



Greater Lowell Workforce Investment Board

Strategic Plan 2015-2016

“The underlying principles of strategy are enduring, regardless of technology or the pace of change.” - Michael Porter

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GLWIB Strategic Plan 2015-2016

Executive Summary

This strategic plan is presented by the Greater Lowell Workforce Investment Board. The plan was developed through a strategic planning process that began in the fall of 2014. Leading up to the establishment of the plan, the GLWIB conducted three sessions with the Strategic Planning Sub-committee to consider our vision, mission, and goals. We then established our strategies and initiatives to reach these goals. The process concluded with a presentation to the full Board in December 2014 at which time the plan was unanimously approved.

The Strategic Planning Committee focused on the Workforce Investment System as continuing to be business driven, managing labor market cycles to drive decision making, and to bridge the gap between employer needs and skills available in the local workforce. It also outlines the goals, objectives, and action steps required to ensure that the Greater Lowell Workforce Investment Board is the leader of local workforce solutions.

In the process of developing this plan for the Greater Lowell WIA region, the GLWIB focused on transitioning to the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) which will become fully implemented in July 2016. In that regard, our plan embodies these key WIOA operating principles:

- Increase access to education, training, and employment--particularly for people with barriers to employment
- Create a comprehensive, high-quality workforce development system by aligning workforce investment, education, and economic development
- Improve the quality and labor market relevance of workforce investment, education, and economic development efforts
- Promote improvement in the structure and delivery of services
- Increase the prosperity of workers and employers
- Increase economic self-sufficiency, meet employer needs, and enhance the productivity and competitiveness of the region

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Overview

The Greater Lowell Workforce Investment Board is one of 16 Workforce Boards throughout Massachusetts, servicing the communities of Billerica, Chelmsford, Dracut, Lowell, Tewksbury, Tyngsboro, Dunstable and Westford. We are charged with overseeing and implementing workforce development initiatives throughout the Workforce Investment Area. Board members offer a wide range of skills and experience and include representatives from local businesses, educational Institutions, community based organizations, labor unions, governmental agencies, economic development, and the Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce.

The Greater Lowell Workforce Investment Board oversees a variety of workforce development activities, representing a multitude of federal and state funding sources . These sources include Youth, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs funded by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA); the Career Center of Lowell; School to Career Initiatives; Department of Education Adult Basic Education Activities; the Massachusetts Workforce Training Fund, and other specially funded workforce development initiatives.



Mission

The Greater Lowell Workforce Investment Board (GLWIB) is a collaborative involving employers, educational institutions, labor groups, municipal and state officials, and community-based organizations that provides leadership, policy direction, and accountability for the local workforce development system.

By securing and allocating public and private funds for high quality, innovative, and collaborative workforce development programs, the GLWIB promotes a skilled and educated workforce, meets the workforce needs of employers, and supports and sustains economic development, business competitiveness, and job creation in Greater Lowell.

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Summary of Planning Process

The Greater Lowell WIB began the process in September 2014 by hiring planning consultants Strategy Matters, Inc (SMI) to facilitate the development of our new strategic plan. SMI is a consulting group that works with mission-driven organizations to develop creative solutions to complex problems. SMI clients are working in areas that affect whole communities including: justice, safety, education, health, culture.

SMI conducted an environmental scan, including updates on regional demographics, economic and labor market information, political landscape, legislative policies, and trends in workforce development funding.

Over the course of two months, the Strategic Planning Committee met three times to a) analyze data; b) interpret implications based on changing conditions, and c) develop goals and objectives to guide our work going forward in light of our mission and current environment and challenges.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the Greater Lowell Workforce Investment Board, we would like to thank Strategy Matters, Inc. in particular, Liz O'Connor and Danielle Gerena. The GLWIB would also like to thank our elected officers for their leadership: Chair Raymond Wrobel; Vice Chair Maureen Fitzpatrick; and 2nd Vice Chair Danielle McFadden who also serves as Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee. The GLWIB would like to acknowledge the time and effort of the members of the Strategic Planning Committee:

Chair—Danielle McFadden - Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce

Barbara O'Neil - Career Center of Lowell

Stephanie Cronin - Middlesex 3 Coalition

Shannon Norton- Career Center of Lowell

Maureen Fitzpatrick - Lowell General Hospital

Beth Goguen - MA Workforce Development

Ed Starr – International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers

Judy Burke - Middlesex Community College

Ray Wrobel – Align Credit Union

GLWIB Vision 2015-2016





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Environmental Scan

Strategy Matters, Inc. (SMI) conducted an environmental scan, including updates on regional demographics, economic and labor market information, political landscape, legislative policies, and trends in workforce development funding.

What they found was both dynamic and static variables that directly effect workforce planning in Greater Lowell and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as a whole. The changes include political landscape (newly elected Governor), legislative and policy environment (WIOA) and funding opportunities (state and federal). The constant items include employers, regional employment opportunities, core WIB members, and partners.

The Greater Lowell region has experienced continued growth in the critical sectors of Information Technology/Hi-Tech, Healthcare, and Advanced Manufacturing. These industries are projecting to have the most job openings for high skill occupations.

The challenges that are most profound in our region and across the state, include a growing number of long-term unemployed and the skills gap between current job seekers and the requirements of employers/businesses. Over the last 10 years, the percentage of jobless who have been unemployed for six months or more has almost doubled.

There is a disconnect between the skills of our workforce and the needs of our regional employers. The high skilled occupations in critical sectors require advanced post-secondary education or training but there are opportunities and pathways for all levels of skill.

The GLWIB Strategic Plan 2015-2016 will be the map for the workforce investment system in Greater Lowell to succeed and evolve within the current environment. The plan will focus on maintaining flexibility to adapt to the aforementioned changes as well as build a foundation to meet the needs of job seekers and businesses.

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Transitioning to WIOA

In July 2014, President Obama signed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) into law. It is the first legislative reform in 15 years of the public workforce system. WIOA is designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy.

WIOA streamlines and increases the focus on serving the most vulnerable and low-income job-seekers who have limited skills, lack work experience, and face other barriers to economic success.

WIOA expands education and training options to help participants access good jobs and advance in their careers; helps disadvantaged and unemployed job-seekers earn while they learn through support services and effective employment-based activities; and aligns planning and accountability policies across core programs to support more unified approaches to serving low-income, low-skilled individuals.

When developing this plan, the GLWIB created objectives and goals based upon the changes to be implemented through WIOA.





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Turning Challenges into Opportunity

For this plan the GLWIB seeks to focus on issues that have historically presented themselves as challenges in Greater Lowell and turn them into opportunities for improvement and growth in our region. A software engineer may call this “turning bugs into features”. We see the implementation of WIOA and the following emerging opportunities as a chance to expand our impact and continue providing successful service:

- Developing and expanding partnerships with the Information Technology/Computer Science sector
- Focusing on new pathways and successful programs for out-of-school young adults and other vulnerable populations
- Developing and growing industry partners to provide work-based learning opportunities, i.e. Apprenticeship and On-Job-Training (OJT) programs
- Increasing attention to soft skills among all, but particularly young job-seekers
- Continuing to build, expand, and deepen our partnerships and reputation in anticipation of potential focus on regionalization through WIOA

Strategic Goals 2015-2016

Goal 1

- Meet regional employer needs for a skilled workforce

Goal 2

- Connect job seekers to competitive wage employment

Goal 3

- Support successful youth entry into career pathways and post-secondary credential programs

Goal 4

- Continue to maintain strong WIB operations

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Goal 1: Meet regional employer needs for a skilled workforce

- Develop/maintain comprehensive employer-focused resources
- Create industry-specific focus on employer needs
- Create a pipeline of strong, appropriate job referrals for employers in need of qualified candidates
- Continue updating database of regional training opportunities
- Support employers in analyzing their current/future training and hiring needs
- Continue coordination and information - sharing between local businesses and partners through regular triage meetings
- Collaborate on a “workforce needs assessment” to connect employers with partner agencies and resources for assistance with their hiring and certification needs



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Goal 2: Connect job seekers to competitive wage employment

- Identify and prepare a job-driven workforce that has the appropriate skills to connect to the labor market
- Using recent labor market information, and in collaboration with the Career Center of Lowell, we will:
 - Educate and encourage job seekers to focus on gaining in-demand skills in need in our area
 - Encourage local vendors to provide training and opportunities for job-seekers that focus on in-demand skills needed by our employers and also on soft skills and interpersonal skills
 - Support methods for connecting job-seekers in getting training for in-demand skills,
- Monitor local demographics and make recommendations for trainings/curriculum based on needs of local job seekers
- Examine options with priority sectors including advanced manufacturing, information technology, healthcare and life sciences for OJT/apprenticeship partnerships
 - Create asset inventory of pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs, including in the trades, in the areas above
 - Gather labor market information on businesses in priority sectors with strong presence in the area
 - Develop an outreach plan and build partnerships to engage local trade unions in creating resources for apprenticeships in priority sectors.

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Goal 3: Support successful youth entry into career pathways and post-secondary credential programs

Promote youth awareness of professional options:

- Offer career awareness services to region's high schools, vocational schools, and community colleges
- Work with career readiness staff at secondary and post-secondary schools to share labor market updates
- Host youth-focused career fairs
- Raise awareness of career pathways and correlating education requirements, opportunities, and salary information

Help those youth at highest risk of disconnection through:

- Using partnerships to identify disconnected youth and intervene in the early stages
- Identifying CORI-friendly career pathways appropriate for highest risk youth
- Working with partners in identified sectors to explore/develop partnerships and pathway development

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Goal 4: Continue to maintain strong WIB operations

Strengthen Board Member engagement in WIB operations, and support their participation in implementing this plan, through

- Building and expanding Board networks
- Ensuring that WIB staff and board members have expanding and relevant professional and personal networks in key industries and with political leadership for this region
- Focus on building new relationships and strengthening existing relationships
- Leveraging Regional Resources, including connect to the full array of resources (grants, media/awareness, investments) available to support WIB goals
- Ensure that core programs are aligned with WIOA strategic priority areas
- Connect with apprenticeship programs
- Build and leverage State House/Legislative/Municipal relationships
- Create a formal network of business partners including advisory roles and participation in grants