

# FRANKLIN HAMPSHIRE REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT BOARD STRATEGIC PLAN

## NEW! 2013 – 2018 SYNOPSIS

### Mission

*“To shape, nurture and sustain a regional workforce development system that promotes the economic well-being of a diverse workforce and business base.”*

### Goals and Action Steps 2013-2018

- I. **In collaboration with community partners, increase frequency and depth of contacts and relationships with priority industry sector employers.**
  - Engage more employers directly in education/training program development
  - Intensify use of OJT, paid internship and other on-site opportunities to incentivize hiring and enhance training
  - Maintain/expand staff specialist/coach role in at least 3 priority areas: e.g. manufacturing, healthcare, and educational services
  - Track and support continuing growth and development of jobs and training in industry areas key to our regional identity: e.g. agriculture, green jobs, and the creative economy.
  
- II. **Refine and expand our ability to work creatively and effectively with community partners to serve homeless and ex-offenders, among other special populations (e.g. Adult Learners, Veterans, people with disabilities, the long-term unemployed, etc.)**
  - Document current practice/partners and identify potential improvements/enhancements
  - With or without grant funding, build on strong working relationships to implement
  - Seek funding to work collaboratively with partners to address persistent weaknesses and gaps.
  
- III. **Draw on Board member expertise and contacts to increase visibility of REB and impact of services.**
  - Increase the visibility of the REB in Hampshire County, including Ware, and in West County
  - Engage REB members personally in new member recruitment
  - Ensure every REB member contributes to youth employment goals through either a donation, a youth work experience, or assistance in engaging an additional business in youth employment activities.
  
- IV. **Improve the quality, not just the quantity, of business relationships.**
  - Increase focus on employer workshops/seminars
  - Increase direct referrals of jobs seekers to employers
  - Establish a local, collaborative “rapid response” strategy for projected lay-offs that complements and enhances state Rapid Response program.

- V. Engage a variety of partners in helping youth in transition develop a focus, gain skills, and achieve goals.**
- Provide a diverse mix of career development activities that afford out-of-school and in-school youth the opportunity to move from *awareness, to exploration, to immersion*
  - Ensure every youth completing a program has a Next Step Plan and Back-Up Plan.
  - Increase the level of awareness and utilization of Youth Service Council education/employment resources in area high schools.

**FRANKLIN HAMPSHIRE  
REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT BOARD**

Strategic Plan  
2013 - 2018

**Mission**

(Revised)

**"To shape, nurture and sustain  
a regional workforce development system  
that promotes the economic well-being of a diverse workforce and  
business base."**

**Core Values**

**LIFELONG LEARNING**

**Fostering continuous access to education and training opportunities for all  
helps individuals and businesses to thrive.**

**COLLABORATION**

**Intentional, deliberate cooperation among public and private sector partners  
leverages community assets and leads to  
innovative programs and efficient use of resources.**

**REGIONAL SOLUTIONS**

**Broad-based leadership and participation generates creative, strategic responses  
to employment needs that span our workforce investment area  
and have a powerful and lasting impact.**

***Statement of Purpose: The Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board is the  
community board made up of representatives of business, labor, education, and  
government that oversees and directs workforce development policy, funding,  
and programming for the fifty communities of Franklin and Hampshire Counties  
and the North Quabbin region.***

## **Vision of the Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board 2013 – 2018**

**The F/H Regional Employment Board will continue to be widely-recognized as a high performing workforce investment board by its community, WDB counterparts, and state partners. The Board will have comprehensive strategies in place for addressing the workforce needs of each of its prominent industry sectors, and will offer documented success of changes or enhancements in the public workforce system that support each of these sectors. The REB will be able to articulate and account for effective programs and strategies in relation to key workforce populations, including the Emerging Workforce, the Transitional Workforce, the Incumbent Workforce, and the Adult Learner/Limited English speaking workforce. The Board will continue to communicate success in these strategies regularly with its partners through press releases, an annual community “report card, and an increased web presence. The Board will use ROI measures to quantify its success to the community.**

**In these five years the FHREB will be strengthened by increased reliance on individual Board members to take a leadership role in setting the agenda and carrying out the business of its sub-committees: including the Performance Oversight, Youth Career Connections, Legislative, Nominating, and Special Projects Committees.**

**The FHREB will be recognized widely by the business community as the place to go for assistance in developing creative workforce development solutions. The REB will have at least doubled the number of employer partners involved in competitively grant-funded collaborative training projects. The number of employers applying for Workforce Training Funds will have increased, and the the number of employers listing job orders at our Career Centers will have increased. By 2018, the FHREB will also have increased its capacity to develop and sustain innovative projects in partnership with business and community partners through the addition of at least one staff member specifically devoted to special projects and resource development.**

**By 2018, the REB will have established itself as a hub of resources, services, and collaborative grant programming for youth development. The REB will have played a leadership role across our region in implementation of the Governor’s Readiness Project goals, documenting improvement of college and career readiness of F/H/NO youth. Moreover, the REB and its Youth Career Connections Council will have solidified its unique position as the only regional entity specifically targeting the out-of-school youth population with extensive and continuous youth development, training, and job placement services. .**

**The Board will have utilized its private non-profit capacity to access private and foundation funding, at least doubling the amount awarded in its baseline year of 2013.**

**The Board will have expanded and strengthened its links to its legislative representatives and town government leaders, and their understanding of the public workforce development system as a key player, so that all think of and turn to the Board and its staff when issues of job creation, unemployment, job training, business recruitment or expansion arise.**

**Most importantly, the Board will have communicated its vision of “Workforce Development as Human Development” broadly and effectively in the community. Board’s activities will demonstrate that it is equally interested in:**

- **helping unemployed individuals and groups of workers through the process of discovering, inventing, doing, and being that turns “jobs” into “careers and leads them to become productive, satisfied and contributing members of the community**
- **helping businesses use workforce development as a tool for increasing their competitiveness, their productivity and their long term growth, and publicly recognizing and commending those who do.**

## Background

The Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board developed and implemented its first formal five-year Strategic Plan in 2002. The Plan at that time focused on refining and honing the mission, goals and objectives of the REB as an entity independent of and different from the Career Center, a focus prompted by major changes as a result of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and its launching of Boards with more autonomy, authority and discretion than prior advisory councils.

In late 2007, in acknowledgement of the achievement of many of its five-year goals, and in recognition of the changing landscape of workforce development, the Board made a decision to launch development of a new Strategic Plan. The new plan more closely defines the role of the Board in overseeing regional workforce development activities through the One-Stop Career Center system, as well as updates the focus and intensity of competitively-funded strategic initiatives either led or contributed to in major ways by REB members and Career Center staff.

In April 2008 the REB hosted a Community Planning session to launch development of the plan. The Community Planning Session was a highly-significant component of the FHREB strategic planning process. Not only did a broad range of community stakeholders reflect on updated Labor Market Data (see Appendix for detailed LMI), respond to and add to the REB's 2008-2013 Vision, and begin the process of refining that vision into Strategic Goals. Partners and stakeholders also had the chance to review and incorporate the results of a preliminary community survey:

The community survey and follow-up planning session elicited facts, figures, and insights on a wide variety of topics, including demographics; economic, business and labor trends; education and training issues; political and legislative trends; socio-economic factors; and workforce development system capacity.

### **“WHAT’S IN THE AIR?”**

Franklin Hampshire Regional Employment Board  
Strategic Planning  
April 2008

#### **The Community’s Thoughts on What We Need to Know about the Franklin, Hampshire and North Quabbin Region**

- Inaugural launch of open strategic planning
- Key regional stakeholders participate
- Identification and analysis of key workforce data
- Identification of key REB directions

- Community members noted such things as the aging baby boomer generation, and a generation of elders needing to work much longer to support themselves. They noted the growing immigrant population, including Moldovan, Romanian, and Russian as well as Hispanic citizens. They highlighted the growing percentage of older youth in adult education programs, and the relatively flat birth rate.
- Participants noted the trend toward more home-based business and small businesses, and increasing reliance on the Internet. Persistent labor

demand among small “niche” manufacturers was highlighted, as well as the fact that—while only 135 establishments in F/H have more than 100 employees, those firms are responsible for over two-fifths of the jobs in the region.

- Concerns were expressed about the lack of access to vocational-technical training in the region for older youth, adults, and immigrant populations, and the fear that we were creating a new generation of “discouraged workers,” with too few viable pathways for accessing sustainable-wage work. Participants noted we had become better at educating and counseling for industry clusters, instead of reacting to a single company’s problems.

This preliminary survey and follow-up planning session were a way of infusing our process and final plan with the expertise and accumulated wisdom and experience of a wide range of community partners, including but not limited to:

- Business Leaders
- Workforce Development Professionals
- Municipal leaders
- Labor Representatives
- Chambers of Commerce
- The Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG)
- Community Action of Franklin and Hampshire Counties
- Franklin County Community Development Corporation
- The University of Massachusetts
- The Adult Basic Education and Worker Education community
- Greenfield Community College
- Representative secondary schools, including both vocational-technical high schools.
- And many others...

Strategic plans and needs assessments from many of these entities, and the data supporting them, were also drawn on to complete our Plan, but the personal presence and input of leaders in our community planning as reflected in their contributions to this document and their participation in the day’s work were particularly invaluable.

With the advent of WIOA in 2016, the FHREB reviewed progress on implementation of its Strategic Plan and updated Goals and Objectives for the 2013 – 2018 period. The FHREB is now looking forward to the data, resources and focus provided by the MA Workforce Skills Cabinet’s Regional Workforce Planning Initiative to shape our efforts in succeeding years.

*[FH Profile update in process]*

## **The Franklin Hampshire Region**

The Franklin/Hampshire workforce area covers all of Franklin and Hampshire counties and four towns in northwestern Worcester County. The Franklin/Hampshire REB serves forty-seven towns and three cities (Easthampton, Greenfield and Northampton). The region is predominately rural (29 of the towns in the area have populations of less than 2,000). It is the largest Workforce area in the state in geographical area, but the third or fourth smallest in population. Estimated population in 2006 was approximately 241,761, which is about 3.7% of the State's total population. The total land area of the region is approximately 1,400 square miles, 17% of the State.

Although the Franklin/Hampshire area has a much lower percentage of minorities than the state (7.3% versus 15.5%), the minority population is growing much faster than the white population and much faster than in previous years. This fact has led the Board and Career Centers to increase our collaborations with literacy partners, support aggressive recruitment of minority staff in WIA youth programs, and improve our One Stop's ability to respond to customers with limited English proficiency. The region also has a very high educational attainment level because of the five colleges and universities that are in the area. Among the population 25 and over, high school dropouts were just 11.6% and those with a Bachelor or advanced degree were 33.7%. For Massachusetts as a whole the respective percentages were 15.2% and 33.2%. Although the Franklin/Hampshire area has a relatively low percentage of school dropouts in the population, it is this group that faces many difficulties in achieving labor market success, especially those who are between the ages of 16 and 19. Data from the 2000 Census shows that these young school dropouts had an unemployment rate of over 25% and an additional 28% of this population was not participating at all in the labor market. For that reason, there is a heavy emphasis on youth services in our region, with WIA Youth Year Round, Connecting Activities, and Pathways to MCAS Success all working hand-in-hand out of our Career Centers. Our WIA Youth programs have long targeted the much harder-to-serve out-of-school youth population.

As indicated in DCS/DUA Labor Market profiles of 2002 through 2008 the Franklin/Hampshire area, like Massachusetts, experienced a downturn in the economy during 2002 and 2003, and another in the past year. The area had gone from nearly full employment in 2001 (unemployment rate of less than 3%) to unemployment rates in 2002 of 4.0% and 4.3% in 2003. Unemployment rates in Massachusetts, during the same period, increased from 5.5% to 5.7%. Most recent data (2008 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter) shows an unemployment rate of 5.5% for the Franklin/Hampshire area as compared to the statewide rate of 6.5 %.

Small employers dominate the Franklin/Hampshire area. In March of 2006 over 88% of the area employers had fewer than 20 employees and only 1.9% of the employers had over 100 employees. Not only are our wages only 66% of the statewide average, but in a recent period, Franklin/Hampshire wages increased at a slower rate than the state's increase ( 3% increase versus 5.6%).

Updated Labor Market Analysis affirms our conviction that the most striking feature of the Franklin/Hampshire economy is the importance of the Educational Services sector. This sector accounts for nearly 1 in 4 jobs (22.9%) in F/H, compared to 1 in 10 (9.3%) statewide. Moreover, half of those jobs are located at the College and University level.

Additional key data points that informed our subsequent community planning and Strategic Plan Task Force sessions included the following:

- Payroll jobs are increasing at a much slower rate in F/H, compared to the statewide rate. Between 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter '04 and 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter '07, Massachusetts jobs increased by 3.1%, F/H by only .3%. However, during the most recent 12-month period covered by the analysis, F/H doubled its rate of growth in payroll jobs, largely attributable to the region's manufacturing sector. The important manufacturing sector, with its higher-than-average overall wages and entry-level wages, still figures in the top five most important industry sectors in F/H.
- As in the rest of the state, the Healthcare and Social Assistance sector is also prominent in the F/H economy, comprising 13.1% of area jobs. The major increases in employment within this sector have been in Ambulatory Health Care services, with growth most pronounced among Physician's Offices and Home Health care. Growth in Nursing and Residential Care facilities was also distinct, almost all of it in Community Care for the Elderly, including Independent and Assisted Living facilities.
- The F/H employment structure differs sharply from the rest of the state in the high technology sectors of Information and Professional and Technical Services. While these two sectors comprise 10.7% of all jobs in the state, the respective share in F/H is less than one half this proportion (4.5%).

Salient among the **challenges** identified by the community and supported by data were the following:

- We have the largest geographical span and lowest population of any MA workforce region, leading to some of the lowest allocations of state/federal resources, but with some of the highest potential costs when it comes to such things as transportation (e.g. costs of helping disadvantaged job seekers get to training or even basic services; costs of staff outreaching services to clients).
- Similar to the rest of the state, our birth rate is down and there is a steep increase in the percentage of our population who are senior citizens or workers nearing retirement age.
- There is only one community college in our 1400 square mile region; Hampshire is the only county in the state with no community college.
- Technical training beyond the CNA, LPN, Nursing, and business programs offered by the local community college and Skills, Inc. in Amherst is a minimum of 40 miles distant, in Holyoke, Springfield, Gardner, or New Hampshire—out of our region and beyond any feasible daily public transportation routes.
- Of the 32 communities in MA with no access to high-speed internet, 56% (18) are located in the F/H region. This severely impacts job seeker access to on-line services and education/training, as well as entrepreneurship and overall business development.

Conversely, our region has very **unique workforce development strengths** that we can call upon, among these strengths are:

- The powerful Five College Network economic engine which helps sustain and generate countless small businesses in our region (including the backbone businesses at the heart of our vibrant downtown economies)
- The identification of Northampton as one of the top ten places to spend retirement years, and the geriatric /retiree housing/community living career paths emerging



- The growing interest and support for renewable energy/energy efficiency in the community and in businesses, with the recognition that this direction will ensure their ability to compete and survive: on this issue the Franklin region is ahead of the curve
- Strong, collaborative youth development network
- Strong, collaborative adult education network, including outstanding workplace education (UMASS) and ESOL (Center for New Americans and International Language Institute of Massachusetts) components, as well as innovative literacy “transitions” approaches (The Literacy Project)

**Policy implications include the following:**

- Educational Services, Healthcare and Manufacturing should remain our priority industries since they employ significant numbers of people, have the greatest potential for good wages, and serve a generator of economic activity in our region.
- Rising levels of employment in Retail/Sales and Food Services prompt us to attend to strategy development in those areas as well, since many get their start through entry-level jobs in these industries (including members of key disadvantaged populations).
- While numbers of jobs are not currently substantial, distinct positive trends in agriculture and green industry development lead us to promote awareness of and attention to these areas.
- Strategies must consistently take into consideration and attend to our wide geographical span, rural nature, poverty rates, scarcity of broadband access, aging workforce, and limited community college and technical training access

**Additional strategic issues related to our priority industry areas that our work takes into consideration include:**

- the proliferation of jobs in home care and extended care, but also the high attrition rate of individuals in these fields.
- the demand for retail and food service workers, but—noting the high turnover rate—the need to acknowledge a certain given level of “churn” in these areas that skill development will not necessarily address.
- genuine skill gaps in such occupational areas as healthcare practitioner and healthcare support, and significant replacement and expansion worker needs in manufacturing.
- the aging workforce, the eager-to-work disabled workforce, and the declining youth population. Not only must we help employers be proactive in planning for changes in expectations and commitments that increased older worker presence in the job market will bring; we must also convince them that investing in youth readiness and making space for differently-abled workers will soon be not a luxury but a necessity if they want to remain competitive.

## **Strategic Plan Progress Tracking**

- 1. The Executive Committee oversees implementation of the Strategic Plan.**
- 2. The REB Director reports interim progress on Plan implementation at each Executive Committee Meeting (minimum 3 times annually).**
- 3. Strategic Plan accomplishments are shared with the full Board and general public at least once a year.**