

**ILLINOIS NORTHERN STATELINE
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REGION
WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY
ACT REGIONAL PLAN**



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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

What is WIOA?

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is the U.S. law that authorizes and coordinates federal investment in employment and training services, adult education and literacy programs, and other skills development throughout the country. It was signed into law in 2014 and took effect July 1, 2015, and was the first legislative reform to the public workforce system in 15 years. WIOA funding supports workers and those looking for work in increasing their skills to match the evolving needs of employers in their region and connecting them with job opportunities. It also helps employers have a ready pipeline of talent for their current and future workforce needs. WIOA programming on a local level is overseen by business-led Workforce Development Boards that also include government, education, and other partners.

What is the Regional Plan?

One of the significant reforms of WIOA is that it fosters regional collaboration by encouraging alignment between workforce development programs and economic development strategies. This helps ensure that money spent on workforce training and adult education programs are meeting the current and future demand of employers in a specific region, and that employers have a role in the planning process. The result is that residents of a region can gain relevant skills development and increase their likelihood of advancing their careers, while businesses can succeed in their region with a workforce that meets their specific needs. As part of WIOA, states defined regions to develop plans that connect local Workforce Development Boards with employers and educational institutions and encourage them to think beyond local boundaries. In Illinois, regions were set by the state's existing Economic Development Regions that already align efforts to support business growth.

The Northern Stateline Region consists of Boone, Ogle, Winnebago, and Stephenson counties. They are already connected by virtue of being a Combined Statistical Area, a federal designation that recognizes economic and social linkages. The Region is served by two Workforce Development Boards that entered this process already experienced in working together. As outlined below, this plan is also built upon existing collaboration on regional economic development priorities that include workforce development.

Each Workforce Development Board has created a WIOA Local Plan that is published alongside this Regional Plan. While the Local Plans focus on specifics of service delivery, the Regional Plan is a bigger picture look at how those efforts connect with the Region's strategies of improving the economy and providing opportunity to all of its residents. In keeping with state and federal guidelines, the Regional Plan is broken into three sections:

1. Regional Economic and Workforce Analysis
2. Regional Integration of Strategies and Services
3. Regional Vision, Goals, and Strategies

CHAPTER 1: REGIONAL ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE ANALYSIS

A. Analysis of economic conditions including existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations; Knowledge and skills needed to meet the employment needs of the employers in the region; and an analysis of the regional workforce.

Partners in the Northern Stateline Economic Development Region (EDR) followed the State of Illinois’ data-driven focus in the WIOA regional planning process. There is a strong history of this kind of analysis in the Region with excellent existing partnerships between workforce investment boards, the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES), and economic development agencies. This Regional Plan also built upon the two Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) documents completed recently within the Region^{1&2}. The CEDS plans, which are developed with oversight from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, provided analysis of regional economic and workforce trends, as well as data-driven recommendations of Targeted Industry clusters. These plans included input from many partners involved in the WIOA regional planning process, including workforce development, economic development, and private sector representatives. The regional planning process also incorporated data provided by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO). A subgroup of the regional planning team provided further detailed analysis of economic and workforce data that was then confirmed by the full team. This analysis provides the backbone of this Regional Plan.

Overview of economic conditions

The Northern Illinois Region CEDS noted regional concerns regarding unemployment, sluggish job growth, an aging workforce, and the risk of population decline. These extend to the rest of the Northern Stateline Region. The Region was hit harder than any other part of Illinois by the Great Recession. Unemployment in the Northern Stateline Region spiked to 14.4 percent in 2009, by far the highest of any EDR in the state, and more than 32,000 were unemployed. The unemployment rate remained above 10 percent through 2013, and is still the highest in the state. All four counties in the Northern Stateline Region still qualify as economically distressed, as defined by the U.S. Economic Development Administration, because of continued high unemployment. Meanwhile, while the Region saw an employment rebound after the recession, recent growth has been slow and lags the state and nation.

	2015 annual average unemployment rate ³	2015 job growth ⁴	Percentage of pre-recession jobs peak ⁴
Northern Stateline	6.9%	0.8%	92.8%
Illinois	5.9%	1.4%	99.7%
U.S.	5.3%	2.7%	102.8%

¹ [Blackhawk Hills Regional Council 2014-2019 CEDS](#)

² [Northern Illinois Region 2016-20 CEDS](#)

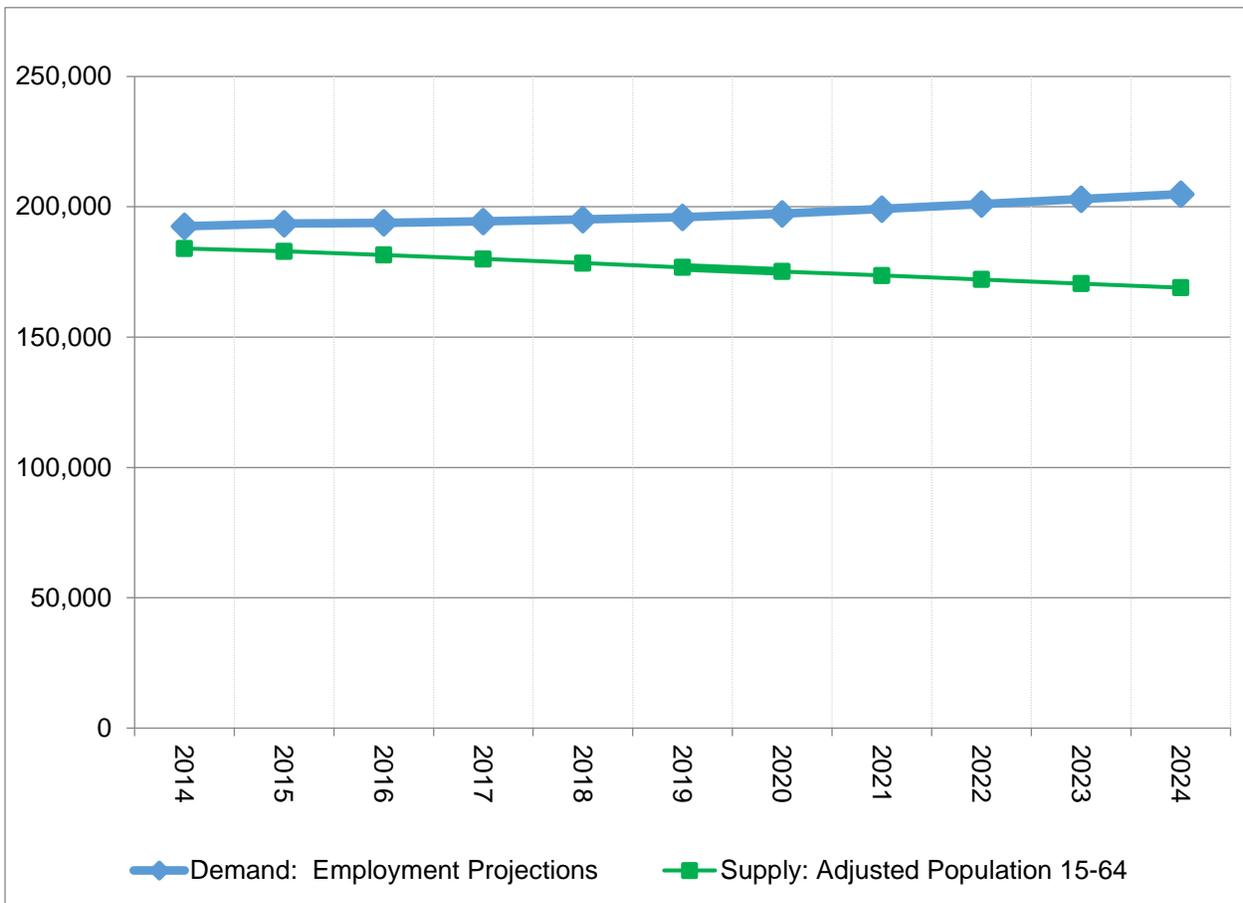
³ Source: Illinois Department of Employment Security Local Area Unemployment Statistics, not seasonally adjusted.

⁴ Source : Illinois Department of Employment Security Current Employment Statistics, not seasonally adjusted.

The Region has also faced a slight decrease in population and an aging rate that outpaces state and national levels. Reasons for population loss include residents moving elsewhere for better job prospects, taxation and business climate concerns, and quality of life issues. While the national population is aging, the fact that the Region is aging faster is a problem for ensuring the future workforce.

	2010-2014 estimated population change ⁵	2014 median age ⁶	2010-2014 change in median age ⁷
Northern Stateline	-2.2%	40.3	1 year
Illinois	0.4%	37.5	0.9 years
U.S.	3.3%	37.7	0.5 years

The trend of an aging workforce and decreasing population is most starkly depicted when labor supply and employment projections are shown next to each other.



*Illinois Workforce Participation Rate of 64.9 Percent applied to Population 15-64 data.
Source: Emsi, BLS (Note: Emsi data used because IDES projections are not annual.)*

⁵ Source: U.S. Census Bureau Estimates of the Resident Population: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2010

⁶ Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2014 American Community Survey

⁷ Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2010 and 2014 American Community Survey

The policy and service implications of the above population and employment trends include several high-level strategies that permeate this Regional Plan:

- Increase efforts to attract and retain workers, particularly younger, educated workers who can fill the pipeline on in-demand occupations.
- Train those who are here to fit the needs of employers.
- Increase the workforce participation rate through better job opportunities and education/training of unemployed and underemployed.

Specific activities to address these implications are noted in Chapter 3 of this plan.

Education and skill levels of the workforce

While the Region is approximately on par with state and national rates of high school attainment among adults and leads in associate’s degree attainment, it lags significantly in bachelor’s degree attainment. This has been a long-standing concern in the Region, as positions that need advanced education are difficult to fill, causing employers to hesitate to bring professional and technical jobs here. Additionally, while the Region is competitive in high school attainment, a large number of adults lack diplomas or GEDs, making it a regional priority to connect them with education and training opportunities.

	% High school or higher	% Associate’s degree	% Bachelor’s or higher
Northern Stateline	88%	8.5%	21.4%
Illinois	88.2%	7.8%	32.8%
U.S.	86.9%	8.2%	30.1%

Source: U.S. Census 2014 American Community Survey 1-Year-Estimates

A 2016 study by Chmura Economics & Analytics⁸ of educational levels and employer demand found the Rockford metropolitan statistical area (which accounts for two of the Region’s four counties and 77% of the population) had fewer high-skilled workers than employers needed, ranking 211th out of 381 in the nation and seventh in Illinois. Chmura defined “high-skilled” as workers with a bachelor’s degree or higher, and used U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics information to define high-skilled jobs. The Rockford MSA had enough medium-skilled workers and more than enough low-skilled workers, Chmura reported.

Beyond the general educational needs of the workforce, there are industry-specific skill and education needs employers have communicated. This includes manufacturing skills in welding, fabrication, and machine operating (especially CNC machines); aircraft mechanic training; engineering degrees; food processing certifications in safety and process control; and healthcare training for nursing, medical technicians, and billing coding.

A 2015 survey of employers in Boone and Winnebago counties gave workers average scores on having appropriate technical skills, and average to above average scores on communication, problem-solving, leadership, and computers skills and reliability. However, in conversations with employers, there are concerns with the “skills gap” particularly within Manufacturing and a general concern about the “soft skills” of entry-level candidates. Many of the Region’s long-term unemployed need assistance in those

⁸ <http://www.chmuraecon.com/interactive/underemployment-in-the-united-states/>

soft skills to get them in the door and begin the needed technical skill advancement. These concerns are addressed in more detail in Chapter 2 of this plan.

The Region has an increasing English Language Learner population, with 32,453 immigrants in the Rock Valley College District 511 alone. As Rockford is a Resettlement region, this is a very diverse population, with immigrants representative of a large variety of home countries. Many adults are Latino, but there are also large populations from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and several African countries. The abilities of the adult immigrants are varied, with approximately 28.5% of students enrolling in beginning classes, 48.8% enrolling in intermediate classes, and 22.7% enrolling in advanced classes. Language barriers are especially an issue in growing Healthcare occupations, as they lead to employer concerns over communicating safety issues. The Region is addressing those concerns through partnering with La Voz Latina to provide intensive language classes and referring adults to ESP classes at both of the Title 2 core partners, Highland Community College and Rock Valley College.

Special populations

The Northern Stateline Region includes sizable numbers of most of Targeted Populations listed in the Unified State Plan, as evidenced by the chart below. Of special importance to the Region are:

- Long-term unemployed
- Low-income adults and those receiving public assistance
- Individuals with disabilities, including youth with disabilities
- Out-of-school youth
- Veterans
- Migrant and seasonal farmworkers
- Re-entry individuals (ex-offenders)
- English Language Learners
- Older individuals
- Low literacy adults, including those without a high school diploma
- Low-skilled adults

Northern Stateline Region Special Populations

Total civilian noninstitutionalized population: 2014 Estimate	440,931
Persons Below Poverty Level	70,315
Public Aid Recipients	121,051
Adult Public Aid Recipients	63,576
TANF Recipients: 2014 Monthly Average	4,608
SNAP Recipients: 2014 Monthly Average	91,370
Total Population with a Disability (Estimate)	47,694
Youth with Disabilities (<18 yrs.)(Estimate)	3,954
Adults with Disabilities (18+ yrs.)(Estimate)	43,740
DHS Division of Rehabilitation Services-Vocational Rehabilitation Program: FY2015 Data Summary	
Number Served Age 25+	493

Number Served Youth (<25)	321
Number in Plan Status Age 25+	241
Number in Plan Status Youth (<25)	367
Successful Closures Age 25+	86
Successful Closures Youth (<25)	77
Adult Parolee Population: June 30, 2014	
Adult Parolee Population: June 30, 2014	1,300
Language other than English spoken at home, age 5+	48,579
Average Monthly Unemployed	17,573
Older Individuals (Age 65+)	70,702
Single Parents	32,405
Age 14-18 in Foster Care	
Age 14-18 in Foster Care	159
Age 19-20 in Foster Care (Aged Out)	
Age 19-20 in Foster Care (Aged Out)	20

Source: Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity

There are multiple *policy and service implications to meet the needs of these individuals*. An overall implication is that due to the great need within the Region, service delivery partners have to be coordinated and efficient to maximize resources to provide the greatest good. Since many residents fall under multiple special population groups, partnerships are needed between agencies and programs servicing specific groups. This also highlights the need for an integrated case management system among workforce development partners and those providing supportive services.

Stakeholders noted the “benefits cliff” that those receiving public assistance face – benefits often drop faster than work income rises, creating a disincentive to work. Beyond regional policies that are discussed in Chapter 3 of this plan, there are policy changes state and federal agencies can make to reduce this problem. For instance, benefit providers can implement transitional programs, such as Social Security’s Ticket to Work program.

With transportation cited as a major barrier for low-income and unemployed residents, there is a need to improve connections to the Region’s fixed-route bus transit system and bolster demand-response service. Activities to address this regionally are listed in Chapter 3. However, there are federal and state policy implications as well, particularly maintaining and increasing transit funding. Stakeholders noted a disconnect between the state’s emphasis on providing employment opportunities for more residents and budget decisions that cut their means to get to work. Additionally, policy changes could make it easier for demand-response transit providers to share vehicles and maximize resources.

To meet the needs of the growing English Language Learner population, ESL funding must remain in place and, as possible, be increased. Workforce partners must also provide materials in multiple languages, and translators as needed.

Finally, policy changes can be made to help employers hire those with barriers to employment, including changes to unemployment insurance rules to minimize risk of turnover from hiring “riskier” employees and incentives to hiring ex-offenders or those who receive public assistance. As one stakeholder said, “Our challenge is to create a pathway to success that works for both employers and jobseekers.”

Targeted Industries

Targeted Industry clusters were identified in the two CEDS plans for the Region. The *targeted industries were determined* in consultation with workforce development, economic development, education, government, and private-sector partners and were based on existing and projected strengths. During the WIOA planning process, regional partners met and discussed the key industries in the Region, using the CEDS documents and other information collected to prioritize these areas:

I. Manufacturing

Specific clusters of focus include:

- Transportation Equipment (especially Automotive, Aerospace and Defense, and Rail Car)
- Machinery Manufacturing
- Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing
- Chemical Manufacturing
- Plastics and Rubber Product Manufacturing

II. Food Processing and Manufacturing (while a subset of **Manufacturing**, stakeholders wanted to call it out for its specific needs that differ from other Manufacturing clusters.)

III. Transportation, Logistics and Distribution

IV. Healthcare

These clusters employ almost 76,000 people more than 1/3 of the Northern Illinois Region's job base. They were chosen because of identified growth potential, regional supply chains, and the ability to draw wealth into the Region in order to spur job growth in other sectors. They all have location quotients above 1, representing a greater concentration than the national average, except for Healthcare, which is in the midst of significant growth. For Manufacturing clusters, the location quotients are typically much higher.

Industry	2012 Employment	2014 Location Quotient	2012-2022 Projected Employment Growth
Manufacturing	34,875	3.47	3.7%
<i>Manufacturing focus clusters</i>			
Machinery	8,640	5.80	-3%
Transportation Equipment	7,646	3.76	14.4%
Fabricated Metal Product	7,342	3.84	3.8%
Chemical	1,105	1.04	-2.9%
Plastics and Rubber Product	1,180	1.35	1.1%
Food Processing and Manufacturing	3,072	1.55	9.0%
Healthcare	24,428	0.99	14.2%
Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics	12,725	1.35	14.5%

Source: Illinois Department of Employment Security

Of the Manufacturing clusters, Transportation Equipment is the most promising for future growth. Automotive Manufacturing is a significant employer, with an estimated 6,800 workers in the Region as of 2015. This includes the Region's largest employer, Fiat Chrysler Automobiles in Belvidere, and its suppliers. It also includes companies that make components for other car and truck makers, and has grown past pre-recession levels. Aerospace and Defense Production is a significant growth industry whose numbers are undercounted in the above IDES levels because many suppliers are counted in other manufacturing sectors. It includes the second- and third-largest manufacturers in the Region, UTC Aerospace Systems and Woodward. Based on company reports, there are approximately 3,700 employed in companies classified as Aerospace and Defense production companies, and hundreds more employed by companies in other sectors that supply that industry. Rail Car Manufacturing is a growth industry focused in Ogle County with the recent arrival and expansion of a Nippon Sharyo production plant there.

Other Manufacturing clusters are more mature, but will present many job opportunities due to retirements. Additionally, the Region's Manufacturing clusters are interrelated, as they include many small- to mid-sized machine shops, metalworking companies, coatings makers, and other suppliers that serve multiple sectors. Companies in one of the more mature clusters can diversify into a growth cluster. For example, Plastics manufacturers may benefit from the growth of the Aerospace cluster. Finally, most Manufacturing clusters in the Region have similar occupational needs, so all will benefit from the workforce development strategies in this Regional Plan.

Healthcare is projected to see significant growth in the coming years, mirroring national trends and providing an opportunity for workers of all levels of skill. Traditionally seen as a "local" cluster that serves residents of the Region, this is growing into a "traded" cluster like the others in this study that brings money from outside the Region. With the expansion of the Region's health systems and growing specializations, they are serving as attractions for outside residents, thus growing our economy. Additionally, the Region's Healthcare systems are attracting educated workers that address some of the concerns identified in this analysis. Finally, Healthcare is seen as a quality of life asset that must be robust for the Region to see a return to population growth.

Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics is a growth cluster due to the Region's wealth of transportation assets, including Chicago Rockford International Airport, the Union Pacific Global III intermodal facility in Rochelle, multiple Class One rail lines, and a highway network including Interstates 39, 88, and 90 and U.S. 20. The cluster includes the second-largest UPS air hub in North America and distribution facilities for major retailers and food companies. It provides excellent entry-level opportunities as well as career pathways into technical and management positions.

Food Processing and Manufacturing is a growth area that stakeholders specifically called out due to the need for increased focus on training and education solutions for employers. These needs are detailed later in this plan. It is a cluster that is spread throughout the Region and includes dairy, snack foods, frozen foods, cereal, and a variety of other products.

In addition to the Targeted Industries listed above, stakeholders identified Information Technology (IT) as an in-demand sector of the regional economy. IT crosses across most of the Targeted Industries and other industries in the Region. It is particularly important to Manufacturing, with the national advance of digital manufacturing and the new Digital Manufacturing and Design Innovation Institute in Chicago (which has added a Rockford chapter to partner with Northern Stateline manufacturers). It is also important to Healthcare with changes in coding and patient records processes. As part of this Regional Plan,

stakeholders will continue to explore ways to advance IT, especially as it intersects with these other industries.

In general, the *employment needs of employers in existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors* match those of overall needs examined in this plan. All need a steady supply of younger talent to offset an upcoming wave of retirements. Manufacturers need workers with familiarity with the advanced technical processes in modern factories, while Food Processors need workers certified in key safety and process control measures. Healthcare employers need workers in key occupations like nursing and medical technicians to keep up with rising demand. Across the board, employers in those sectors need workers with foundational and soft skills, and these needs and planned solutions are itemized throughout this Regional Plan.

In-demand occupations

On the next page, the top 30 occupations, by projected annual openings, among the Region's Targeted Industries are listed. Also included is the typical level of education required for each and the on-the-job training amount. This list does not replace the individual Local Workforce Area approved occupation list for WIOA training, but serves as a complement and a guide for regional planning.

Description	Annual Openings	Typical Entry Level Education	Typical On-The-Job Training	Industries
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	236	Less than high school	Short-term	Manufacturing, TDL, Food
Team Assemblers	145	High school diploma or equivalent	Moderate-term	Manufacturing
Customer Service Representatives	121	High school diploma or equivalent	Short-term	Manufacturing, TDL
Registered Nurses	108	Associate's degree	None	Healthcare
Office Clerks, General	97	High school diploma or equivalent	Short-term	Manufacturing, Healthcare
Stock Clerks and Order Fillers	76	Less than high school	Short-term	TDL
General and Operations Managers	74	Associate's degree	None	Manufacturing
Nursing Assistants	72	Postsecondary non-degree award	None	Healthcare
Packers and Packagers, Hand	70	Less than high school	Short-term	Manufacturing, TDL, Food
Machinists	66	High school diploma or equivalent	Long-term	Manufacturing
Home Health Aides	64	Less than high school	Short-term	Healthcare
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	61	High school diploma or equivalent	Short-term	TDL
Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products	56	High school diploma or equivalent	Moderate-term	Manufacturing
Light Truck or Delivery Services Drivers	45	High school diploma or equivalent	Short-term	TDL
Receptionists and Information Clerks	44	High school diploma or equivalent	Short-term	Healthcare
Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	44	High school diploma or equivalent	Long-term	Manufacturing
Shipping, Receiving, and Traffic Clerks	38	High school diploma or equivalent	Short-term	Manufacturing, TDL
Inspectors, Testers, Sorters, Samplers, and Weighers	36	High school diploma or equivalent	Moderate-term	Manufacturing
Industrial Machinery Mechanics	36	High school diploma or equivalent	Long-term	Manufacturing
Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	35	Postsecondary non-degree award	None	Healthcare
Personal Care Aides	33	Less than high school	Short-term	Healthcare
Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics	32	High School Diploma or Equivalent	Long-Term	
Computer-Controlled Machine Tool Operators, Metal and Plastic	32	High school diploma or equivalent	Moderate-term	Manufacturing
Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers	31	High school diploma or equivalent	Moderate-term	Manufacturing
Production Workers, All Other	30	High school diploma or equivalent	Moderate-term	Manufacturing
Industrial Truck and Tractor Operators	29	Less than high school	Short-term	TDL
Medical Assistants	27	High school diploma or equivalent	Moderate-term	Healthcare
First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers	26	Postsecondary non-degree award	None	Manufacturing, Food
Helpers – Production Workers	25	Less than high school	None	Manufacturing, Food
Mechanical Engineers	20	Bachelor's degree	None	Manufacturing

Source: Illinois Department of Employment Security 2012-2022 projections

Not on the list, but identified by stakeholders as an in-demand occupation is aircraft mechanics due to the new addition of an AAR Corp. facility at Chicago Rockford International Airport and an adjacent Rock Valley training facility. AAR is expected to employ 500 at open and eventually 1,000. There is a successful nearby aircraft maintenance business, and the potential for more to come to the Region.

Also, while not a Targeted Industry, leisure and hospitality jobs will continue to be in demand as the Region grows its tourism and sports event industries.

B. Describe the development and implementation of sector initiatives for in-demand industry sectors or occupations for the planning region.

The Targeted Industry clusters and in-demand occupations listed above are the *regional priorities*. While not explicitly ranked by priority by stakeholders, Manufacturing is the most important due to the size of the cluster and the above-average wages it provides. Healthcare was also prioritized for its growth potential and the increased need of technical training for its employees. Food Manufacturing, while not as significant regionally size-wise, was given special priority in developing training and certification processes since it was seen as under-served in that area. Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics requires fewer investments in training and education programs than the other clusters, but needs assistance in recruitment of workers and development of basic skills. Information Technology is not currently as high a priority as the other industries, but that could change quickly depending on the results of an IT sector strategy being explored. *This prioritization was determined* through both the CEDS plan processes described above and in regional stakeholder planning meetings in December, 2015; and January and February, 2016.

Sector partnerships and public-private partnerships

The Northern Stateline Region has strong sector and public-private partnership activity that can assist with the implementation of this plan, as well as identify more opportunities for partnership.

Below are sector partnerships in the Region that were identified by stakeholders:

Name & Brief Description	Key Partners	Geographic Area	Industries Targeted
<p>Career Cruising/Unite! Career guidance software and partnership database that is available to 28,000 6-12 graders in the Region. Students keep individual career portfolios in this system. We also have 120 business partners and 100 career mentors that volunteer to work with teachers/students in various capacities – guest speaker, field trip, project advisor, job shadowing, internships, etc. These are all managed in the online database system.</p>	<p>CEANCI, consortium districts, local employers</p>	<p>Boone, Ogle, Winnebago counties</p>	<p>Various</p>

<p><u>Advance Now</u> Dual credit program coordinated with RVC High School Connections. Offers courses in multiple career and technical areas.</p>	CEANCI and RVC	Boone, Ogle, Winnebago counties	Various
<p><u>Manufacturing Day</u> Coordinate and financially support student involvement, grades 9-12 with targeted interests, in this region career awareness campaign for manufacturing.</p>	CEANCI, RVC, IMEC, local manufacturers, RAEDC, Rockford Chamber CareerTEC and member schools	Boone, Ogle, Winnebago counties Stephenson County	Manufacturing
<p><u>Construction Trades Career Expo</u> Coordinate and financially support student involvement, grades 6-8 and targeted high school students, in this region career awareness campaign for trades.</p>	CEANCI & NWIBT	Boone, Ogle, Winnebago counties	Construction Trades
<p><u>Careers on Wheels</u> Coordinate entire event and financially support student involvement, grade 6, in this region career awareness campaign for 16 career cluster occupations that are mobile.</p>	CEANCI & consortium districts	Boone, Ogle, Winnebago counties	Various
<p><u>National Employment Team</u> Work in Illinois with national employers that have a regional presence.</p>	CSVAR & regional employers (Mondelez, Lowe's)	All counties	Various
<p><u>Job Driven VR Technical Assistance grant</u> We will be targeting 25 businesses in the state this year to work with</p>	Specifics TBD		
<p><u>Northwest Illinois Healthcare Collaborative</u> comprised of six independent healthcare organizations in Northwest Illinois working together to convey what Northwest Illinois community and health systems offer. http://nwilhealthcareers.com</p>	CGH, FHN, KSB Hospital, OSF Healthcare, MercyHealth, and SwedishAmerican Health System.	All counties	Healthcare

<p>Rockford Area Aerospace Network (RAAN) consortium of companies implementing a strategic plan to increase the competitiveness of the Rockford Region for aerospace expansion and attraction. Major subsectors include AS9100 and Nadcap certified suppliers of: Electric power generation systems, Power management, Actuation systems, Metal component fabrication, Aircraft interior manufacturing, and Maintenance repair and overhaul (MRO).</p>	<p>RAEDC; key aerospace companies in the Region including UTC Aerospace Systems, Woodward, and GE Aviation; education, training, and support providers</p>	<p>All counties</p>	<p>Aerospace</p>
<p>Workforce Development Coalition (WDC) The goal is to support local businesses and assist them in their quest for qualified employees. This is done through special programs, WorkKeys assessments and credit bearing programs. We also do program promotions and hosting career fairs and Manufacturing Day related activities.</p>	<p>Secondary and post-secondary representatives, Employers, Staffing Agencies, Public Library, Chamber and Retirees.</p>	<p>Stephenson County</p>	<p>Various</p>

Though not listed above, the Logistics Council in Ogle County is a past *sector partnership* and the Region hopes to restart and expand to meet the needs of the TDL cluster.

The region’s four economic development corporations – Growth Dimensions for Belvidere-Boone County, the Northern Illinois Development Alliance (NIDA), the Greater Rochelle Economic Development Corporation (GREDCO), and the Rockford Area Economic Development Council (RAEDC) – are *public-private partnerships* with strong business and government investment. Each has particular strengths in developing sector partnerships (Growth Dimensions – Automotive, NIDA – Food Processing, GREDCO – TDL and Rail Car Manufacturing, RAEDC – Aerospace) that can be leveraged as part of this plan. These partners all participated in the Regional Plan process. They also can all serve as *neutral conveners for establishing new sector partnerships*, as can the Region’s workforce development agencies, Chambers of Commerce, and the new Regional Planning Council. Transform Rockford, a grassroots community initiative committed to tackling the Rockford area’s biggest challenges, includes ample private-sector involvement and provides input and assistance on workforce initiatives.

As noted above, the *existing skills of job seekers* generally meet the demands of local businesses, but there are growth areas itemized through this plan. Each sector partnership described above or implemented as a result of regional collaboration is formed in part to address that sector’s workforce needs. Employers will drive the sector strategies and partnerships, with WIOA Core Partners (Title IB, Adult Education, Wagner-Peyser, and Vocational Rehabilitation), Required Partners and other Stakeholders leveraging program resources to address workforce skill gaps. Partners are committed to collaborate on solutions, provide integrated services, and braid funding to effectively and efficiently meet regional business needs. One opportunity is to use the existing integration of Title IB Career Services and Business Services that connects job-seekers with training that meets employer-identified needs and connecting that process to the employer-led partnerships described here to meet sector-specific needs. Other opportunities include

leveraging the existing collaboration of Adult Education and Perkins training providers with employer collaboratives to develop and change program offerings (as evidenced by recent expansions in Manufacturing and Healthcare programs); and use of supportive service partners like IDHS and CSBG to connect long-term unemployed to soft skills training and other career readiness preparation.

Core partners are collaborating with secondary and post-secondary education and trainers to meet employer needs through these sector strategies. As noted in the examples above, secondary education is a key partner in developing the Region's future workforce, and actively part of this Regional Plan. Core partners will continue to serve as a connecting piece between educators and employers, including making sure key employers participate in events like Manufacturing Day and ensuring WIOA Youth programming directs participants into training opportunities consistent with future employer demand. Post-secondary education and training providers already collaborate with employers and core partners in these sector strategies, with the goal of helping employers clearly communicate their needs and aggregate demand for training so small- and mid-sized companies can participate. Through Career Services programming, Title 1B partners will communicate with educators and trainers on how program offering can meet the needs of job-seekers; while Business Services will play a direct role in connecting educators and trainers with business needs. Another example, detailed in Chapter 2, is the use of ICAPS Career Pathways programming in the Region.

An exciting new partnership being developed is the Northern Illinois Talent Pipeline Management in Manufacturing project, which uses a U.S. Chamber of Commerce model and brings together key regional employers, workforce and educational providers, and Northern Illinois University. This employer collaborative is supported by the local workforce boards, Rockford Chamber of Commerce, and local economic development entities. Education and training providers, including WIOA Core and Required Partners, will integrate solutions to address needs. At this early stage in the formation of the employer collaborative, foundational skills of job applicants is an area requiring attention. Soft/Essential Skill development is addressed under the Strategy, Goals and Activities section of this Plan.

The Northern Illinois Talent Pipeline Management in Manufacturing group is made up of 15 employers from all four counties of the Region. Core members include Imperial Punch, Greenlee Textron, Star Manufacturing, SPG Manufacturing, and Woodward. The group will continue to expand and is intended to create the "pull model" and future pipeline for manufacturing by continuing to inform the development and implementation of education and training programs and services.

In addition to this new employer collaborative addressing manufacturing, the Northwest Illinois Healthcare Collaborative, which has been in existence for over ten years, includes employer representatives from all the major health systems – OSF Healthcare; Freeport Health Network; MercyHealth; SwedishAmerican; KSB Hospital; and CGH. This collaborative partners with education entities to address skill and credential needs of the current and emerging workforce, and partners with secondary education to inform students, parents and educators on health careers; identifies appropriate pathways for the talent development pipelines; and provides resources and expertise curricula development and implementation. This employer collaborative will continue to inform and guide the workforce development for the Healthcare cluster.

The Rockford Area Aerospace Network is a collaborative led by the Rockford Area Economic Development Council that includes 27 business, educational, governmental, and other partners. Key employers such as UTC Aerospace Systems, Woodward, and GE Aviation, as well as their suppliers, drove this effort that has

promoted the need for an engineering school in the Region, the opportunity for an aircraft maintenance facility, and identification of recruitment and retention concerns for technical staff. RAAN can be a template for other manufacturing sector groups in the Region.

As evidenced by the number of sector related activities in the region, the Northern Stateline EDR has made significant progress in moving to an employer-led, demand-driven approach to designing and providing services. This approach will continue to be refined and become more robust as the WIOA Core and Required Partners leverage resources, braid funding and services, and address the goals, strategies and activities in this Plan.

CHAPTER 2: REGIONAL INTEGRATION OF STRATEGIES AND SERVICES

A. Provide an analysis of workforce development activities, including education and training, in the region.

The Northern Stateline Region's workforce development system has a strong track record of connecting well-trained workers to job opportunities, is respected by and responsive to employers, and is thoroughly collaborative. However, due to the complex challenges of a post-recession economy, coupled with an aging workforce and nationwide challenges faced by the Manufacturing sector, partners recognize significant work remains to be done. As part of the WIOA regional planning process, partners analyzed the *strengths and weaknesses of workforce development activities* using employer, customer, and stakeholder feedback, group planning sessions, and review of previous planning activities and analyses.

Strengths of the regional workforce system

Employers routinely cite the Region's workforce as both one of its biggest strengths and one of its biggest areas of need. Employers who gave input during the WIOA regional planning process, as well as during the 2016-20 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the Northern Illinois Region process and other surveys and interviews, noted sizable, well-trained, and effective workforce. In a 2011 Labor Shed Analysis of the Rockford MSA (which includes 2 of the 4 counties of this Region) by Foote Consulting Group, existing employers noted "the great work ethic and labor pool here."

There is strength in the growing regional collaboration that workforce development has been a part of. Workforce development, education, and economic development partners throughout the Region developed applications for the U.S. Department of Commerce's Make It in America and Investing in Manufacturing Communities Partnership programs from 2013 to 2015. Partners then collaborated on the updated CEDS plan. Each of these plans built on the work that came before to ensure new initiatives were aligned with ongoing efforts, and that partners were committed to carrying them through. In particular, the workforce component of the CEDS plan was developed with WIOA in mind, and partners added tactics to that plan that continue in this regional plan. One of the first comments made by partners at the initial WIOA regional planning session was that the new federal legislation and state planning process brought exciting opportunities for further collaboration.

The Region's workforce development system is known for employer-driven initiatives, particularly within Targeted Industry clusters. The Workforce Connection (TWC) Board, which represents three of the four counties of the Region, and Rock Valley College have long partnerships with major manufacturers like Fiat Chrysler Automobiles and Woodward in developing tailored training programs. Workforce development and educational institutions have collaborated with the Region's hospitals for more than a decade to improve training opportunities to help increase the number of nurses in the Region by more than 20% and face other staffing needs. The Region's community colleges have developed new programs in direct response to employer needs. Highland Community College's wind turbine maintenance program has assisted in an exciting new industry, but also provided skills transferable to the Region's manufacturing sector. Rock Valley College recently partnered with Northern Illinois University to offer bachelor's degrees

in Mechanical Engineering and Electrical Engineering in Rockford for the growing aerospace and other advanced manufacturing clusters.

The private sector has responded by providing strong leadership and engagement with the Region's workforce development boards, and by participating in this planning process. Business leaders have been at the forefront of identifying and addressing workforce needs and advocating for improvements to and support of the system. Additionally, government leaders are engaged in the workforce development system, actively participating on boards, providing feedback on plans and policies, and aligning their priorities with identified workforce needs. Both groups provided key feedback to assist with creation of this plan.

Another strength is the career focus of the Region's educational institutions. Partners have committed to implementing the Illinois State Board of Education's Career Cluster Framework at the K-12 level, and community colleges have strong existing Career Pathways programming in manufacturing, food manufacturing, healthcare, and transportation, distribution, and logistics. The Region's Education for Employment regional delivery systems - Career Education Associates of Northern Illinois (CEANCI) and CareerTEC - work with high schools and community colleges to provide courses of study leading to industry-recognized certifications in the Region's Targeted Industry clusters. Alignment Rockford, a public-private partnership to improve the performance and perception of Rockford Public Schools has led to College and Career Academies, small learning communities that provide real-world experiences with local businesses and professionals, linking schoolwork and the workplace. Belvidere School District 100 has developed the STEM-based Washington Academy, and 10 high schools in the Region participate in Project Lead the Way and commit to STEM-based education. Hundreds of students in the Region participated in Manufacturing Day this past year, visiting factories, food processors, and other facilities to learn about careers in manufacturing. Generally, schools are rated well; several of the Region's schools have been named to U.S. News and World Report's Best High Schools List.

Educational partners are collaborating on the Integrated Career and Academic Preparedness System (ICAPS), an Accelerating Opportunities Initiative, which seeks to address the needs of the adults in our community who are in need of a high school diploma. The ICAPS program includes dual enrollment in Adult Education and Career and Technical Education courses, leading to completion of the high school equivalency (GED), an institutional certificate, and at least one industry certification. Each program includes a pathway for students to continue their education, leading to a degree. Intense support services and a career navigator work with each student, assisting the student with any obstacles that arise.

The first ICAPS program is in CNC Career Pathways. This program leads to two institutional certificates: 1) Certified Manufacturing Associate, and 2) CNC. It also leads to three National Institute for Metalworking Skills (NIMS) credentials: 1) Measurement, Materials & Safety, 2) Lathe Operator I, and 3) Mill Operator I. Upon completion of this program, students will be ready for entry level positions in the manufacturing field, an industry that is growing in our area, such as CNC operator, CNC machinist, and setup. Students will have the opportunity to continue their studies in order to earn an Associate of Applied Science in Manufacturing Engineering Technology, after which, they will then be prepared to pursue a career of production manager, CAD/CAE/CAM designer or programmer, or tool designer.

Weaknesses of the regional workforce system

While the Region has been strong in collaboration among partners, coordination of service delivery has become a weakness. This was a symptom of the Great Recession and its after-effects. Unemployment in the Northern Stateline EDR spiked to 14.4 percent in 2009⁹, by far the highest in the state, with more than 32,000 unemployed. The unemployment rate remained above 10 percent through 2013. In response, the regional workforce system received an influx of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds, but with the absence of jobs it became a “train and pray” system. A concurrent spike in poverty in the Region led to increased stress on social service agencies, forcing them into reactionary programming and reducing their ability to proactively coordinate activities with workforce development.

Increased coordination is also needed between workforce development, economic development, and other partners with regard to employer outreach. Employers feel over-surveyed and invited to too many meetings, with confusion about which organization does what. Improvements are being made on this front, with early conversations about combining Business Services visits and economic development outreach and sharing of data, but more can be done.

While manufacturers appreciate the strengths of the workforce system in providing industry-recognized credentials and specialized training, there is a growing concern about difficulty in finding qualified workers, particularly with certain in-demand skills. This is exacerbated by the aging and impending retirement of many workers, coupled with a regional population decline since the recession. Meanwhile, workforce development and economic development professionals report that there is also a disconnect between the skills that employers say they are seeking and their hiring practices. Several manufacturing-related programs have been developed within the Region to meet perceived employer demand in machining, welding, and assembly skills, but even with these resources, program participants continued to have difficulty finding jobs.

Food manufacturers and processors in the Region feel they are underserved and there are no training programs for the certifications they require. This is particularly an issue because the cluster is scattered around the Region and not centered near any single training provider or educational institution. It was determined in the regional planning process that while the Region is heading in the right direction in addressing its Targeted Industry cluster needs, more work will be done for the food manufacturing industry.

There is also concern among all sectors about “soft skills” of many job applicants, and the Region must develop a more cohesive approach to providing training and other solutions to that problem. Many unconnected programs have been developed in the Region to address soft skills and other basic training needs, particularly in the Region’s cities like Rockford, but there is a growing fear of duplication and inefficient use of limited resources.

Customers of the workforce system report some barriers to training and employment that should be addressed. Transportation was often raised as a barrier, as customers near the fixed-route transit system in and around Rockford often report long commute times and inflexible work schedules. Others say it’s hard for them to even reach the fixed-route system. For residents in the three other counties of the Region, there are limited on-demand services, so they are reliant on their own vehicles. Customers also

⁹ Source: Illinois Department of Employment Security annual average data

noted that child care was a barrier, and suggested improved offerings of that and other supportive services. Customers and other stakeholders also indicated the need for a more coordinated intake system among different workforce partners to reduce duplicative paperwork and also assure that customers would be connected to all programs they qualified for.

Stakeholders noted two areas of weakness regarding marketing of the workforce system. Customers indicated that they primarily heard about programs through “word of mouth”. One customer of The Workforce Connection said in a focus group, “Not until you come do you know all that’s there.” This could lead to customers not participating in programs they qualify for, or not engaging the system at all. Increased marketing could also help the perception from some community groups and businesses that the workforce system is not addressing their key needs, which in turn causes creation of duplicative services.

The other marketing concern is a negative perception of manufacturing as a career among young workers or dislocated workers from other fields. Manufacturers report that many think of factories as dirty, loud, and dangerous, and not as the technologically advanced shops they are today. This limits the number of qualified candidates for a large, well-paying, economically foundational sector for the Region, and stakeholders say a coordinated marketing effort can assist.

Capacity to provide the workforce development activities to address the education and skill needs of the workforce, including individuals with barriers to employment, and the employment needs of employers

There is ample *capacity to provide the needed workforce development activities* outlined in this plan, as well as the Local Plans for the two Local Workforce Areas in the Northern Stateline Region. The Region is served by two workforce investment boards – The Workforce Connection Board and NCI Works – and several WIOA-funded training providers – Rock River Training Corp., Rock Valley College, and Business Employment Skills Team Inc. All four have track records of meeting federal, state, and local goals, have the support and participation of local businesses, and the backing of elected officials.

The Region is primarily served by two community colleges – Rock Valley College and Highland Community College – with Kishwaukee College and Sauk Valley Community College serving portions of Ogle County and McHenry County College serving a small area in Boone County. Rock Valley and Highland combined awarded nearly 1,400 associate’s degrees and more than 700 certificates in 2014¹⁰. The Region is also served by several four-year institutions, including Northern Illinois University, which has a Rockford center and a main campus in a neighboring county. The educational institutions are ready and willing partners in these workforce development activities with long track records of producing quality graduates and certificate-holders, and are trusted by businesses.

The Region’s four economic development corporations – the Greater Rochelle Economic Development Corporation, Growth Dimensions for Belvidere-Boone County, the Northwest Illinois Development Alliance, and Rockford Area Economic Development Council – are public/private partnerships actively engaged in workforce development activities. They provide an additional voice for businesses, and a partner in engaging those businesses.

¹⁰ Source: Emsi; Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System

There is ample capacity to meet the needs of individuals with barriers to employment, particularly if partners succeed in implementing the elements of this plan regarding coordination of services and reduction of duplication. Some examples of partners for key populations include:

- Long-term unemployed and individuals identified as likely to exhaust UI benefits are served by WIOA-funded workforce boards and service providers.
- Low-income adults and those receiving public assistance will be provided priority service by workforce boards and training providers.
- Individuals with disabilities, including youth with disabilities will be served by the Division of Rehabilitation Services staff, and given priority for WIOA Title 1B programs. The Vocational Rehabilitation Step-Up program is available in schools for transition-age students. Additionally, NCI Works has established a Targeted Population standing committee to address the needs of individuals with barriers to employment, specifically individuals with disabilities, returning citizens and veterans.
- Out-of-school youth will be served by programming that meets the requirement that 75% of youth funding goes to this population.
- Veterans receive highest priority for adult employment and training activities. Veterans' service representatives with IDES are on-site, fulltime to provide specialized assistance. Additionally, NCI Works has established a Targeted Population standing committee to address the needs of individuals with barriers to employment, specifically individuals with disabilities, returning citizens and veterans.
- Migrant and seasonal farmworkers receive specialized service from the Illinois Migrant Council (IMC), a community-based nonprofit organization that promotes employment, educational, and other opportunities for migrant and seasonal farmworkers and their families to achieve economic self-sufficiency and stability. IMC offers National Farmworkers Jobs Program training and support, partners with the Illinois Department of Employment Security on the Migrant Seasonal Farmworker Program, and provides ESL training, among other services.
- Re-entry individuals (ex-offenders) receive assistance through multiple programs including WIOA Title IB and the Illinois Department of Employment Security programs. As part of the Strong Cities, Strong Communities designation through the City of Rockford, TWC Board received U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration technical assistance to identify best practices and establish procedures to enhance and develop services for re-entry individuals. The Tri-County Re-Entry Coalition was formed and includes many of the One-Stop Partner programs / agencies, as well as Community-Based and Faith-Based organizations in the three counties. Additionally, NCI Works has established a Targeted Population standing committee to address the needs of individuals with barriers to employment, specifically individuals with disabilities, returning citizens and veterans.
- English Language Learners have multiple options for ESL classes, as well as training and materials provided in Spanish. Utilizing WIOA Title IB Adult funds, TWC Board has secured a contractor to provide work readiness training and work-based/place training for adult English Language Learners. NCI Works and its partners also provide English language acquisition and integrated education and training programs.
- Older individuals are provided specialized services through the Senior Community Services Empowerment Program (SCSEP), which trains qualified seniors 55 years and up with the skill sets needed to re-enter the workforce. Seniors who don't qualify for the program will be referred to other employment services or to a Senior Services center.

- Low literacy adults, including those without a high school diploma have multiple options for literacy programs. Tutoring and specialized services for low literacy adults are provided by The Literacy Council. Rock Valley College, Highland Community College and Rockford School District 205 – Roosevelt High School provide adult basic education classes and high school equivalency classes, along with transitional services, bridge programs and ICAPS. NCI Works will further coordinate with literacy program providers in its service territory.
- Low-skilled adults can receive specialized training to increase basic skills and occupational specific skills. Career Services are available through WIOA Title IB and specific training services are available through Rock Valley College, Highland Community College and other local eligible training providers. Business Employment Skills Training Inc. will also provide skills training.

Changes to service delivery strategies

Partners are focusing on getting individuals into higher-wage jobs and training for in-demand occupations and Targeted Industries. Also, work-based training to support classroom training will be expanded to include On-the-Job Training, Apprenticeships, Customized Training, Transitional Jobs, Internships, and Work Experience. ROI will be tracked in terms of wage growth for populations served, as well as for the Region as a whole, growth of Gross Regional Product in Targeted Industries, and required WIOA performance metrics when they are finalized. One new strategy under this plan is to develop a system for regional tracking of these ROI metrics in partnership with a Regional Planning Council that is coordinating a data commons. Partners will work collaboratively to ensure goals are being met and ROI can be demonstrated, and proactively communicate to businesses examples of ROI to support their continued investment in training programs.

At this time, the only strategy being curtailed is a de-emphasis on training programs for lower-demand occupations to focus on the above strategies.

Support of the state strategies and goals to align and integrate education, workforce and economic development

As detailed in Chapter 3 of this plan, the Northern Stateline Region’s Goals were written to align with the four State Goals outlined in Chapter 4 of the Illinois WIOA Unified Plan while also incorporating the themes that came up repeatedly in the regional planning process. Goal 1 is particularly relevant to this: “Integration of workforce, education, and economic development efforts to move the Region’s strategies forward through increased collaboration, communication, and shared resources.” Partners are committed to work with their respective state agencies to support the state strategies and goals, while communicating regionally to ensure integration of those efforts. An example of this is ongoing meetings between regional workforce development agencies, economic development groups, and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity’s regional staff.

In addition, the Business Services teams and economic development corporations in the Region will work together as outlined in Chapter 3 to align business engagement activities, such as the Business Services team work of the local workforce areas. This integration is already present in the joint planning work of the CEDS plan.

Formal and informal cooperative procedures to align services and coordinate delivery

Three of the four counties in the Northern Stateline Region make up Local Workforce Area 3 (LWA 3). The Local Memorandum of Understanding between all partners in LWA 3 will identify strategies and actions to align services and coordinate service delivery. Ogle County is in Local Workforce Area 4, which has its own Local Memorandum of Understanding. Both are attached to this plan with their respective Local Plans. Staff from both LWAs work closely to coordinate and collaborate, and will do so even more under this plan. Additionally, the community colleges that serve the Region collaborate with each other. Other regional groups referenced in this document, such as CEANCI, CareerTEC, and the Northwest Illinois Healthcare Collaborative, provide regional collaboration and coordination among their members.

B. Describe how transportation and other supportive services are coordinated within the region.

Transportation services

Rockford Mass Transit District (RMTD) provides fixed-route and demand-response service for the cities of Rockford, Loves Park, and Belvidere, and the Village of Machesney Park. RMTD's fixed-route service area is roughly 155 square miles with a potential service population of just over 260,000. Service runs seven days a week. In 2014, 1.8 million riders used the fixed-route system and almost 100,000 used the demand-response service.

RMTD is one of the policy committee members of the Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning (RMAP). RMAP conducts transportation and transit planning for most of Winnebago and Boone counties and a portion of Ogle County, which in total represent the majority of the Northern Stateline Region's population. RMAP oversees a Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan that assesses the transit needs and gaps for transit dependent populations. RMAP's Mobility Subcommittee includes representatives of RMTD, Rock River Training Corp. (a WIOA-funded training provider for LWA 3), and other service and transportation providers. As such, RMAP is a prime convener of the coordination of transportation services in a large part of the Region. The RMAP Mobility Subcommittee gave important feedback during the drafting of this plan.

This coordination will be further improved as RMAP is joining the Economic Development District of Northern Illinois (EDDNI) in becoming a Regional Planning Council that assists with economic development and workforce planning in addition to transportation planning. EDDNI is a planning partner in the development of this regional plan, and oversees the CEDS plan for Northern Illinois that is referenced through this document.

Rural Boone County received demand-response service by the Boone County Council on Aging (BCCA). Service is available regardless of age. BCCA is also a member of the RMAP Mobility Subcommittee, providing further coordination. The Stateline Mass Transit District provides demand-response service to northern Winnebago County and connects with RMTD fixed-route service. Coordination is provided through regulation communication and meeting attendance by each agency. The Lee-Ogle Transportation System provides demand-response service in Ogle County, and Pretzel City Area Transit serves Stephenson County. The workforce system One-Stop Centers, partner agencies, and educational

institutions provide information about the various transit services, and communicate regularly with the transit providers in their service territories.

Supportive services

TWC Board coordinates supportive services in LWA 3 through its Supportive Services policy, which ensures the appropriate use of supportive services and that eligible individuals receive the supportive services necessary to enable them to participate in activities authorized under WIOA. This includes “not-to-exceed” payments toward childcare, transportation (via transportation allowance or RMTD bus pass), and a variety of supplemental support items. Supportive services are provided in coordination with One-Stop Partner programs and other community-based and faith-based organizations. WIOA Title IB funds are available to provide supportive services if those supportive services are not readily available through other organizations. Additionally, as part of TWC Board’s recent mapping project, partners identified their roles in integrating services to connect target populations to supportive services.

For Ogle County, BEST, Inc. intends to contract with an agency to develop an on-line resource mapping directory. Partners can access this directory to locate supportive services that will help meet the personal/life needs of our customers. This directory will be a useful tool to further assist Title IV staff in locating support services in close proximity to their job- seeking customers.

C. Describe the coordination of services with regional economic development services and providers.

The Economic Development District of Northern Illinois (EDDNI) assisted with the development of this plan, and oversees the Northern Illinois CEDS plan referenced throughout this document. The CEDS is a U.S. Economic Development Administration-required documents that coordinates economic development planning for a Region. The CEDS for Northern Illinois included direct input by Growth Dimensions for Belvidere-Boone County and the Rockford Area Economic Development Council (RAEDC), as well as workforce representatives, government leaders, and private sector representatives from various key sectors. While the CEDS was developed in 2015, provisions of WIOA were kept in mind while creating its section on workforce, including a list of tactics that continue into this plan. The economic development groups also provided information from their individual organizational goals and strategies.

Additionally, Blackhawk Hills Regional Council’s CEDS plan covers Ogle and Stephenson Counties, and includes an objective to strengthen its collaboration with NCI Works “to find ways to economically train our existing and future advanced manufacturing workforce.”

The RAEDC and Growth Dimensions, along with Northwest Illinois Development Alliance and the Greater Rochelle Economic Development Corporation, participated further in the development of the Regional Plan, attending partner meetings (and several economic development representatives attended the statewide summit), and giving other input. Additionally, all four economic development agencies and representatives of the two workforce development boards (as well as economic development and workforce development from neighboring McHenry County) attended a regional summit with representatives of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to discuss coordination under WIOA. Additionally, several members of the business community representing various sectors attended partner meetings and the statewide summit. To ensure a larger mix of business input, previous business surveys conducted by workforce boards, economic development corporations, and

EDDNI were also included in this plan. Business input is shown throughout the plan, particularly in Goal 2, which outlines strategies to continue to be responsive to business needs.

Going forward, the Regional Planning Council (which includes EDDNI and RMAP), will assist in the coordination between economic development and workforce development. Representatives of workforce, economic development, education, and government will be among its members. Also, the Regional Planning Council will continue to work with Blackhawk Hills Regional Council in ensuring communication and collaboration. Both EDDNI and Blackhawk Hills will have private-sector representatives overseeing their CEDS plans as well. WIOA Core Partners will use these relationships and forums to make sure their program and training offerings align with the existing needs of employers as communicated by economic development retention and expansion activities, as well as the needs of potential growth and attraction industries. As outlined in the Regional Tactical Plan, a key action will be including Core Partners “into economic development business attraction and retention processes earlier, using scenario planning, boilerplate RFP sections, and shared understandings of targeted industries and locations for development. This activity recognizes that economic development processes often are time-sensitive and must be reactive to business needs, while allowing other partners to participate more fully.

Representatives of the various economic development corporations and workforce development agencies also sit on one another’s respective boards, ensuring continuous coordination and collaboration. During the most recent process, no economic development organizations or businesses that were invited to participate declined to do so.

D. Describe the coordination of administrative cost arrangements, including the pooling of funds for administrative costs, as appropriate.

All required partners participating in the development of this Regional Plan have agreed that the strategies and goals identified for Economic Development Region (EDR) 5 do not require coordination of administrative cost arrangements at this time. As specific projects and activities emerge, pooling of funds for administrative costs will be addressed among partners. If projects require additional administrative support, partners will identify in-kind resources, grants (i.e. Community Foundation support) and/or pool administrative costs, as needed and appropriate, to implement the project and/or activity.

CHAPTER 3: REGIONAL VISION, GOALS, AND STRATEGIES

A. Describe the strategic vision to support state and regional economic growth

Partners in the Northern Stateline Region are excited about the opportunities under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the Illinois WIOA Unified Plan for increased collaboration. This regional plan builds upon the recent success within the Northern Stateline Region in developing business-driven talent solutions (as highlighted in the State’s Vision Statement) that have supported not only a rebound from the Great Recession, but a path forward to economic growth. Workforce development has become a key piece of the ongoing conversation about bringing jobs to the Region and bringing residents to jobs. Workforce is also a major element of a regional collective impact model that is being developed through accountable partnerships like Rockford Community Partners, and stakeholders have noted that WIOA provides inherent connections with that model. That is why the strategic vision for the Northern Stateline Region is about more than just fulfilling traditional workforce development goals, and is broadly aligned with other regional strategies.

Vision Statement

A coordinated workforce pipeline that responds to employer needs, gives opportunities to all residents for traditional employment and support for self-employment and entrepreneurship, and provides talent for key industries to lead the way in regional economic growth.

B. Describe the goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce (including youth and individuals with barriers to employment), and goals relating to the performance accountability measures based on performance indicators.

Regional Goals

The Northern Stateline Region’s Goals were written to align with the four State Goals outlined in Chapter 4 of the Illinois WIOA Unified Plan while also incorporating the six broad themes that came up repeatedly in the regional planning process. In keeping with the Regional Vision of giving “opportunities to all residents” these goals are intended to benefit the entire workforce, *including youth and individuals with barriers to employment*.

1. Integration of workforce, education, and economic development efforts to move the Region’s strategies forward through increased collaboration, communication, and shared resources.
2. Engagement of employers as champions for workforce solutions that meet their current and future needs, using existing sector partnerships as foundations for further collaboration.
3. Increased skill level of the workforce through bolstered education and training opportunities providing industry-recognized credentials, sought-after degrees and certificates, and regionally relevant career pathways.
4. Better connection of residents of all skill levels and socioeconomic groups to career opportunities by addressing their barriers to traditional employment and education and providing support for individuals to participate in co-ops and social entrepreneurship ventures.

5. Improved intake, tracking, and data management systems that are user-friendly, easily sharable among partners, and able to provide relevant information to measure progress and needs for the Region's workforce systems.
6. A well-marketed workforce system that encourages residents and employers to engage its programs and services and understand available opportunities.

Additionally, it is the intent of this plan to assist core partners with meeting the six *performance accountability measures* under WIOA – participants who entered employment, participants who retained employment, median earnings, credential attainment rate, measureable skills gain, and effectiveness in serving employers. As metrics are set by Federal and State guidance, partners will work collaboratively under Goal 1 to meet regional metrics and identify assistance partners will need from one another. Additionally, the data strategies under Goal 5 will assist with tracking of metrics on a regional basis.

At this time local workforce boards negotiate local performance measures with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity for Title IB, Adult Education and Literacy providers under Title II negotiate performance measures with their State funding entity, and Title III and Title IV are State agencies with State performance measures. The Core Partners and Required Partners are committed to working together to successfully meet all performance measures in the spirit of creating success for businesses, residents and the Region as a whole. Upon receipt of State guidance on collectively negotiating collective local performance for the performance accountability described in WIOA, the regional Core and Required Partners will establish a negotiation team, research and analyze demographics and performance scenarios, and negotiate in accordance with State guidance.

C. Provide a description of the regional and local strategies that will achieve the vision and goals.

D. Describe the steps that will be taken to support the state goals to align and integrate education, workforce and economic development including.

Regional Tactical Plan

To describe both the *regional and local strategies that will achieve the vision and goals* and *steps that will be taken to support the state goals*, the Region developed a tactical plan outlining strategies and action items for each of the above goals. This format was successfully used in developing the 2016-20 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the Northern Illinois Region, which includes a significant workforce component. Because the goals and strategies below are inherently connected, it will be noted below where activities affect multiple sections of this plan. Core and Required Partners will be assisting through the Business Services team and through their own involvement in the One-Stop Centers, with further opportunities to be developed as Activities are implemented.

Goal 1: Integration of workforce, education, and economic development efforts to move the Region's strategies forward through increased collaboration, communication, and shared resources.

Strategy 1.1: Develop a clear path for employers, residents, and partners to access the services and programs of the workforce development system where there is a common point of contact but allowing for multiple points of entry to the system. This strategy is in response to community concerns that the workforce development system is uncoordinated and diffuse, with overlapping and sometimes redundant programs confusing employers and residents alike. Partners are working to develop a system where the wide range of regional workforce, educational, social service, economic development, and civic agencies can each direct their clients and business partners into the same system but retain their autonomy and relationships.

Activity 1.1A: Develop an integrated customer intake and case management process, first piloting it among several Rockford-area social service and workforce agencies. The process would help funnel clients toward the public workforce development system while also ensuring they are aware of other programs they may qualify for. Train staff at workforce and partner agencies to be aware of the above intake system and services the other programs partners offer so they can make proper referrals. This includes giving all partner agencies consistent language and a process guide for directing clients into the workforce system to maintain the common point of contact of the goal. This system will also support Goals 3 and 5 below. **Partner Roles:** The Rockford Area Case Management Initiative (RACMI), including the Northern Illinois Center for Nonprofit Excellence, Rock Valley College (RVC), and Goodwill, is leading development of the process. Core and Required Partners will implement it through an MOU, though many are already part of the development process, including the City of Rockford (CSBG provider) and Title 1B providers.

Activity 1.1B: Create a multi-partner, unified regional Business Services team by connecting existing Business Services teams for the Region’s two workforce development boards and formally partnering with other agencies. This would include providing an “Easy Button” on the front page of each workforce development agency website directly connecting businesses to the information they need, a single business services phone number for each workforce development area, coordinated branding of business services, and information sharing with partners so they know how to refer businesses. **Partner Roles:** The Workforce Connection (TWC) Board and NCI Works lead, with IDES, Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and other Core and Required Partners will participate to ensure coordinated approach.

Activity 1.1C: Explore creation of a “smart card” for residents that would serve as a single source for connecting them to services and programs offered by partners much like how a library card or student ID works. It would also allow for integration among partners and co-branding, since participating residents would have easy access to a wide variety of offerings with one card. It would also assist with reducing redundant data collection by agencies. City of Rockford could be a starting point for this activity, but it could be expanded over time. **Partner Roles:** This is expected to follow the work of Activity 1.1A to complement that intake system. Partners will follow a similar MOU process, depending on which partners are able to join implementation; it would be expanded beyond Core and Required Partners to any willing community partner.

Strategy 1.2: Build on successful recent collaboration and communication efforts to better coordinate workforce and economic development. Workforce development partners were strong participants in the recent CEDS update and are active on the boards of the region’s economic development agencies. Recently, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) hosted a regional summit between economic development and workforce development agencies. Additionally, a new

Regional Planning Council that is being formed will assist with convening further meetings, since its membership will include workforce and economic development, and the RPC board will be able to make regional policy recommendations. These initiatives have highlighted several ways the groups can be more integrated.

Activity 1.2A: Hold regular meetings between economic development and workforce development agencies to align and coordinate strategies and improve regional communication on current and future workforce needs. This includes adding workforce development entities to the team on business attraction and retention efforts as confidentiality allows. For example, as part of this planning process, the economic development officials that head “Team Rochelle” in Ogle County agreed to include a representative from NCI Works, which administers WIOA programs in Local Workforce Area 4. This complements existing relationships between The Workforce Connection Board (which administers WIOA programs in LWA 3) and its economic development partners in Boone, Stephenson, and Winnebago counties, relationships which will also be strengthened as part of this plan. **Partner Roles:** TWC Board, NCI Works, economic development organizations - Rockford Area Economic Development Council (RAEDC), Growth Dimensions, Northwest Illinois Development Alliance (NIDA), Greater Rochelle Economic Development Corp. (GREDCO) – and DCEO.

Activity 1.2B: Bring education, workforce, and transportation partners into economic development business attraction and retention processes earlier, using scenario planning, boilerplate RFP sections, and shared understandings of targeted industries and locations for development. This activity recognizes that economic development processes often are time-sensitive and must be reactive to business needs, while allowing other partners to participate more fully. An example of this process was the successful attraction of AAR Corp. to the Chicago Rockford International Airport, which was the result of a longer period of joint planning around the targeted industry of aircraft maintenance, repair, and overhaul operations. **Partner Roles:** TWC Board, NCI Works, economic development organizations, Regional Planning Council (RPC), Rockford Mass Transit District, Boone County Council on Aging, Pretzel City Area Transit, Lee-Ogle Transportation System, and community colleges – RVC, Highland Community College (HCC), Kishwaukee College, Sauk Valley Community College.

Activity 1.2C: Where possible, combine workforce development Business Services outreach with economic development outreach, such as the successful Synchronist-based Voice of the Customer program. **Partner Roles:** TWC Board, NCI Works, economic development organizations, RPC (for back office technical assistance).

Goal 2: Engagement of employers as champions for workforce solutions that meet their current and future needs, using existing sector partnerships as foundations for further collaboration.

Strategy 2.1: Strengthen existing sector partnerships within the Region and develop - additional sector partnership, particularly around identified Targeted Industries.

Activity 2.1A: Continue the work of the Northwest Illinois Healthcare Collaborative and the Rockford Area Aerospace Network, expand the Information Technology Roundtable, and restart the Logistics Council in Ogle County and look for ways to expand it to a regional level. These partnerships have formed around industry-specific needs that often have included workforce development, and have created successful initiatives that had buy-in from companies. **Partner Roles:** TWC Board (oversees NIHC), RAEDC (oversees RAAN), NCI Works (potential facilitation of Logistics Council), with other partners and economic development organizations assisting as outlined in Chapter 2, Section B.

Activity 2.1B: Identify “sector champions” to lead the formation of other partnerships, using the above models. Possible sectors include food manufacturing, metalworking, and other manufacturing areas. While the groups would coalesce around their identified shared needs, it is expected workforce will be a key topic. These partnerships will be particularly helpful for small- and mid-sized companies that don’t have the time and resources to implement workforce development programs that larger companies can. **Partner Roles:** Economic development organizations, in partnership with TWC Board and NCI Works.

Activity 2.1C: Implement the Northern Illinois Talent Pipeline Management project. This is based on the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s Talent Pipeline Management initiative and is a partnership of key regional employers, workforce and educational providers, and Northern Illinois University. The next step in 2016 is further research in developing how the project would work in this Region. The activity would align with the two others in this section, as sector partnerships will be key. One goal of this program is to align small- and mid-sized employers into groups that can work directly with training and education providers to develop specialized programs. **Partner Roles:** Northern Illinois University, TWC Board, and private employers lead; WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker providers, Career and Technical Education providers, and Eligible Training Providers will participate as needs are determined by employers.

Strategy 2.2: Provide the industry-recognized credentials needed to grow Targeted Industry clusters

Activity 2.2A: Develop programs to provide certifications and training needed by the growing Food Manufacturing industry in the Region, including programs in safety, sanitation, production, specialized equipment, and quality assurance. Partner with larger food companies and collectives of smaller ones to offer programs at schools and/or on site. Additionally, explore the possibility of crossover with training programs needed by biopharmaceutical and drug processing companies in the wider northern Illinois area. **Partner Roles:** HCC, NIDA, Growth Dimensions, TWC Board, and private sector partners.

Activity 2.2B: Identify training programs offered in the Region that could be attractive to employers outside the Region who are willing to send their workers off-site. This would develop the Northern Stateline Region as an expert in specific training niches. One possibility is to start with Food Manufacturing as noted in the above activity. This could allow the Region to offer larger programs than what regional companies could support. **Partner Roles:** Community colleges, Northern Illinois University, Eligible Training Providers, TWC Board, NCI Works.

Activity 2.2C: Partner with employers, placement and temporary agencies, and training providers to develop a “certified worker” program to address employers’ concerns about both basic and technical skills. This activity complements the Employability Certificate as part of Goal 4, as well as the various training programs of Goal 3. **Partner Roles:** This will start with the work of Activity 2.1A and 2.1C to determine these basic and technical skill needs. Core and Required Partners would then discuss how to put that into a usable program through the One-Stop and Adult and Dislocated Worker offerings, using existing best practices from DRS, IDES, and CSBG efforts to prepare job candidates.

Strategy 2.3: Improve outreach to and engagement with businesses, particularly small- to mid-sized businesses that need specialized attention but lack the resources of larger firms.

Activity 2.3A: As a component of Goal 1, improve coordination of business services, outreach, and engagement programs to minimize confusion and promote a unified system. Focus on delivery of employers’ desired solutions and demonstrate return on investment to them, while keeping the bureaucratic and process components in the background. **Partner Roles:** In conjunction with Activity 1.1B, TWC Board and NCI Works lead, with IDES, DRS, and other Core and Required Partners participating. Include economic development organizations, Chambers of Commerce and other groups that do business engagement.

Activity 2.3B: Use existing private sector representatives on workforce boards as champions for further business engagement in creating solutions to workforce problems. **Partner Roles:** Private sector representatives on boards.

Activity 2.3C: Engage with existing business associations, such as the Rockford Chamber of Commerce’s Manufacturers Council, Rock River Valley Tooling & Machining Association, and the Illinois Manufacturers’ Association. **Partner Roles:** TWC Board, NCI Works, community colleges, economic development organizations, and other partners that have relationships with business associations.

Goal 3: Increased skill level of the workforce through bolstered education and training opportunities providing industry-recognized credentials, sought-after degrees and certificates, and regionally relevant career pathways.

Strategy 3.1: Expand work-based learning programs that partner with businesses, such as internships, co-ops, apprenticeships, job shadowing, and scholarships.

Activity 3.1A: Build on the success of the Joint Institute for Engineering and Technology – Aerospace internship program by actively supporting the Northern Illinois University/Rock Valley College program, combining the new engineering school with internships in various advanced manufacturing fields. **Partner Roles:** NIU and RVC, Highland Community College (for other internship programming, RAEDC, private sector partners.

Activity 3.1B: Expand the use of apprenticeships, such as the aircraft maintenance apprenticeship program offered at Emery Air in Rockford and other company-specific programs. Assist manufacturers with setting up their own programs and connecting them with U.S. Department of Labor resources within the Region. **Partner Roles:** WIOA Core and Required Partners to promote apprenticeships through Adult and Youth programming, IDES existing encouragement of apprenticeships, and other partners where there is opportunity. TWC Board and NCI Works to coordinate wider efforts to expand apprenticeships through Business Services teams, in partnership with employers, community colleges, and the U.S. Department of Labor apprenticeships office in Rockford.

Activity 3.1C: Partner with businesses in developing training cohorts for in-demand occupations such as welding, CNC machining, forklift driving, etc. **Partner Roles:** Community colleges (in particular their Career and Technical Education components), Eligible Training Providers, business groups include Northern Illinois Talent Pipeline Management, TCW Board and NCI Works. Other partners will be involved in specific opportunities, such as CSBG programming to help low-income residents take RVC TechWorks training in CNC machining.

Strategy 3.2: Encourage and assist with the implementation of the Illinois State Board of Education’s Career Cluster Framework (which includes career clusters, career pathways, and programs of study) in the K- 12 school districts and the local workforce areas in the Region.

Activity 3.2A: Develop new career pathways programs based on Illinois Pathways in partnership with the Region’s community colleges and secondary schools. Programs in development relevant to Targeted Industries include manufacturing (such as welding), engineering, medical coding, aviation maintenance, and computer science. Strengthen existing pathways in food manufacturing and transportation, logistics, and distribution (including truck drivers and moving people into supply chain management). **Partner Roles:** Community colleges, K-12 school districts, and the Regional Office of Education to lead, with Business Services teams as a resource and Career Services and partners to explain options to job-seekers and residents seeking advancement.

Activity 3.2B: Explore modular, shorter-term training and stackable credentials in order to develop and deploy training more quickly and responsively. Look at credentials from a pathways perspective to articulate stackable credentials and connect all populations to pathways. **Partner Roles:** Community colleges and Eligible Training Providers, with input and engagement assistance from Business Services teams and economic development organizations.

Activity 3.2C: Develop an educational center and technical training facility in Belvidere at currently abandoned or underused commercial space. **Partner Roles:** City of Belvidere, in conjunction with educational and training providers to be determined. TWC Board to participate as plan is developed.

Activity 3.2D: Create a centralized location for enhanced Career and Technical Education in Rockford for high school and college students to consolidate disparate facilities. This facility can also be used by private industry in partnership with public school districts to facilitate job training. **Partner Roles:** City of Rockford, RVC, Rockford Public Schools 205.

Strategy 3.3: Address the Region’s need for engineering and technical talent to strengthen its Advanced Manufacturing clusters and offset the impending wave of retirements.

Activity 3.3A: Increase direct exposure to STEM for K-12 students to develop interest in future career goals. Use existing First Robotics and First Lego League programs and other hands-on demonstrations. **Partner Roles:** CareerTEC, Career Education Associates of North Central Illinois (CEANCI), K-12 school districts, community colleges, WIOA Youth programs, and companies that sponsor robotics teams.

Activity 3.3B: Encourage the development of educational and technical training academies, such as the Career Academy program at Rockford Public Schools, and Belvidere Public Schools’ science-based Washington Academy. **Partner Roles:** Alignment Rockford, Rockford Public Schools 205, Belvidere School District 100, and other K-12 school districts.

Activity 3.3C: Assist with the recruitment of students for the new NIU/RVC engineering program, and identify employers within the Region to provide internships, co-op placements, and other opportunities for students and graduates. **Partner Roles:** NIU, RVC, community colleges, K-12 school districts and academies, WIOA Career Services and Youth programs.

Goal 4: Better connection of residents of all skill levels and socioeconomic groups to career opportunities by addressing their barriers to traditional employment and education and providing support for individuals to participate in co-ops and social entrepreneurship ventures.

Strategy 4.1: Integrate supportive services and case management into the workforce delivery system.

This recognizes that individuals with barriers to employment need more assistance than training, education, and job referrals. It would establish a process to coordinate the needed assistance in conjunction with training, and reduce redundancy among providers. As this strategy integrates partners, it would tie to Goal 1.

Activity 4.1A: Use the joint case management system developed in Activity 1.1A for Core and Required Partners providing wraparound services integrating supportive services with career services. This program would connect individuals with case managers or “success coaches” to guide them through the process of getting the education and training needed to get and retain a job. **Partner Roles:** After partners identified in Activity 1.1A develop system, it will be implemented by Core and Required Partners through MOU, with other community partners participating as possible.

Activity 4.1B: As a follow up to Activity 4.1A, training of workforce development and partner staff to be success coaches, using existing resources and expertise but providing a common framework. For instance, workforce development staff would specialize in career planning, partnering with supportive services provider staff. NCI works will be using “journey mapping” to analyze how participants are now moving through the system, with an eye toward identifying improvements that can be made. This can be then extended to the rest of the Region. **Partner Roles:** TWC Board and NCI Works to coordinate, with One-Stop and partner staff participating in training.

Strategy 4.2: Address financial, logistical, and transportation barriers for unemployed and underemployed individuals.

Activity 4.2A: Address the “benefits cliff” faced by individuals receiving public support by promoting usage of existing transitional programs, such as Social Security’s Ticket to Work program that gradually phases out benefits but makes it easy to resume benefits if employment is not retained, and advocate for similar initiatives for other programs. Where possible, connect participants with stipends, bus passes, child care assistance, and other financial support directly tied to training and educational opportunities. **Partner Roles:** TWC Board and NCI Works to coordinate, with Core and Required Partners to provide information about barriers clients have and workforce board members to provide legislative advocacy. Operationally, partners will address this in line with each board’s supportive services policy and look for innovative ways to support individuals.

Activity 4.2B: Address transportation barriers for residents by engaging transit providers to provide them the right information to put service where it’s needed, and get the word out to residents about what’s available. Provide transit maps and schedules at workforce centers and

other partner agencies. Explore better coordination of on-demand and paratransit vehicles to pool resources where insurance and other limitations allow. Work with employers to develop other transportation options, including van service and commuter pools, particularly in rural areas and for second/third shifts. **Partner Roles:** Transit providers in partnership with workforce boards and the RPC through its RMAP Mobility Subcommittee.

Strategy 4.3: Develop and expand programs to help individuals overcome barriers to employment, including career counseling and soft skills training, and provide support for low-cost self-employment educational opportunities.

Activity 4.3A: In conjunction with Activity 2.2C, coordinate and consolidate soft skills training programs into a network of offerings throughout the Region that reduce duplication but also engage specific populations where they are. This would build on the strengths of existing service providers while bolstering programs where needed. Particular needs include basic job preparation skills – such as how to dress for an interview, how to interview, and how to be punctual – as well as basic technical skills such as typing and computer usage. Engage businesses in the development of this programming. Provide refresher workshops before hiring events. **Partner Roles:** Same as Activity 2.2C, plus other agencies and partners now offering soft skills training in the Region

Activity 4.3B: Educate career planners about addressing barriers to employment that job seekers may face, such as language and communication barriers for immigrant and refugee populations, limitations faced by individuals with disabilities, and challenges faced by ex-offenders returning home. **Partner Roles:** All Core and Required Partners will participate in discussions led by TWC Board and NCI Works to address this issue; training will be then provided to career planners and partner staff.

Activity 4.3C: Expand bridge programs, including pre-bridge programs, to bring unemployed and underemployed populations into career pathways that improve the size and skill of the workforce. **Partner Roles:** Adult Education providers/community colleges are leading.

Activity 4.3D: As a complement to Activity 2.2C, explore development of a regional Employability Certificate that uses nationally recognized programs like WorkKeys to give employers confidence in new hires. This would leverage existing certificate programs in the Region. **Partner Roles:** Partners as outlined in Activity 2.2C, along with community colleges or other training providers to offer the Certificate.

Activity 4.3E: Use the successful model of Etsy in Rockford and the development of regional makerspaces to engage unemployed and underemployed residents in entrepreneurial opportunities. **Partner Roles:** City of Rockford (including CSBG), Rockford Housing Authority, Freeport Housing Authority, NIDA, and Rock River Development Partnership through its Rockford City Market.

Strategy 4.4: Bridge the gap between employer expectations and the workforce pool, developing ways to build employer trust in unemployed and underemployed populations and mitigating their risk.

Activity 4.4A: Build employer trust over time by identifying the most ready, most skilled workers of key applicant pools and referring them to willing employers. By having good experiences hiring

those with barriers, employers may develop more willingness. **Partner Roles:** Business Services team in partnership with Core and Required Partners who serve special populations.

Activity 4.4B: Use existing incentive programs that encourage employers to hire those with disabilities, veterans, and others with barriers to employment. Make employers aware of programs tied to specific populations. **Partner Roles:** Business Services team in partnership with Core and Required Partners who serve special populations.

Activity 4.4C: Work with staffing/placement agencies, which have existing trust with employers, to develop or use existing screening, assessment, matching, and tracking programs to connect available workers with the right employer. Find ways to incorporate assessment and tracking into the public workforce system. **Partner Roles:** Business Services team and staffing agencies.

Goal 5: Improved intake, tracking, and data management systems that are user-friendly, easily sharable among partners, and able to provide relevant information to measure progress and needs for the Region's workforce systems.

Strategy 5.1: Support the collaboration efforts of this plan by developing shared systems or better coordinating existing systems for customer intake and tracking.

Activity 5.1A: Support the common intake system among key workforce partners outlined in Activity 1.1A by starting with user-friendly intake forms that reduce the need for multiple forms for multiple programs. **Partner Roles:** Roles as outlined in Activity 1.1A, with assistance from IDES, TWC Board, NCI Works, and One-Stop Operators.

Activity 5.1B: Use existing partners' tracking systems or develop a new one that can promote data sharing while protecting confidentiality. **Partner Roles:** Core and Required Partners as outlined in Activity 1.1A with assistance from IDES, TWC Board, NCI Works, and One-Stop Operators.

Activity 5.1C: Partner with the Regional Planning Council on data collection and maintenance infrastructure. **Partner Roles:** TWC Board, NCI Works, RPC, in partnership with Core and Required Partners and One-Stop Operators.

Activity 5.1D: Improve usage of Illinois JobLink and other labor exchange programs to provide easy access to qualified candidates for businesses. **Partner Roles:** IDES along with all partners that provide basic career services, Business Services team, and economic development organizations.

Strategy 5.2: Provide timely and relevant workforce data to businesses and economic development partners.

Activity 5.2A: Bolster existing state-provided employment projections and wage data with an annual regional survey of businesses on their wages, employment projections, and training needs, and publish annual report. This would be done in conjunction with the Regional Planning Council. **Partner Roles:** TWC Board, NCI Works, IDES, and RPC.

Activity 5.2B: As a complement to Activity 2.3A, integrate business surveys done by partner agencies into a shared surveying and data tracking system that reduces redundant asks of employers. Use data generated from Synchronist surveys and workforce agency business visits. Consult with Chicago-Cook Workforce Partnership on its workforce assessment tool in development. **Partner Roles:** TWC Board and NCI Works, Business Services team, economic development organizations, with technical support as needed from IDES, DCEO, RPC.

Goal 6: A well-marketed workforce system that encourages residents and employers to engage its programs and services and understand available opportunities.

Strategy 6.1: Brand the regional workforce system as an employer-driven solution to their workforce needs.

Activity 6.1A: Develop coordinated branding that promotes the workforce system as a one-stop solution to employer needs, and share materials with partners for dissemination. This includes updates to workforce system websites such as the “Easy Button” described in Goal 2. **Partner Roles:** TWC Board and NCI Works to lead, with partners to participate in branding development and dissemination of marketing materials.

Activity 6.1B: Meet with employers and employer groups to discuss perceptions of the workforce system and learn how to increase the positive perception of the system and address negative perceptions. **Partner Roles:** TWC Board, NCI Works, Business Services team, economic development organizations, and business groups.

Strategy 6.2: Promote the regional workforce system to residents, particularly those in most need of its services.

Activity 6.2A: Develop coordinated branding that promotes the workforce system as a one-stop solution to resident needs, and share materials with partners for dissemination. **Partner Roles:** TWC Board and NCI Works to lead, with partners to participate in branding development and dissemination of marketing materials.

Activity 6.2B: Visit community organizations, churches, and other places residents gather to provide details of training, education, and other workforce system offerings, rather than wait for residents to visit offices. **Partner Roles:** TWC Board and NCI Works, One-Stop Operators and Adult and Dislocated Worker

Activity 6.2C: Host more hiring events and WIOA informational and enrollment events in sites beyond workforce and educational facilities. **Partner Roles:** TWC Board and NCI Works, with partners hosting some of these events.

Strategy 6.3: Market job opportunities to retain residents who may commute or move out of the Region for work, and to attract new residents.

Activity 6.3A: Create and implement a coordinated awareness program of regional career opportunities, particularly in manufacturing, healthcare, and other key industries. Increase efforts to retain workers in high-demand occupations who are commuting out of the Region or moving to other regions, while attracting workers to move to the Region. **Partner Roles:** TWC Board and NCI Works, in partnership with economic development organizations and RPC.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND RESPONSES

The Northern Stateline Region draft Regional Plan was made available to the public on The Workforce Connection Board’s website (www.theworkforceconnection.org) on Monday, 5/2/2016. Public notice was published in a local newspaper on the same day. Additionally, emails were sent to Local Board members and stakeholders advising them of the draft plan and soliciting comments. The 30-day public comment period ended Wednesday, 6/1/2016.

Two comments were received.

Name or organization	Comment	Response
<p>Dan Dineen, Community Foundation of Northern Illinois</p>	<p>Mr. Dineen was complimentary of the plan overall and expressed desire to continue working with workforce partners on its goals and strategies going forward. He made some minor corrections and editing suggestions that were fixed in the final version. He also made the following two suggestions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The document assumes the reader is familiar with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, so much so that it never actually spells out the acronym’s meaning. I believe that some background about WIOA would be helpful for the reader to ground them in the relationship between federal funding/departments and regional efforts. 2. I’m excited to see all the different work being done in the region under the various goals in section 3. I know that many of the specific activities are in development, but, at the very least, I would love to see a backbone organization attached to each activity. This, I believe, would lead to more interested readers becoming invested participant and would strengthen 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An Introduction and Overview page was added to the beginning of the document in response to this comment. 2. This suggestion was discussed, but it was decided that at this time it was not appropriate to specifically link Activities to organizations beyond what is already in the plan. The Workforce Development Boards and other core partners are generally responsible for many of the items in the plan. Additionally, the Region will develop an implementation matrix after Regional Plan approval that will go into more depth about implementing agencies and partnerships that are needed.

	<p>the document's claim to follow a collective impact model.</p>	
<p>Mayor Larry Morrissey, City of Rockford</p>	<p>Thank you for the presentation today on our Workforce Alliance Regional Plan. Great work overall. I just wanted to confirm a couple of the points I made at the meeting and a couple others.</p> <p>First, I thought the Vision statement needs to add something along the lines of "and effective support for individuals to pursue self-employment and entrepreneurship opportunities." This has been a glaring hole in our national, State and local approaches to help folks out of poverty.</p> <p>Second, as it regards to goals, I would add something like "support for individuals, especially those who may have significant background barriers to traditional employment opportunities, to participate in co-ops and social entrepreneurship ventures."</p> <p>Third, as far as strategies, I would add:</p> <p>A) that we need to specifically mention our support for collective impact, accountable partnerships/collaborations like "Rockford Community Partners". I have copied Todd Cagnoni. I would like to add a RCP group specifically targeting "co-ops & social entrepreneurship"</p> <p>B) that we mention something around the need to support for low-cost entrepreneurial, self-employment education such as a</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Vision has been amended in response to this comment 2. Goal 4 has been amended in response to this comment. 3. A. The introduction to the Regional Vision, Goals, and Strategies referenced this, but more has been added in response to this comment. B. Strategy 4.3 has been amended in response to this comment. Additionally, it was noted that Activity 4.3E addresses this comment. C. Activity 1.1C has been added to the plan in response to this comment.

	<p>Rockford Maker Space. There is a venture I'm currently working on with the Rockford Public Library and Rock Valley College and a few entrepreneurs. Mark Williams from the City is helping on this. We got a grant from the RAEDC to purchase equipment. We're working up the plan for the space. I think this is something NIWA may be able to support by subsidizing an individual's membership to such a MakerSpace or supporting general overhead for such a facility if that's possible. I'd like to discuss this with you further.</p> <p>C) I may have discussed with you in the past the opportunity to create a "suped-up" version of a Library Card that can serve as a single source for connecting a resident to the host of services/databases that might support them. Such a "smart-card" could support a more seamless integration of our various partner organizations. I think this should also be integrated into our partner MOU and Technology parts of our work. This type of card would be similar to what a Student ID does for a student at a big university. It might be a transit card, debit card, library card, dining card, etc. We would use this as a way to improve and expand our network of partners and opportunities for the individuals we serve. This would also allow us to better market and brand our services with other partner organizations. I can see our logo on the back of the card.</p>	
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After the plan was modified in March 2017 in accordance with updated state and federal guidance, the draft plan was again made available to the public on The Workforce Connection Board's website (www.theworkforceconnection.org) on Monday, 3/13/2017. Public notice was published in a local newspaper on the same day. Additionally, emails were sent to Local Board members and stakeholders advising them of the draft plan and soliciting comments. The 30-day public comment period ended Thursday, 4/13/2017. There were no public comments received.