
NORTHEAST REGION WIOA PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

REGIONAL ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE ANALYSIS

The Metropolitan Area was struck hard by the economic downturn. At the same time, the Chicago region is unique among major US metropolitan areas in that the area is home to both a strong service sector and a strong manufacturing sector. The metropolitan region's unemployment rate is down to around 6%. By the end of next year, the region is expected to have recovered all jobs lost during the downturn with growth over the next decade expected at 8%.

The Northeast Economic Development Region (NEEDR) has chosen to focus sector efforts on Healthcare, Manufacturing and Transportation, Distribution and Logistics (TDL), with acknowledgement that IT underlies all of these and is an important economic driver in its own right. World Business Chicago has identified the shortage of middle-skill workers as a major regional hurdle and each of these industries are expected to grow in middle-skill positions in the near term.

Occupational skill requirements are increasing in many industries, both across the nation and in the northeast Illinois region.

Sector Initiatives

The NEEDR has significant experience in sector-based workforce initiatives. Recent initiatives include: Accelerated Training for Illinois Manufacturing, Health Professions and Opportunity Program, the Job Driven NEG Grant, The Chicago-Cook Workforce Partnership's sector centers in three industries, and community college ICAPs programs, with many other initiatives spread throughout the region.

REGIONAL INTEGRATION OF STRATEGIES AND SERVICES

Workforce Development Activities, Special Populations and Employer Services

The following workforce development activities and types of services with promising return-on-investment (ROI) warrant continued focus and development.

- **Work-Based Learning Opportunities:** Several of the Local Workforce Boards use On-the-Job-Training (OJT), Apprenticeships, and Internships to provide the skills needed for job-seekers to be successful in the workplace.
- **Career Pathways:** Workforce development and education partners in the NEEDR are increasingly developing Career Pathway programs to prepare individuals to be successful in secondary and post-secondary education as well as help individuals enter or advance within a specific occupational cluster.
- **Sector Strategies:** The NEEDR provides many sector-based workforce development services for residents and businesses.

The system focuses on special populations, including Low-Skilled Adults, Individuals with Disabilities, Formerly Incarcerated/Criminal Justice Involved, Out-of-School Youth, Veterans, English Language Learners, Homeless, Older Workers, and the Long Term Unemployed.

Employer services include occupational and labor market information to inform economic forecasting, no-cost human resource services for recruiting, retaining, and hiring qualified employees and accelerated and customized employer-based training programs for increasing skills of existing and new employees.

Transportation and Supportive Services

The Northeast Region is fortunate to have an extensive transportation system, including public transit, although, as mentioned above, outside of the core, transit can be a challenge. The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) provides more than two million rides each weekday on bus and rail services in Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will Counties. One-Stop clients are referred to entities or organizations that are not available at the One-Stop center for supportive services. Examples include housing, health, transportation, services for individuals with disabilities and financial counseling.

Coordination with Economic Development

In many of the local areas, the local economic development department or authority has a seat on the Local Workforce Board and is included in policy making decisions. At the regional level, the Workforce Boards of Metropolitan Chicago have partnered with MEGA (Metropolitan Economic Growth Alliance) to prepare economic and industry reports and at least one Local Workforce Board Director is a member of the Chicagoland Metropolitan Agency for Planning's (CMAP) Economic Development Committee and regularly provides input on the regional planning efforts that CMAP is responsible for.

REGIONAL VISION, GOALS AND STRATEGIES

The Northeast Economic Development Region WIOA partners will work collaboratively to deliver a workforce development system that provides opportunities for career growth for the region's jobseekers and workers as well as ensures a skilled workforce to meet the needs of businesses. The region's workforce development system will be responsive to changes in the economy, including changes in dominant industry sectors, as well as changes in the skills and education needed for jobs. The system will assist the region's workers and job-seekers to advance along career pathways and will effectively collaborate with educators and economic development agencies to provide an aligned system for the region's stakeholders. Specifically, the One-Stop delivery system shall provide a true "One-Stop" experience, at which any employer, worker or job seeker can access the programs and resources they need, whether in-person or electronically. Finally, the workforce system will utilize ongoing evaluations to assess programmatic success, providing for continuous system improvement.

The region's goals include: Improved and expanded regional sector partnerships, expanded career pathway opportunities, and expanded workforce opportunities for populations facing multiple barriers to career advancement.

The vision and principles will be implemented through the following policy strategies that together are necessary to reach the NEEDR plan goals.

- Strategy 1: Strengthen relationships with local businesses and ability to meet the needs of businesses
- Strategy 2: Increase coordination between workforce development and economic development
- Strategy 3: Strengthen linkages between the One-Stop delivery system and unemployment programs
- Strategy 4: Coordinate and Enhance Career Services and Case Management
- Strategy 5: Expand Access to Labor Market Information
- Strategy 6: Expand Career Pathway Programs and Work-Based training programs