partners, the benefits of the workforce development system's services are not known to numerous organizations and individuals who might logically connect with the WIB. For example, meeting the needs of area employers is a main priority for the Bristol WIB. However, in past employer outreach sessions, we learned that many employers have little knowledge of the width and breadth of Career Center services as well as resources such as the Workforce Training Fund and On the Job Training resources.

The WIB has marketed the services of the workforce development system. However, it has not been done in a focused, planned way. For example, employer events are held but not coordinated with other partners activities.

To help address this issue, the development of a new outreach plan is an area of focus for the WIB moving forward. Initial areas of emphasis will include the following:

- Revamp and development of targeted outreach materials
- E-newsletter
- Increased media emphasis – press releases
- Development of local labor market reports
- Joint outreach with partners (i.e. Chamber newsletter)
- Revamp website with increased access to employer service information

The Fall River area Chamber of Commerce has already assisted by setting up a regular schedule for the WIB and Career Centers to appear on their *Voice of Business* radio show, have a regular article appear in their newsletter and have the WIB and Career Centers as a guest on their Cable Access television show.

In addition, the WIB and Career Centers have worked in partnership with two major newspapers in the region to have a workforce development insert at least twice per year. This would result in four inserts per year that document services available to job seekers and employers.

An additional activity to meet our goal of strengthening the connection between the region's employers and the workforce development system will be to utilize industry cluster advocates. The WIB and Career Centers have begun to more formalize the process of having employers provide information on local workforce development services. The WIB will identify one or more employer advocates in each of the region's critical industry clusters. These individuals will be included in WIB and Career Center outreach materials and brochures, will participate in WIB employer outreach events and will accompany WIB and/or Career Center staff to individual meetings with employers where appropriate.

### **Expand training, employment and career opportunities for at-risk target populations**

Expanding education and training opportunities for at-risk populations has and will be a major area of emphasis. One area of service expansions will likely result from recent WIB activities in connection with the Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) division of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The WIB Executive Director participated in an ACLS planning group established to strengthen the connection between the Adult Basic Education and Workforce Development systems. This group has made recommendations that will result in a stronger integration of workforce development components (i.e. contextualized curriculum, greater intensity of service, integration of job readiness activities) into Adult Basic Education programs.

Based on a constricted job market, it is important to assist customers in making appropriate career and training choices. The WIB and Career Centers will work to identify additional training opportunities and strengthen its existing training programs. This will take several forms. To address the need for shorter, but still meaningful, training options, the WIB and Career Centers will encourage local partners to develop integrated basic skills-occupational training options over the traditional linear approach. This has already resulted in private training vendors, the local Community College and local community based organizations developing integrated ABE-GED-ESOL-occupational training components. As a result, job seekers with both basic and occupational skills deficiencies will be able to move to employment at a far quicker rate.

It is also important to ensure that training investments, particularly if limited, are targeted toward growth industries. In addition to the labor market analysis documented above, work history trends of career center clients will be captured through DCS (i.e. claimant characteristics) and locally customized reports. After major occupational clusters of participants are analyzed, the Career Center will examine if there are skills sets within these occupations that can be readily transferred to areas of growth as identified by our region's employers. Another tool that can be of assistance are several, locally developed career ladder documents. For example, the Bristol WIB worked with a group of health care and manufacturing employers to identify career ladders in many areas of health care employment within the local area. This included skill sets required for advancement in administrative, professional and clinical tracks. By matching up skill sets that are common among current participants with these career ladder documents, participants can be given access to training areas in which they have a better chance to secure gainful employment.

In addition, continued examination of newly available occupational clusters will drive the WIB to seek out newly established training programs in these areas. For example, Bristol Community College recently opened *The Green Center* which provides training programs in home weatherization, renewable energy technologies and green lifestyle practices.

Finally, expansion of existing training programs to encompass skills sought by employers will continue. For example, the board surveyed area health care employers to determine skills sets lacking among recent graduates of Certified Nurses Aide programs. This resulted in the board working with Bristol Community College to run two cycles of expanded CNA training which included additional curriculum around serving patients with development disabilities, computer training and work ethic issues.

Another training opportunity for Career Center clients is in “middle skills” positions that require targeted training and are in demand throughout the region. This has recently come to the surface among area manufacturers who are having difficulty filling such occupational clusters as welders and CNC machine operators. Initial discussions to develop additional manufacturing training pipelines have occurred among the WIB, area manufacturers and the UMASS Dartmouth Advanced Technology and Manufacturing Center.

In order to access occupational training programs, as well as certificate and degree programs available from local post-secondary institutions, Bristol must continue to aggressively address language and basic skills deficiencies through the utilization of intensive ESOL and GED classes funded through multiple sources. This includes the utilization of Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) funding to establish intensive, 20 hour per week classes in order to meet this critical need. These are provided by Bristol Community College and a local Community Based Organization, SER Jobs for Progress. Private proprietary schools in our region now offered such intensive education programs as well. These classes have open entry start dates and we are able to access slots on an individual referral basis. This structure will allow significant flexibility in addressing the basic skill needs of our clients on an expedited basis without the need to establish group funded activities in this category. Finally, our WIA funded Youth Programs will include a GED/skills upgrading component for a minimum of 15 hours per week. Ultimately, if many of Bristol’s job seekers are to move along a continuum of services, adult basic education activities must be available in an intensive, widely available manner. Job seekers within Bristol will access these classes, not as a stand alone activity, but as part of their overall Individual Service Strategy.

It is also likely that area job seekers will access includes referrals to occupational training often offered through Bristol Community College, ensuring a strong connection to post-secondary education. This becomes a natural connection when analyzing Bristol’s targeted occupations, many of which require an Associate’s Degree. A strong relationship with Bristol Community College (BCC) will offer area job seekers with access to a multitude of certificate programs and post-secondary educational activities. The Bristol WIB executive director sits on BCC’s Perkins Advisory Board and the Board has worked to foster additional partnerships with the College to support area job seekers.

Paralleling the Bristol WIB’s work to maximize coordination with Bristol Community College (BCC), the local One-Stop Career Centers have and will

continue to work with BCC to increase the community college's responsiveness to the needs of the typical Career Center client. One initiative is to establish a more "open entry" process, with multiple entry points, for BCC courses. With BCC traditionally having only two entry points per year, many Career Center clients have not been able to access certificate and Associates Degree programs that might ideally meet their career objectives.

Another initiative with BCC is to improve methods to increase client retention in academic programming. This would include development of a new tracking system for such clients which would result in issues such as absenteeism, academic issues or other issues affecting student progression being reported to the relevant Career Center Counselor. In this way, the counselor can work to address any issues through appropriate intervention. This will ideally have an impact on program retention and completion rates.

Other design issues the Career Centers, WIB and BCC will work on include implementation of self-paced, flexible and modular scheduling/curriculum to reduce time to obtain degrees, certificates, and industry recognized credentials, development of contextualized learning that combines basic skills with specific career knowledge and development of partnerships with employers that may include validation of curricula, use of equipment and facilities, and/or agreements to hire students following successful completion.

Work maturity or "work ethic" skills have increasingly been cited by area employers as a critical need. This need has been expressed both individually and in employer focus groups convened by the WIB. As well, newer employers to our area such as Meditech require skills such as presentation skills, teamwork, customer service skills and leadership.

With this in mind, Bristol will attempt to strengthen these skills among area job seekers through a "job club" that targets the topics cited above. Also, the Bristol WIB has required integration of work maturity skills within its youth programming and has attempted to design initiatives to address this issue. These activities stem from the conclusion if high tech companies are going to be attracted to the local area, Bristol must be able to demonstrate that it can provide employees with the skills sets that are common and in demand among these companies.

To allow for a cost effective delivery of training, the Career Centers will continue to utilize their computer orientation labs to deliver basic computer skills to a large number of participants. As basic computer skills represent a requirement that cuts across multiple industries and occupational clusters, job seekers will be able to

take advantage of 60 hours of training on Microsoft Office programs at any of the region's three Career Centers. These clients will be able to take Microsoft certification exams at the Fall River Career Center. This cost effective delivery of training services greatly expands the number of Career Center clients who can gain valuable occupational skills.

Beyond training design and funds, another concept that will be expanded to accommodate increased participant numbers at a lower cost is to provide additional services in group settings. For example, expansion of initial Career Center workshops will include more detail regarding the array of Career Center services. This might include job development staff providing an introduction on how to look for a job which may lead to participants signing up for additional Career Center workshops. Other activities in this vein could include activities that would provide information to job seekers before they see a counselor. This would include developing information about training providers perhaps to include short video pods on training programs. As well, ways to provide clients with access to relevant LMI will be investigated. The aim is to afford participants with ways to access information leading into their appointment with Career Center counselors. In this way, counselors would ultimately spend less time per appointment and could serve a greater volume of participants.

### **Strengthen Services for At-Risk Youth**

With regard to services geared toward at-risk youth, the Bristol WIB will expect that providers will need to think strategically about developing partnerships with other providers and agencies that will enhance their services and link youth to additional supports. This will entail using existing resources better through collaboration, cooperation, and partnership.

Our guiding concepts in serving youth will center on five priorities.

#### **Priority # 1 - High Expectations**

Service providers shall demonstrate high expectations for youth, including the most at-risk youth by presenting long-term integrated service strategies. Goals for youth will include both educational and occupational attainments.

#### **Priority # 2 - Systems Development**

Youth Providers will strengthen the regional workforce development system and should consider critical industry clusters, employer needs, career ladders, and the educational occupational training required to enter those industries. All workforce

development funds are to be used as leveraged resources in order to maximize the scope and effectiveness of services provided to youth.

### **Priority # 3 – Partnership Development and Seamless Service Delivery**

Priority will be given to providers who demonstrate a continuum of services based on strong partnerships and coordinated case management strategies. The Workforce Investment Act requires the provision of youth elements that center on breaking barriers to success. These include tutoring/study skills, alternative education, paid and unpaid work experience, occupational training, leadership development, supportive services, adult mentoring, and comprehensive guidance and counseling. In addition, job readiness skills and job search assistance are also critical components of an integrated youth service strategy.

It is clear that a single provider attempting to deal with even some of these elements through a purely WIA funded program would face significant challenges in meeting the needs of at-risk youth. It is even clearer that a partnership leveraging outside resources and providing the multiple areas of expertise offered by its members would be far better equipped to develop a service strategy that addresses the aforementioned youth elements in a comprehensive way.

While the following list only scratches the surface of potential youth partners, service linkages can be made with youth serving agencies, community and faith based organizations, employers, local high schools, alternative schools, vocational schools, community colleges and other institutions of higher learning, School-to-Career Partnerships, and the One Stop Career Centers.

### **Priority # 4 - Career Development**

Placing youth in jobs without growth potential does not serve either the youth or the workforce needs of the region. Youth program design within our region should include strategies that identify career ladders within critical industry clusters that offer high wage/high growth opportunities. Programs that offer the attainment of an occupational skill certificate in these areas will receive preference in funding consideration.

High priority should be placed on establishing brokered, paid employment opportunities for youth within these clusters.

Brokered employment refers to negotiated opportunities that youth would be unable to secure on their own. Negotiated elements could include job coaching, work-based learning plans, internship to employment arrangements, on the job training, or other services to support successful transitions into the workplace.

### **Priority # 5 - Positive Performance and Measurable Results**

The Bristol WIB and the Career Centers of Bristol County are performance driven agencies. Consequently, providers must incorporate the performance measures identified in the attached addendum in the development of programs and youth service strategies.

In examining the youth priorities, it is clear that Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funding alone is insufficient to meet the broad needs of our region's youth. As a result, it is critical that resources be leveraged across agencies, school systems, and funding streams.

The WIB will continue to blend WIA and non-WIA funding to maximize services and avoid duplication of effort. This already occurs and the concept will continue to guide our many youth programs. For example, School to Career Connecting Activities (STC), funded by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), is strongly integrated into our youth service delivery system. Our local STC partnerships provide valuable employment brokering services, initiate the MA Work Based Learning Plan for numerous youth, and receive MCAS remediation grants and connect youth to these grants.

*YouthWorks* funds, provided by the state of MA, are utilized extensively throughout our region to expand work and learning opportunities for area youth in both summer and year round operational periods.

The DESE "Pathways" grant funds a staff person at the Career Center who connects youth who have failed MCAS testing with education, training and employment resources. DESE also provides funding to the region through its 596/597 *Work and Learning* programs. This has allowed the Career Centers, public schools and STC Partnerships to link in-school youth to remediation activities where appropriate.

The WIB partners with the Department of Youth Services to operate a *Bridging the Opportunity Gap* grant that funds a Career Specialist to work with youth in community re-entry centers in Fall River and Taunton. This individual provides court involved youth with work readiness skills, employment brokering and job coaching. The WIB is also a partner in and receives funding from a local *Charles E. Shannon Community Safety Initiative*. The *Shannon Grant* targets youth at risk for gang involvement through the provision of outreach, guidance, and vocational counseling.

These examples illustrate the challenges but also the opportunities in a systemic approach to youth services.

### **Strengthen Connection between employers and workforce development system**

To strengthen employer participation in the workforce development system, it is fully anticipated that the WIB will return to the formation of sector partnerships. This will assist the board in aligning training activities with high-growth industries and critical industry clusters. The Bristol WIB has had past success in building such industry cluster partnerships. These included the Southeastern Massachusetts Manufacturing Partnership (SEMMC) and the Southeast Health Care Collaborative (SEHCC). The WIB was able to secure grants to address the incumbent worker training needs of these partnerships, securing approximately \$1 million through two successful grant applications, which resulted in more than 1,600 incumbent workers accessing training. With additional grant opportunities on the horizon for WIB led employer consortiums, Bristol will continue to form new sector partnerships to address employers' common workforce needs. By increasing our assistance to employers in accessing incumbent worker training funds, it is anticipated that additional resources will be secured for the region.

To increase employer usage of the local Career Centers, the Center will directly market all the employer services that are available including:

- Access to Professional Account Representatives and Account Management Services
- Employer Recruitment Services
- Initial Pre-screening of Applicants Prior to Referral
- Labor Market Information, Information on Applicant Pool and Qualifications of Potential Applicants
- Access to Talent Bank
- Information on Local Availability of Training Grants, Skill Development Opportunities and Referral to State Funding Resources
- Information on Working With Individuals With Disabilities

It should be noted that it will not only be the Career Centers that market these services, but employers themselves. Several employers who have utilized the local workforce development system have agreed to support Career Center employer outreach efforts. For example, the local Stop & Shop distribution center as well as Anderson Windows have provided support letters and spoken with other employers about the effectiveness of Career Center employer services. Other employers, such as Meditech and Sousa and Demayo have participated in past

WIB's employer information sessions to describe their connection with the local workforce development system. This is certainly an area that can be expanded to achieve the WIB's strategic goals.

To address the issue of the local unemployment rate, the Career Center will re-double its efforts to uncover as large a number of employment opportunities as possible. Through re-allocation of resources, some of their staff will be retrained. In many instances, staff efforts will increasingly be targeted toward employment outreach and job development services. This group will aggressively attempt to identify employers who are hiring. Upon identifying a company within this category, staff will meet with the employer to gather information regarding near term and long term hiring estimates as well as the skill sets required for these employment opportunities. This information will also assist the Career Center in identifying training areas for Career Center participants and may also alert the Center to any potential group training needs.

Another initiative is the utilization of a customized job bank to maximize job search assistance to the widest range of customers possible. Activities around this initiative continue with local companies utilizing the Bristol Job Bank to assist them in identifying qualified candidates. As well, the Job Bank has provided Career Center job seekers with increased opportunities, often entirely through self service. As additional employers have accessed the job bank, it has become a useful tool to quickly assess the hiring needs of a wide range of area companies.

### **Develop and sustain key partnerships**

To achieve its strategic goals, the Bristol WIB will strengthen its partnership with local economic development offices. Bristol will continue to partner with area economic development agencies to increase employment opportunities for participants. For example, the region's economic development offices will inform newly established companies of the services available through the Career Center and arrange for these companies to visit the Career Center. In addition, the Fall River Office of Economic Development includes a workforce development question on the employer surveys it regularly disseminates. Those companies that express needs related to job vacancies and other workforce development issues will be referred to the Career Center. Also, any businesses that create positions through the Fall River OED's Micro Loan program are advised to utilize the local One Stop Career Center to meet their hiring needs.

These partnerships with economic development will be strengthened by setting up a regular meeting schedule with identified economic development staff. As well,

these staff will be invited to participate in WIB sponsored employer information sessions as well as WIB led strategic planning meetings.

The WIB will continue to work with the southeast regional offices of the Massachusetts Small Business Development Center and Massachusetts Office of Business Development to share information, outreach to business and better coordinate the various services available to employers.

Our strategic goal of expanded partnership development and increased workforce development services to at-risk population will be served by striving to leverage complementary resources available among many of our partners. For example, the WIB continues to maintain a Disability Action Committee (DAC) which includes representatives from the WIB, Career Centers, employers and numerous agencies and organizations that service individuals with disabilities. This committee has worked to systemically improve training and job search services for individuals with disabilities. We have learned that many individuals participating within the workforce development system are not accessing services that could be of benefit. The DAC will continue to work on improving cross-referral processes between the Career Centers and organizations such as Mass Rehabilitation Commission, Department of Mental Health, Mass Commission for the Blind and the Independent Living Centers. Also, cross training of staff among these organizations will occur throughout the period covered by this strategic plan based on need.

Our strong connection to Bristol Community College has already been documented but there are numerous other areas for partnership with post-secondary education in the region. For example, as part of goal 3b. the WIB has already worked with Bristol Community College (BCC) to better align curriculum between credit and Associate Degree programs. The goal is to have individuals enrolled in BCC certificate programs secure transferable credits to Associate Degree programs. This has already been established for the Medical Assistant Certificate program. The WIB and BCC have agreed to continue this work with other community college programs.

The Bristol WIB will continue to collaborate with other neighboring WIB's in seeking funds to provide training opportunities to local employees to provide career ladder, and transferable skills to incumbent workers. Currently the Bristol WIB in collaboration with the Greater New Bedford WIB is meeting with a number of members representing the various segments of the healthcare industry in the region to identify the hiring needs of the area and the skill sets required to fill

those needs. Ultimately the goal is to assist employers seek alternative ways of funding streams to train their staff.

### **Utilize labor market information to better guide resource allocation and programmatic action**

The WIB will devote sufficient staff time and resources to engage in ongoing labor market analysis. This has obvious benefits in guiding the WIB toward policy decisions around investment of training resources, the focus of job development activities, curriculum design in area education and training programs and assistance in customer choice.

While the WIB does engage in such analysis, the process and outputs need to be further formalized. More specifically, the WIB will issue at least one formal labor market report annually. As well, the WIB will offer LMI presentations to partners within our region. Presentations have already included Adult Basic Education Community Planning Partnerships in the region, Rotary Club, Career Centers, and other entities. Certainly, the value of accurate LMI is of benefit to many stakeholders in the region as evidenced by the regular inquiries for such data that the WIB receives on a frequent basis. For example, regular requests have increased from local economic development entities which has served to further strengthen the workforce development-economic development partnership throughout the region.

Data sources that will be utilized include, but are not necessarily limited to the following:

- United States Department of Labor Data
- MA Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development data
- Local and regional economic development organizations' data (i.e. Southeast Regional Planning and Economic Development District)
- Data gleaned through WIB facilitated Employer Focus Groups
- Data from labor market reports through other sources
- Job placement and training completion data within the Massachusetts One Stop Employment System (MOSES)

Through this formalized process, the WIB will not only strengthen its ability to respond to changes in the local market through policy development and recalibrating services but will also position the organization to be the recognized as the local source for current labor market data in the region.

## Section 5: Measuring Progress

The goals of the WIB will be reviewed by the full board and its subcommittees. The following metrics will guide the board in judging which strategies are successful and those that need adjustment or additional effort.

### 1. **Raise Awareness of the WIB and Career Center’s role in workforce development.**

#### Quantitative Measures

- Development of formal outreach plan
- At least four informational inserts annually in two regional newspapers
- At least two guest articles per year in Chamber of Commerce newsletters
- At least six speaking engagements/presentations per year
- At least three employment information events per year
- 25% improvement in Bristol WIB website usage
- At least two television appearances per year
- At least two op-ed pieces in local newspapers per year
- Development of updated outreach materials for employer and job seeker services

#### Qualitative Measures

- Key stakeholders gain a greater understanding of workforce development system and actively utilize its services
- WIB becomes the key driver of workforce development policy discussion and partnership development in the region
- WIB becomes recognized leader in workforce development among community leaders and partnering organizations

### 2. **Expand education, training, employment and career opportunities for at-risk target populations.**

#### Quantitative Measures

- Work with Bristol Community College to establish at least two “fast-track” programs at Bristol Community College in critical industry clusters
- Establish at least two new “middle-skills” programs in regional critical industry clusters with non-WIA resources
- Work with local provider network to establish at least four integrated Adult Basic Education-Occupational Skills training programs in targeted industry clusters

- Work with Career Centers to hold at least four job fairs annually
- Increase number of employer on-site recruitments by 10%
- Secure at least 30% additional funding beyond Workforce Investment Act dedicated training dollars
- Develop one comprehensive inventory of training providers offering training/industry recognized credentials within the region's critical industry clusters

### **Qualitative Measures**

- Availability of education and training opportunities expanded for job seekers
- Training programs prepare job seekers for opportunities in growth occupations
- Secured funding is coordinated and integrated to maximize level of services
- High demand positions that can be accessed with certificate and Associate Degree programs are identified

### **3. Strengthen services for at-risk youth.**

#### **Quantitative Measures**

- Serve at least 400 youth annually through all targeted youth programs/activities coordinated by the WIB
- At least 1,000 youth are served directly or indirectly through WIB or partnering organization activities supported by the WIB
- Establish an Education and Industry Advisory Council to work with the region's public school system on career and job readiness for in-school youth
- Attain GED/Industry Recognized Credential attainment rate of 65% for at-risk youth
- Establish three intensive GED programs (one in each of the region's cities) for at-risk youth
- Increase the number of internships for in and out-of school youth by 10%

#### **Qualitative Measures**

- Youth will be provided a continuum of services based on strong partnerships and coordinated case management strategies
- WIA and non-WIA funding is blended to maximize services and avoid duplication of effort
- Youth program design includes strategies that identify career ladders within critical industry clusters that offer high wage/high growth opportunities

- WIB is recognized as regional leader for youth internships, job shadowing and apprenticeship opportunities
- Career and job-readiness of youth graduating from high school is positively impacted

**4. Strengthen the connection between the region’s employers and the workforce development system.**

Quantitative Measures

- Increase of 10% in number of new employers served at Career Centers
- Increase of 10% in number of job orders placed with Career Centers
- Increase of 10% in number of On the Job Training partnerships established
- Hold at least six industry briefings
- Hold at least six employer focus groups
- Add at least five employer advocates from within board membership
- Increase number of incumbent worker training grants by 10%

Qualitative Measures

- WIB becomes first point of contact for employers seeking qualified employees
- WIB becomes first point of contact for employers seeking to upgrade skills of incumbent workers
- A greater understanding of current skill set needs required by the region’s employers

**5. Develop and sustain key partnerships that strengthen the region’s workforce development system.**

Quantitative Measures

- Establish formal meeting schedule with local economic development entities
- Increase number of employer referrals from local and regional economic development entities by 10%
- WIB and Career Center develop at least two cross regional partnerships with other Workforce Investment Areas designed to expand education, training and/or employment services
- Partner with at least five organizations that have not previously interfaced with the workforce development system
- Attend at least eight partner events per year (including Chamber of Commerce Business After Hours)

- Career Centers to develop at least three cross regional strategies for business service integration

#### Qualitative Measures

- Key partnerships are strengthened and new partnership are developed to align education, economic development and workforce development to meet employer needs
  - Additional resources available through partnering organization are identified and utilized to increase intensity and effectiveness of services provided job seekers and employers
6. Utilize current labor market information to better guide resource allocation and programmatic activity.

#### Quantitative Measures

- At least one major labor market report issued per year
- At least six speaking engagements/presentations per year that include LMI component
- At least two labor market presentations to Career Center staff per year
- Update current health care and manufacturing career ladder documents
- Add one additional local career ladder publication in an additional critical industry cluster

#### Qualitative Measures

- Key stakeholders and staff understand current labor market trends and utilize this data in decision making
- Partnering organizations look to WIB for up to date labor market information
- Workforce development policy decisions driven by up to date LMI
- Influence local and regional discussions among partners and stakeholders on policy

## **Section 6: Conclusions and Next Steps**

The Bristol Workforce Investment Board is committed to ensuring the local workforce development system continually strives toward improvement in meeting the demands of the region's job seekers, employers and other stakeholders. This plan embodies the principle that we must enable job seekers to maximize their opportunities for economic prosperity. The region's workforce development system will incorporate a diversity of resources that will be presented in a seamless manner to serve the wide array of individuals and organizations that are directly and indirectly impacted by the policies and services established by the WIB. Flexibility will be a cornerstone with adjustments continuously made to reflect the changing needs of customers based upon their expressed needs and recommendations.

The goals and tasks outlined in this plan will be overseen by the WIB's executive committee with input and analysis provided by relevant subcommittees of the board. These will include the Planning Committee, Youth Council, Performance Committee and Disability Action Committee. Any refinements of timeline and reporting instruments will be overseen by the WIB's Planning Committee. Each WIB subcommittee is comprised of a wide range of partners. By assembling and fostering communication among the region's diverse workforce stakeholders, the WIB will work toward remaining a major catalyst in the area's advancement of an effective workforce development system.