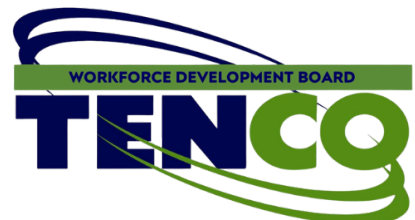


# WIOA Regional & Local Strategic Plan

PROGRAM YEAR 2025 - 2028



EASTERN KENTUCKY  
**EKCEP**  
CONCENTRATED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM, INC.



## Regional name: **East Region**

### Local Workforce Development Boards:

Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program (EKCEP)

and

TENCO Workforce Development Board (TENCO)

The guidance for local and regional plans can be found here: [Guidance 21-007](#) released 1/1/2025. With the accompanying [Local and Regional Plans Toolkit](#) that provides statewide strategic objectives, programs, and initiatives that are referenced in the Combined WIOA State Plan.

### Economic and Workforce Analysis

**A. (R) A description of the planning process undertaken to produce the regional plan, including a description of how all local areas were afforded the opportunity to participate in the regional planning process.**

The planning process undertaken by the East Region included opportunities for both the Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program local area and the TENCO Workforce Development local area to participate in regional planning.

#### EAST REGION PLAN TIMELINE

ACTIVITY	DATE	NOTES
EKCEP and TENCO representatives	February 17, 2025	Joint Virtual meeting
EKCEP and TENCO representatives	February 28, 2025	Joint Virtual meeting
Draft release; Public comment period starts	March 27, 2025	Place on website; Notify on social media pages.
Virtual Forum	April 9, 2025	Open for all partners, board members, LEOs, and interested parties
Public comment period ends	April 25, 2025	
Plan is finalized	No later than April 30, 2025	Submit plan to DWD

Regional local elected officials and workforce development board members have an opportunity to review and provide input for the plan prior to and during the public comment period as well as through committee and board meetings. The completion of the draft Plan will be advertised and available for review from all interested parties and will be placed on the following websites: EKCEP website, [www.ekcep.org](http://www.ekcep.org), and Kentucky Career Center – TENCO website, [www.tencocareercenter.com](http://www.tencocareercenter.com). A thirty (30) day public comment

period will be available which will include one virtual forum. Public input received will be reviewed by Board staff and, if appropriate, corresponding modifications will be made to the Plan.

Both local areas conducted data analyses on the region's strengths, obstacles, and opportunities. The analyses concluded that while there are many similarities in the challenges and opportunities faced by the region, there are also many differences between the two local areas that comprise the region. The data in the following sections reflect these similarities and differences which are utilized locally to determine programming, service delivery, funding allocations, performance measures, high-demand sectors and resource accessibility.

The Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (KWIB) also conducted statewide listening sessions between July and October 2023. EKCEP and TENCO local areas participated and contributed to the discussion on the strengths and concerns of the current workforce system and a reimagined future workforce system. The intention was to learn best practices and identify challenges and opportunities in the local area.

- A.** Provide a regional analysis of the economic conditions including existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations, and the employment needs of employers in those industry sectors and occupations. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(1)(A)] and [20 C.F.R. § 679.560(a)]

While the East Region continues to lag behind other regions in the Commonwealth of Kentucky in job growth and economic expansion, there are still many opportunities in multiple sectors.

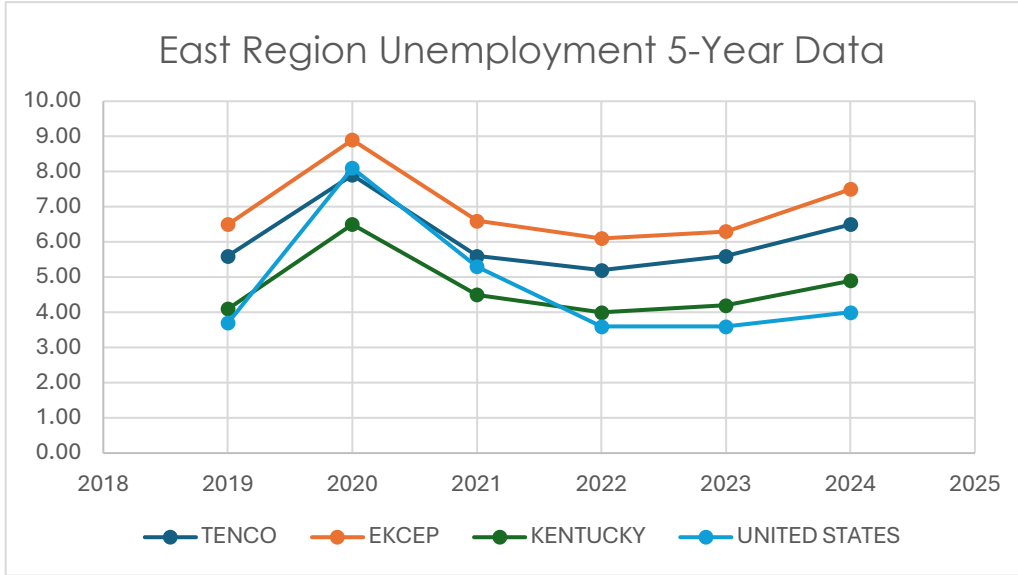
The continued growth of the healthcare sector and the vast array of job opportunities that come with increased connectivity provide hope that the region can rise above its historical role as a geographically isolated economy and become a full and equal participant in the world's internet-based economy.

### **Unemployment Data**

The 5-year data revealed the unemployment rate for the East Region was at its highest peak in 2020 (EKCEP at 8.9% and TENCO at 7.9%), with both areas seeing a decrease in unemployment in 2021 and 2022. However, throughout the last two years, the unemployment rate in the East Region has steadily increased. East Kentucky has a persistently higher unemployment compared to statewide and national rates. Employment opportunities, while improving, provide minimal new jobs and many offer lower than the average living wage. It is projected that high unemployment, low labor participation, and high poverty will continue in East Kentucky until economic conditions significantly improve. Both EKCEP and TENCO local workforce boards work diligently with businesses and economic development entities to provide services in recruitment, retention, layoff aversion, and workforce data.

The chart below compares unemployment rates during the past five years for the East Region, EKCEP, TENCO, and Kentucky.

Unemployment Rate for the East Region:



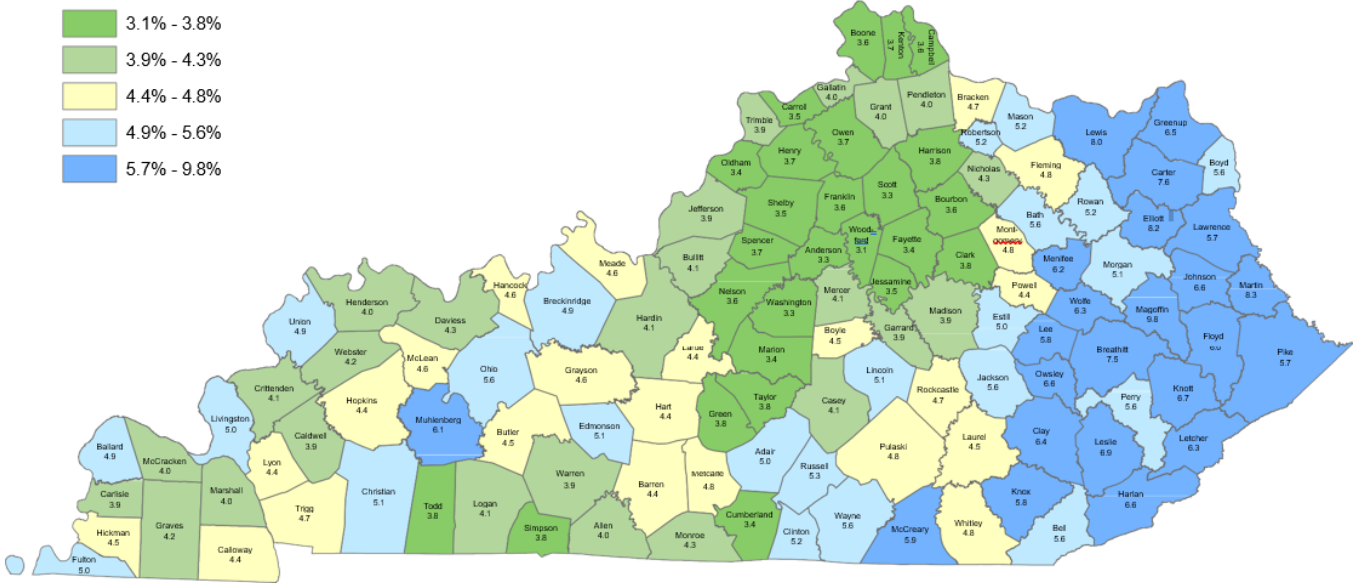
UNEMPLOYMENT %						
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
TENCO	5.60	7.90	5.60	5.20	5.60	6.50
EKCEP	6.50	8.90	6.60	6.10	6.30	7.50
KENTUCKY	4.10	6.50	4.50	4.00	4.20	4.90
UNITED STATES	3.70	8.10	5.30	3.60	3.60	4.00

[kystats.ky.gov](http://kystats.ky.gov)

While the local and regional UI data paints a bleak picture of a serious obstacle facing the East Kentucky Region, county-specific data reflects that there are “pockets” in East Kentucky that are the most distressed in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. *The Annual 2023 Unemployment Rates by County: Local Area Unemployment Statistics* produced by the Kentucky Center for Statistics reflects the county-specific unemployment rates compared to the rest of the Commonwealth.

## Annual 2023 Unemployment Rates\* by County Local Area Unemployment Statistics

Date Produced: April 19, 2024



\*Unemployment rates are not seasonally adjusted

Kentucky: 4.2%  
United States: 3.6%

County	Local Area	Unemployment Rate %
Bath County	TENCO	5.6
Bell County	EKCEP	5.6
Boyd County	TENCO	5.6
Bracken County	TENCO	4.7
Breathitt County	EKCEP	7.5
Carter County	EKCEP	7.6
Clay County	EKCEP	6.4
Elliott County	EKCEP	8.2
Fleming County	TENCO	4.8
Floyd County	EKCEP	6.0
Greenup County	TENCO	6.5
Harlan County	EKCEP	6.6
Jackson County	EKCEP	5.6
Johnson County	EKCEP	6.6
Knott County	EKCEP	6.7
Knox County	EKCEP	5.8
Lawrence County	EKCEP	5.7
Lee County	EKCEP	5.8
Leslie County	EKCEP	6.9
Letcher County	EKCEP	6.3

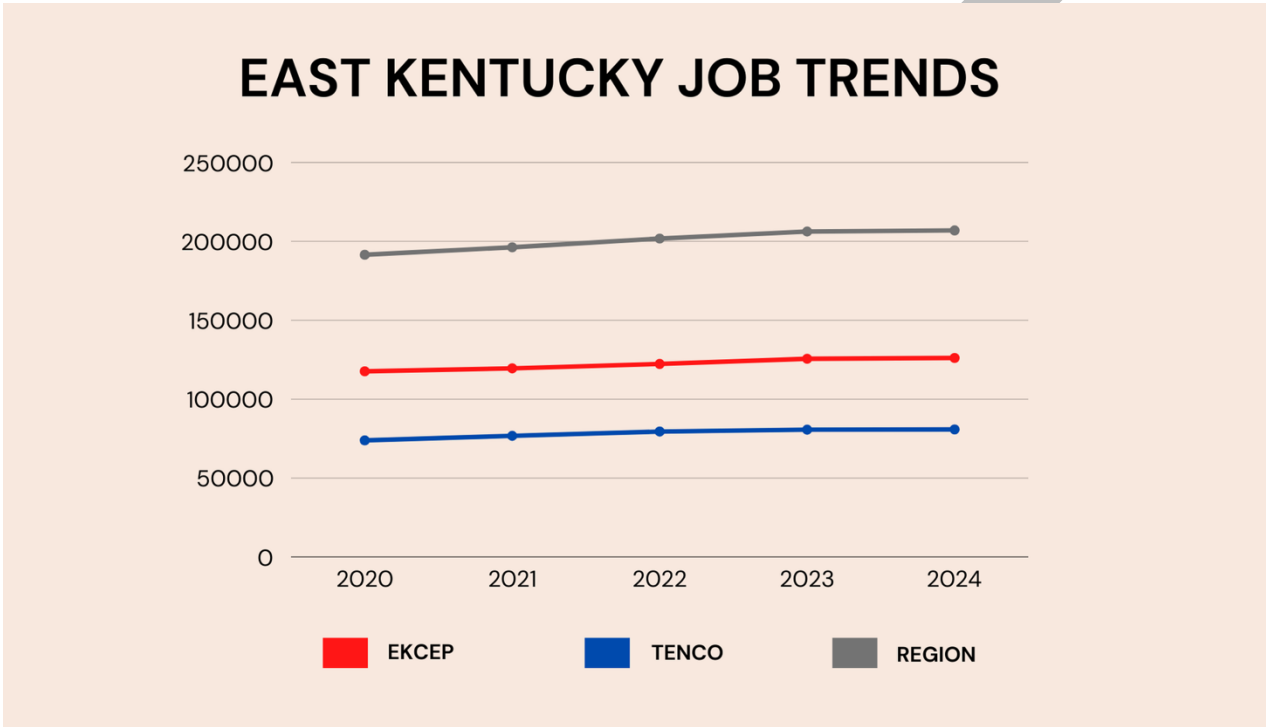
Lewis County	TENCO	8.0
Magoffin County	EKCEP	9.8
Martin County	EKCEP	8.3
Mason County	TENCO	5.2
Menifee County	EKCEP	6.2
Montgomery County	TENCO	4.8
Morgan County	EKCEP	5.1
Owsley County	EKCEP	6.6
Perry County	EKCEP	5.6
Pike County	EKCEP	5.7
Robertson County	TENCO	5.2
Rowan County	TENCO	5.2
Wolfe County	EKCEP	6.3
Kentucky		4.2
United States		3.6

All East Region counties had a higher unemployment rate in 2023 than Kentucky and the United States. Four counties had a rate of 8.0% or higher. Those counties include Lewis, Elliott, Martin, and Magoffin. The three counties with the lowest unemployment were still slightly above the state rate, with unemployment between 4.7%—4.8%. These counties included Bracken, Fleming, and Montgomery.

This data reflects the urgency in which we, as the Commonwealth of Kentucky, need to act to attract new business and support economic growth in current businesses within the East Region. This demonstrates the need for sustained state and federal funding to align job-seeker skills with business demands.

## Job Trends

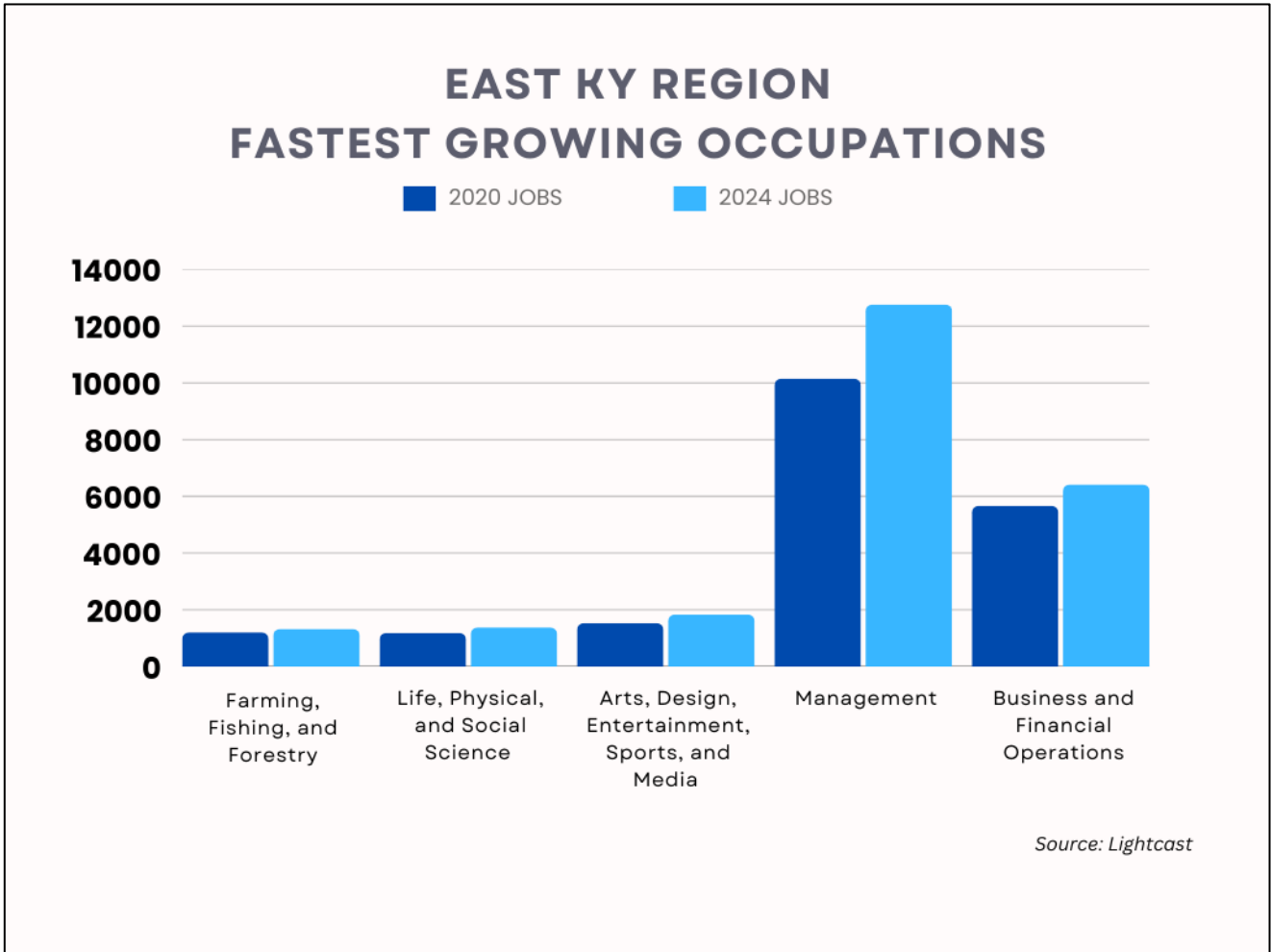
While job loss was a major economic issue in the East Region from 2015 through 2020, job trends in the East Region are positive over the past five years. The region has seen an increase in employment opportunities with a five-year total gain of 15,436 jobs (approximately 8.06% increase).



Job Data for 2020 – 2024

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>EKCEP</b>	117,643	119,529	122,318	125,599	126,131
<b>TENCO</b>	73,876	76,745	79,473	80,671	80,824
<b>Region</b>	191,519	196,274	201,791	206,270	206,955

The following chart shows the occupations that experienced high growth between 2020 and 2024:



The following chart indicates the top five occupations that have been identified by KYStats as projected to grow through 2032 for the Region:

TENCO	EKCEP
Healthcare Practitioners and Tech	Healthcare Practitioners and Tech
Healthcare Support	Healthcare Support
Food Preparation and Serving	Home Health and Personal Care Aides
Transportation and Material Moving	Transportation and Material Moving
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	Management Occupations

Based on the 2024 LWA Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, the occupations (Standard Occupational Classifications) in the Region with the highest wages include:

1. Management Occupations – \$37.46 median hourly earnings (9,780 jobs in 2024)
2. Legal Occupations – \$31.23 median hourly earnings (820 jobs in 2024)
3. Healthcare Practitioners and Technical – \$31.10 median hourly earnings (16,870 jobs in 2024)



4. Architecture and Engineering – \$29.90 median hourly earnings (1,820 jobs in 2024)
5. Computer and Mathematical – \$29.86 median hourly earnings (1,570 jobs in 2024)

### In-Demand Sectors

The EKCEP Workforce Innovation Board recognizes the following occupational sectors as priorities.

Healthcare	Manufacturing	Construction	Education	Professional, Scientific and Technical Services
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The TENCO Workforce Development Board has established the following high-demand priority sectors:

Healthcare	Skilled/Construction Trades	Manufacturing, Distribution & Logistics	Transportation	Professional Services and Support Programs
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To meet the current and projected employment opportunities in these sectors, job seekers will need assistance with setting attainable career goals, focusing their job searches, and choosing appropriate training. Job seekers are not often aware of the range of available occupations in the region that can offer a living wage and economic stability — especially with the steady expansion of job opportunities available online. Job seekers also need guidance in planning and preparing for their job search and in executing the steps in their job search process, such as writing resumes, developing job search strategies, finding job leads, and learning interviewing techniques. In sum, job seekers need assistance with career exploration and guidance, occupational information, access to resources, information about and access to training options, job search assistance, work experience, and education in essential skills and workplace behaviors. These needs emphasize the important role the EKCEP and TENCO professional career advisors play in job seekers' successes.

In all sectors, employers consistently identify a lack in essential job readiness skills in addition to specific occupational skills. Essential job readiness skills provided in conjunction with work-based learning opportunities continue to be vital elements in workforce development services in the region.

The East Region workforce system diligently works to remove barriers that prevent job seekers from employment success. Along with services such as internships, on-the-job training, work experience, and other work-based learning placements that can open the doors to new career opportunities, EKCEP and TENCO anticipate an increasing need for supportive services such as transportation, childcare, supplies, housing, and specialty programs. As technologies and skills become increasingly more developed, individuals will require a higher level of occupational, career pathway, and work-based training opportunities. Structured supportive services while pursuing high-demand training is vital for success.

**B. (R) Provide an analysis of the regional workforce, including current labor force employment (and unemployment) data and information on labor market trends and the educational and skill levels of the workforce in the region, including individuals with barriers to employment. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(1)(C)] and [20 C.F.R. § 679.560(a)]**

The East Region is comprised of the Eastern Kentucky C.E.P., Inc. and the TENCO local workforce areas, consisting of 33 rural counties: Bath, Bell, Boyd, Bracken, Breathitt, Carter, Clay, Elliott, Fleming, Floyd, Greenup, Harlan, Jackson, Johnson, Knott, Knox, Lawrence, Lee, Leslie, Letcher, Lewis, Magoffin, Martin, Mason, Menifee, Montgomery, Morgan, Owsley, Perry, Pike, Robertson, Rowan, and Wolfe. The overall population for the East Region continues to decrease. The East Region makes up 14% of the total population of Kentucky.

**Regional Analysis**

**635,574**

**Total Population**

Population decreased over the last 5 years.

**379,134**

**Working Age Population**

The working age makes up 59% of the total (635,574) population.

**41.5%**

**Workforce Participation Rate**

The overall workforce participation rate has increased slightly from 39.8% in 2020. This percentage shows that only 157,341 individuals who are working age (379,134) are in the labor force.

**46%**

**Some College or Higher**

24% (90,992 individuals) have an Associate Degree or higher.

**42**

**Average Age**

The average age of the population has increased from 40 in 2021 to 42. This is 1% higher than Kentucky's median age.

**Breakdown of the Regional Analysis:**

**East Region Population  
Comparison of 2020 -2024**

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>Region</b>	635,716	630,880	625,813	622,596	619,379
<b>EKCEP</b>	430,178	425,973	421,022	417,643	414,264
<b>TENCO</b>	205,538	204,907	204,791	204,953	205,115

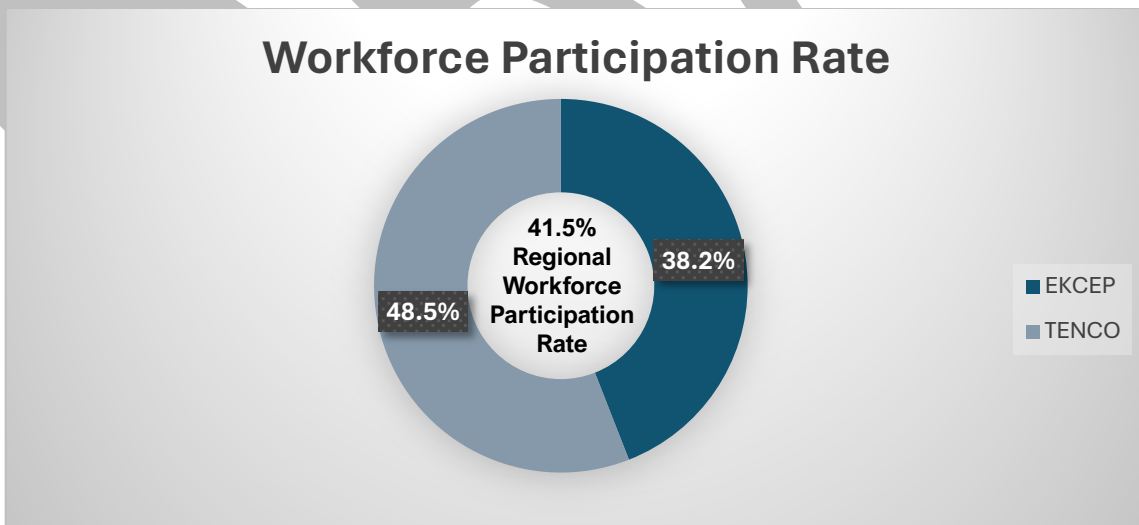


Overall, the East Region's population has declined by -.97% from 2020. EKCEP and TENCO have both experienced population declines in many of their counties.

Half of TENCO's ten counties experienced population decline, with Boyd (-8%), Greenup (-1.8%), Lewis (-.9%), Mason (-1.7%), and Rowan (-1.3%) all showing losses. Greenup County saw the most significant decrease at -1.8%. Conversely, Robertson County had the highest growth at 5.9%. Although TENCO's population slightly increased from 2023 to 2024, it remains below 2020 levels.

Since 2020, EKCEP has seen a consistent annual population decline. Nineteen of its twenty-three counties experienced population loss, with Breathitt (-5.4%), Leslie (-5.8%), and Harlan (-5.3%) showing the most significant decreases. Only Jackson (+1.1%), Menifee (+2.3%), Morgan (+4.0%), and Owsley (+.8%) saw population increases.

**Workforce Participation Rate**



The East Region of Kentucky exhibits a significantly low workforce participation rate of 41.5%, the lowest in the state. Fifteen counties within the region fall below this average, with Martin County

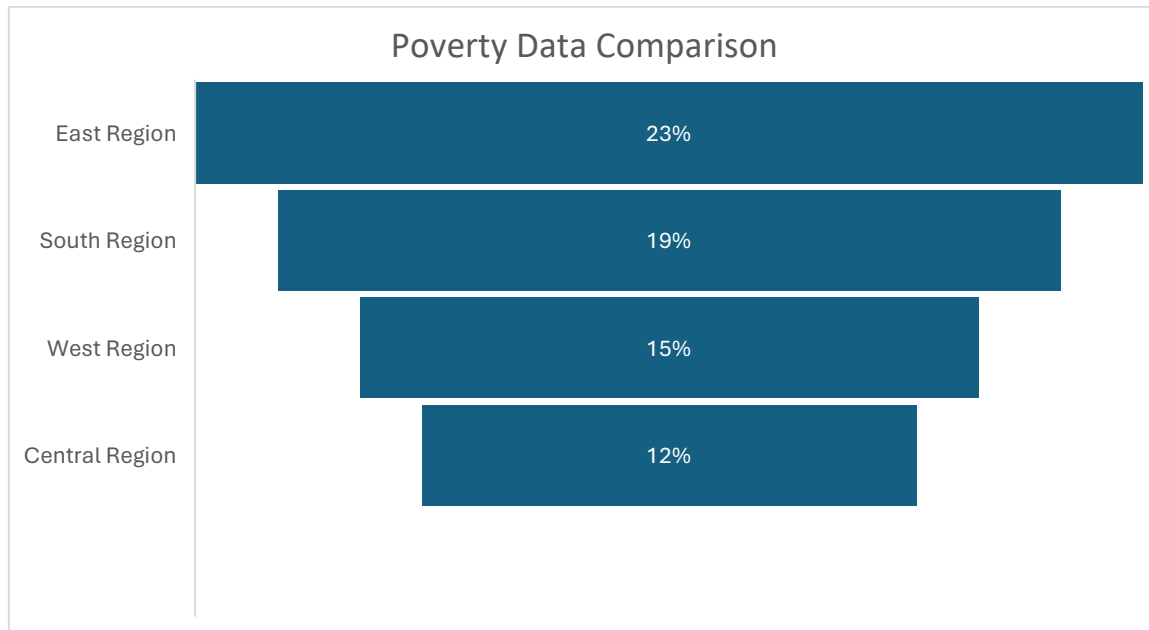
having the lowest rate at 27%. Other counties with notably low participation include Breathitt (29%), Leslie (30%), and Harlan (31%).

In contrast, Bracken (57%), Montgomery (54%), Fleming (50%), and Robertson (50%) counties demonstrate the highest labor market participation rates in the region.

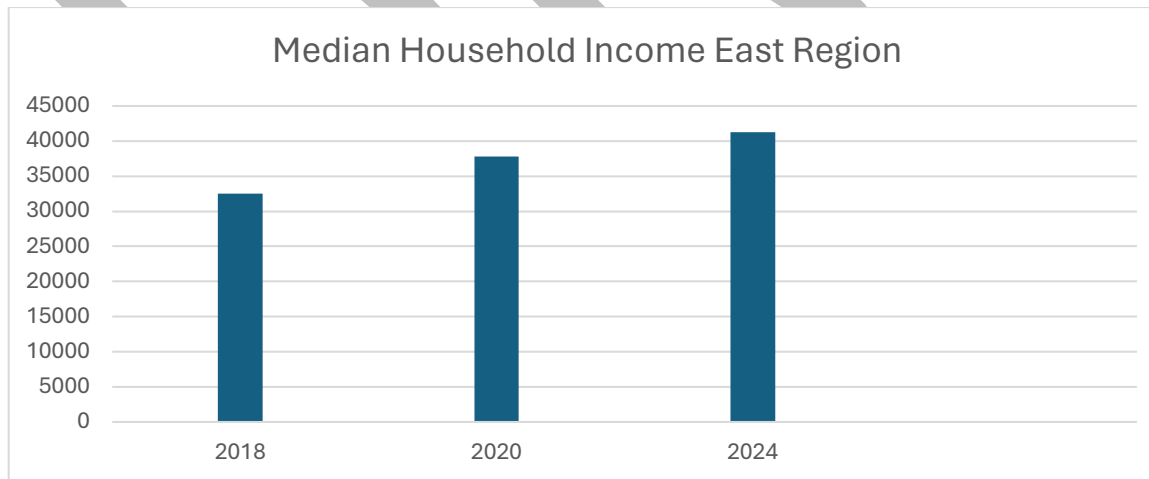
### Poverty Levels

The East Region’s poverty population is 150,226 or 23%. This is higher than any other region in Kentucky. The counties with the highest poverty rates include the following: Leslie (36%), Harlan (35%), Bell (34%), Breathitt (34%), Lee (33%), and Perry (34%).

(KYStats)



### Median Household Income



The average median household income for the 33 counties that comprise the East Region has steadily increased from \$32,471.00 in 2018 to \$37,798.54 in 2020 and \$41,271.00 in 2024. Although this shows an

increase for families in the East Region, the median household income continues to be significantly below Kentucky’s overall median income of \$60,183.00.

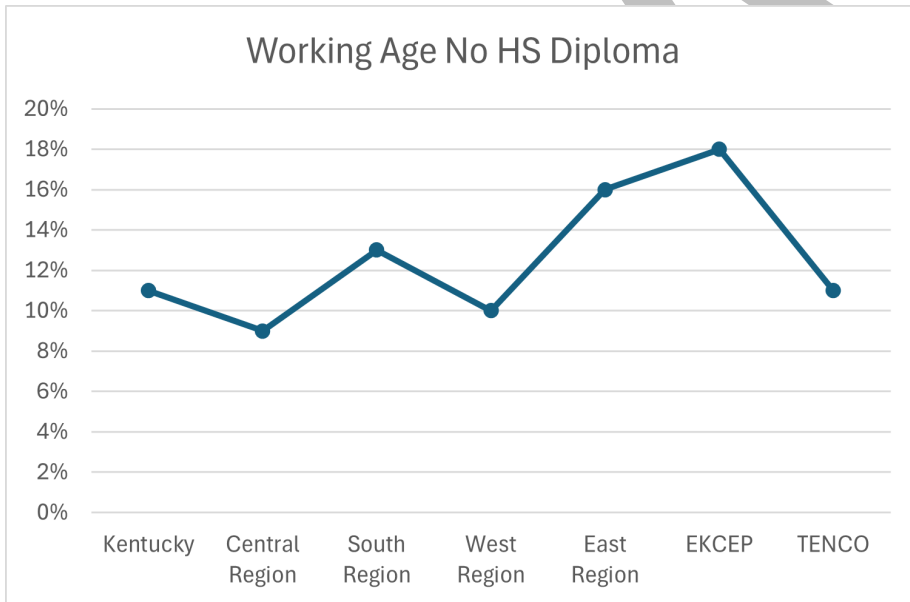
(KYStats: WORKR)

## Education

The secondary and post-secondary training institutions in the East Region continuously seek opportunities to improve upon the educational level of the geographical area. At a minimum, a high school diploma or its equivalent is necessary for entry level employment. Current KY Stats data indicates the East Region has an average high school graduation rate of 95%. Only two counties fall below a 90% high school graduation rate – Bath at 89.2 and Lee at 89.2.

Work Ready Communities; October 2022

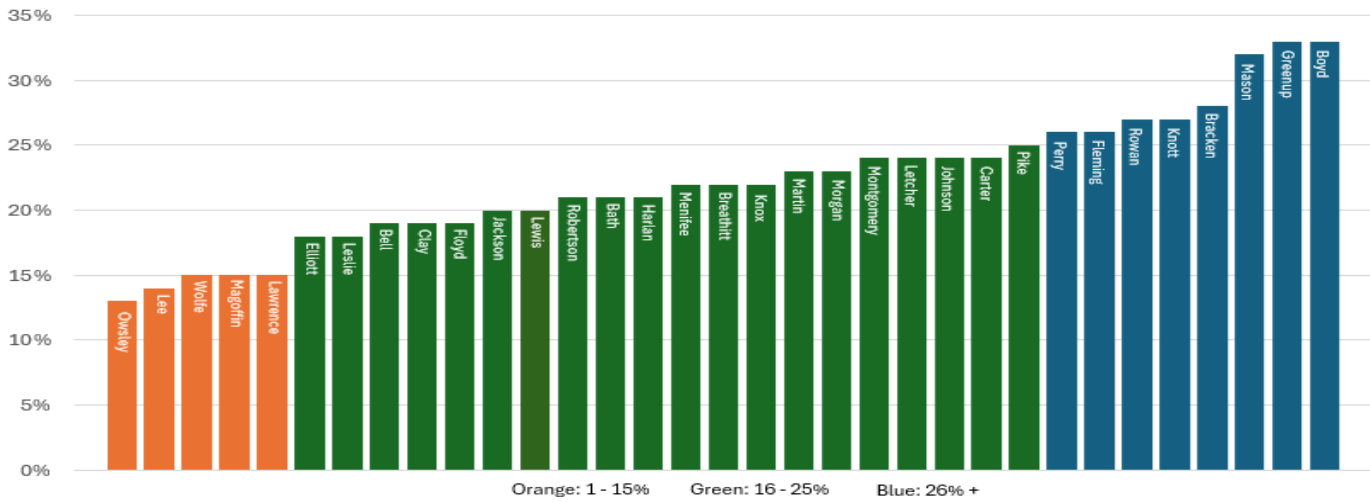
While high school graduation rates in recent years have been consistently in the mid-90% range, the East Region still faces a challenge with a substantial working-age population lacking high school diplomas. The 2018-2022 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates reveal that ten counties have 20% or more of their working-age population without a diploma. These counties include Clay (25%), Harlan (21%), Jackson (21%), Knott (22%), Lawrence (22%), Lee (21%), Lewis (20%), Magoffin (23%), Owsley (22%), and Wolfe (30%). Rowan and Greenup counties have the lowest percentages of working-age individuals without a high school diploma, at 8% and 9% respectively.



All counties in the East Region show 30% or more residents that have some college credits, which includes certifications and licenses. The East Region shows a slight increase in individuals who have an Associate degree or higher. In 2021, eighteen counties met that threshold compared to twenty-three counties in 2024. The counties that have 20% or more of the population with an Associate degree or higher include: Bath, Boyd, Bracken, Breathitt, Fleming, Greenup, Harlan, Jackson, Johnson, Knott, Letcher, Martin, Mason, Montgomery, Robertson, Rowan, Perry, and Pike.

Five counties have a post-secondary educational attainment (Associate or higher) rate of 15% or less: Lawrence, Owsley, Lee, Magoffin, and Wolfe.

Associate's Degree Completion by County

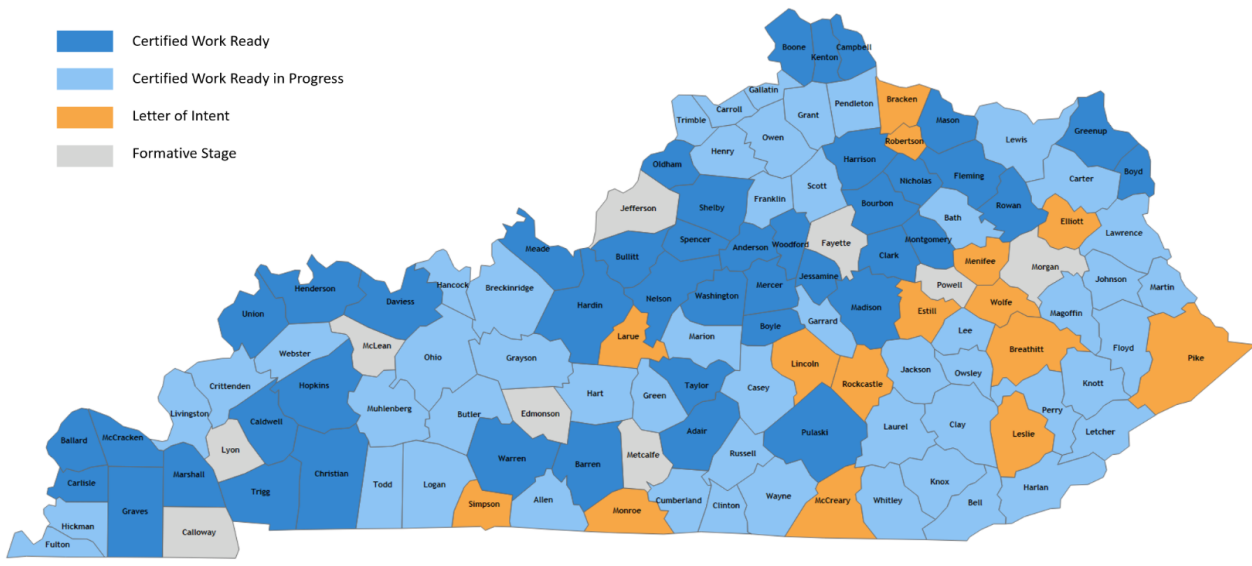


### Initiatives

Many of the concerns affecting the East Region—including high poverty rates, low educational attainment levels, poor graduation rates, and the percentage of the population lacking a high school diploma or the equivalent—are being addressed through initiatives such as SOAR (Shaping Our Appalachian Region), Work Ready Communities, and the Appalachian Regional Commission.

While the criteria for certification as a Work Ready Community is currently being modified, it is valuable to mention that under the current guidelines, six counties in the East Region have been recognized and certified as Work Ready: Boyd, Fleming, Greenup, Mason, Montgomery, and Rowan. A Work Ready Community certification is a measure of a county’s workforce quality. To be certified as Work Ready, counties must reflect strong partnership and meet expectations in graduation rates, work-based learning opportunities, engagement of underserved populations, community commitment, educational attainment, essential skills development and broadband access. Another eighteen counties in the East Region have been certified as “Work Ready in Progress,” meaning that they have made significant progress toward meeting the standards required to be certified as Work Ready.

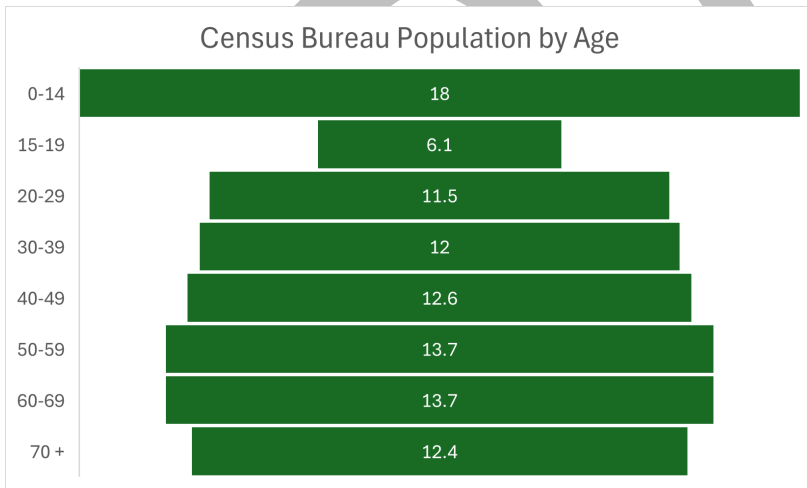
- Certified Work Ready
- Certified Work Ready in Progress
- Letter of Intent
- Formative Stage



[Workready.ky.gov/pages/certified-counties.aspx](http://Workready.ky.gov/pages/certified-counties.aspx); updated 2023.

### Population by Age

Another concern affecting the East Region is the aging workforce. While Kentucky’s median age is 39, the East Region’s median age is 42. Rowan County has the youngest average population of 31, while Owsley has the oldest average at 48.



Projections indicate that 27% of the region’s current workforce could retire within the next 10-15 years. Youth ages 6-19 make up 18.5% of the region’s current population based on census data. Existing businesses may suffer even greater concerns in filling new and vacant positions due to a projection of 8.5% more individuals exiting the workforce than joining it.

## Other characteristics of the East Region

	Total Population	Veteran Population	Poverty Population	Median Household Income	Foreign Born	Foster Youth	Homeless	Justice Involved	Person with Disability
<b>EKCEP</b>	430,132	16,354	112,428	38,466	3,074	955	112	3,747	114,939
<b>TENCO</b>	205,442	11,131	37,798	52,453.50	2,253	602	190	2,005	42,312

## Offenses/Justice Involved

In 2023, there were 20,411 crimes committed in the East Region associated with Drug/Narcotics, Burglary, Assault, Vandalism, Larceny, Theft, Robbery, Stolen Property, Sexual Offenses, Kidnapping, Homicide, Arson, Fraud, Extortion, Forgery, Counterfeiting, Bribery, Pornography, Prostitution, Weapons Violations, and Human Trafficking that caused individuals to become involved in the adult correctional system. (Note: This is the number of crimes, not the number of individuals who committed crimes.)

The top three offenses included: Drug/Narcotics - 10,180 which has steadily increased since 2017 (8,771); Assault - 4,569 which has increased slightly since 2017 (3,596); and Larceny/theft/burglary - which declined from 6,105 in 2017 to 2,815 in 2023. The five counties with the most criminal activity in 2023 based on their population are Harlan, Perry, Knox, Bell, and Floyd. (kystatepolice.org)

COUNTY	# OF ARRESTS	POPULATION	PER CAPITA
<b>HARLAN</b>	1613	25652	0.063
<b>PERRY</b>	1380	27367	0.050
<b>KNOX</b>	1491	29773	0.050
<b>BELL</b>	1045	23611	0.044
<b>FLOYD</b>	1539	34918	0.044
<b>ELLIOTT</b>	320	7292	0.044
<b>LESLIE</b>	398	10049	0.040
<b>PIKE</b>	2137	56317	0.038
<b>OWSLEY</b>	138	4001	0.034
<b>JOHNSON</b>	748	22235	0.034
<b>MAGOFFIN</b>	374	11348	0.033
<b>WOLFE</b>	211	6416	0.033
<b>MASON</b>	554	16903	0.033
<b>ROWAN</b>	780	24372	0.032
<b>LAWRENCE</b>	502	16097	0.031
<b>CARTER</b>	814	26343	0.031
<b>BREATHITT</b>	408	13358	0.031
<b>FLEMING</b>	464	15278	0.030



<b>JACKSON</b>	392	12989	0.030
<b>MENIFEE</b>	182	6236	0.029
<b>BOYD</b>	1387	48059	0.029
<b>CLAY</b>	549	19874	0.028
<b>LETCHER</b>	549	20827	0.026
<b>LEE</b>	188	7273	0.026
<b>MORGAN</b>	313	14283	0.022
<b>KNOTT</b>	300	13847	0.022
<b>LEWIS</b>	275	12937	0.021
<b>BATH</b>	235	12828	0.018
<b>MARTIN</b>	192	11096	0.017
<b>MONTGOMERY</b>	470	28357	0.017
<b>BRACKEN</b>	119	8435	0.014
<b>ROBERTSON</b>	30	2247	0.013
<b>GREENUP</b>	314	35375	0.009
	20,411		

Kystatepolice.org, Crime in Kentucky 2023

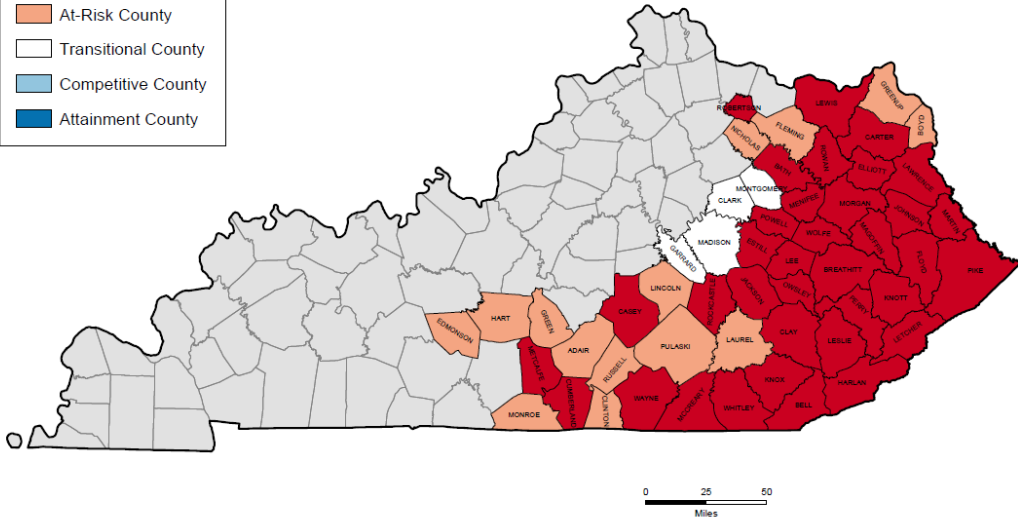
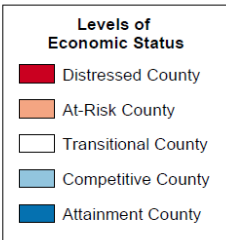
**Commuting Distances** - Due to limited employment opportunities in many of the region's counties, a significant number of individuals must commute outside of the county in which they reside to find employment. An average of 61% of the residents in the East Region travel outside of their home county for employment. This indicates a need for additional job opportunities at a higher wage in the East Region.

*(2020 Commuting Patterns Report)*

### **Appalachian Regional Commission and Distressed Eastern Kentucky Counties**

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) has identified all but two counties (Bracken and Mason) within the East Region as "distressed or at-risk counties." Distressed counties rank as the most economically depressed 10% of the nation's counties. At-risk counties are those most at-risk of becoming economically distressed without intervention and rank between 10% and 25% of the nation's counties. Transitional counties are those that are transitioning between strong and weak economies. The economic indicators used by the ARC are three-year average unemployment rates, per capita market income, and poverty rates. While the ARC identifies those counties most in need, they also provide valuable investments into the area as presented below.

## County Economic Status in Appalachian Kentucky, Fiscal Year 2025



## KENTUCKY

STATE PROFILE | FISCAL YEAR 2024  
(OCTOBER 1, 2023-SEPTEMBER 30, 2024)

### FISCAL YEAR 2024 INVESTMENT SNAPSHOT



**\$32.3M** ARC INVESTMENT

**\$26.2M** PROJECT MATCH



**\$58.6M** TOTAL PROJECT INVESTMENT

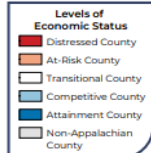
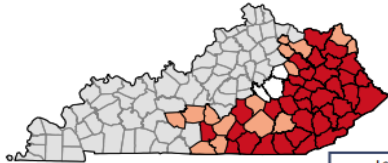
**45** PROJECTS



**2,638** STUDENTS AND WORKERS TRAINED AND EDUCATED

**4,497** HOUSEHOLDS/BUSINESSES SERVED WITH INFRASTRUCTURE

### FY 2024 COUNTY ECONOMIC STATUS IN KENTUCKY



### FISCAL YEAR 2024 INVESTMENT PRIORITIES



**COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE**  
**\$16.4M**

invested in Kentucky to ensure access to reliable and affordable broadband, clean water and updated wastewater systems, highways, and more



**WORKFORCE ECOSYSTEM**  
**\$12.8M**

invested in Kentucky to expand community systems that will help Appalachians obtain a job, stay on the job, and advance their careers



**COMMUNITY LEADERS & CAPACITY**  
**\$1.5M**

invested in growing the capacity of local leaders, organizations, and communities to address challenges and create opportunities in Kentucky



**ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES**  
**\$1.7M**

invested in entrepreneurship and business development to strengthen the economy and to preserve local history, culture, and natural assets in Kentucky

In conclusion, the East Region has significant obstacles to overcome, but with the right resources, partnerships, and determination, those obstacles can be turned into region wide opportunities.

**C. (R) An analysis of workforce development activities, including education and training in the region. This will include an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of workforce development activities and 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 in the region.**

**Note:** Per WIOA Sec. 108(c), existing economic regional and/or local area analyses may be used if sourced data and/or derived analyses are economically relevant and current (i.e., within two years of the issuance of this guidance).

The workforce development activities in the East Region of Kentucky (EKCEP and TENCO) are focused on helping job seekers prepare for and obtain careers that pay a self-sufficient wage while helping employers — in both existing and emerging sectors — find or develop the workers they need to prosper and help grow the region's economy.

The WIOA and workforce development board staff in both local workforce areas work closely with the partner agencies required under WIOA and with other organizations to ensure that both job seekers and employers receive a full array of services to make it possible for these goals to be met.

Career Advisors are the central and most important element of the WIOA-funded workforce development system. Career advisors use interviews and assessment tools with customers to understand their circumstances, aptitudes, interests, barriers, and career objectives. Career Advisors use this information to develop a career action plan (Individual Employment Plan) which may include job placement, training and/or supportive service plans, work-based learning programs, or direct referrals to partner services. Intensive case management and follow-up services increases the likelihood of success. The intent is to empower customers to make realistic decisions about their employment goals and assist them in implementing action to reach those goals.

The role of the Career Advisor/Career Counselor is crucial in the region's workforce development system. Services provided include, but are not limited to the following:

- ✚ Career advising including information such as educational requirements, job projections, and wages for careers and helping the customer set attainable career goals
- ✚ Choosing appropriate training to meet their financial, personal, and employment needs.
- ✚ Analysis of assessments completed by the customer to determine basic skills levels, career interests, personal resources, supportive service needs, past work and educational history, strengths, and obstacles the customer is facing.
- ✚ Planning and preparing for job search and executing the steps in the job search process including completing applications, developing resumes, and interviewing techniques.
- ✚ Access to partner and community resources.
- ✚ Provide work-based learning opportunities through on-the-job training, transitional employment, customized training, career pathway development, work experience, internships, co-ops, apprenticeships, and summer jobs.

- ✚ Workshops in essential work readiness skills including communication, workplace principles, job search techniques
- ✚ Provide eligible training provider data
- ✚ Provide funding for occupational skills training in high-demand occupations
- ✚ Provide funding for support services such as occupational/training supplies, transportation, and childcare.
- ✚ Direct links to employment opportunities
- ✚ Entrepreneurship skill development
- ✚ Youth fourteen program elements

These services not only provide individual job seekers the assistance needed for new and projected job opportunities, but provide employers with highly skilled, job ready employees. The Business Service Representatives of both local areas work closely with employers to stay abreast of the workforce needs in the region. Each local area has a Business Service Team made up of agency partners and community leaders that craft training solutions for identified workforce issues. These include the following:

### **Work-Based Learning**

In alignment with the emphasis of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, much of the training facilitated by the East Region's workforce development system involves a variety of work-based learning opportunities. Often the best path to acquiring the skills a job seeker needs for a new career is a work-based learning placement (i.e., work experience, internship, apprenticeship, on-the-job training) in which they can earn while learning and prove their work ethics to their employer. This is especially true for many Eastern Kentuckians who have been displaced from their previous jobs by the region's economic downturn. Work-based learning opportunities provide businesses of all sizes to "road test" potential employees while ensuring that they get the precise and specific training that they need to benefit both the worker and the employer.

### **Post-Secondary Training**

Individuals seeking post-secondary training have a wide selection of postsecondary institutions that are located in the region, including:

- Kentucky Community & Technical College System (KCTCS) institutions, including:
  - Southeast Kentucky Community & Technical College
  - Hazard Community & Technical College
  - Big Sandy Community & Technical College
  - Ashland Community & Technical College
  - Maysville Community & Technical College
- Regional State Universities, including:
  - Morehead State University

- Eastern Kentucky University
  
- Private Colleges, including:
  - Union College
  - University of Pikeville
  - Alice Lloyd College
  - Frontier Nursing University
  - Kentucky Christian University
  - Galen College of Nursing
  - Kentucky Welding Institute

The workforce development system in the East Region works closely with these institutions as well as other training facilities that are on the Eligible Training Provider List. These post-secondary institutions offer multiple avenues to access post-secondary training. These include in-person, virtual, hybrid, customized workforce solutions programs, and have adapted locations and/or times to meet the need. Individuals seeking training in high-demand occupations can choose schools that meet their expectations and needs. These institutions offer a variety of credentialing such as industry recognized certifications, licenses, certificates, diplomas, associate degrees, bachelor degrees, master degrees, and Ph.D.

The local areas of the East Region set aside funding to support the individual's goal of obtaining an initial credential and/or move through a career pathway. Funding may also include supportive service reimbursement, career guidance, and intensive case management activities geared toward successful completion of their training goal. This provides businesses in many high-demand, high-wage occupations with a necessary skilled workforce.

### **Essential Skills**

The specific job skills employers require for current and emerging employment opportunities in the East Region vary widely by occupation. In some sectors, the path is clearly defined. For example, the healthcare sector has defined academic training programs and credentials job seekers must obtain to qualify for employment opportunities. Other occupational sectors do not have as clear of a career path and may consist of several alternate routes. However, most if not all, occupations require basic essential skills including skills in math, reading and comprehension, basic computer literacy, communication, accountability, problem solving, teamwork, reasoning, and human relations. EKCEP and TENCO recognizes the importance of a high school credential or equivalent and the importance of essential employment skills. The East Region works closely with local Adult Education and Literacy programs through direct referrals, co-enrollment, and inclusion in hiring events, business service teams, rapid response activities, and career center activities. Essential skills are provided through a variety of resources such as RESEA, local workshops, WIN program, and opportunities through partner agencies such as SOAR who offers computer literacy services.

## Direct Links to Employment

The East Region uses multiple resources to assist customers with locating employment. While each local area may be unique in the delivery, the purpose of our programs is to ensure individuals obtain self-sustaining employment and providing a skilled and prepared workforce for employers. Therefore, the East Region understands the importance of assessing a customer's goals, past, resources, strengths, and obstacles prior to developing an Individual Employment Plan. The Career Advisor/Counselor has a plethora of resources available to prepare a customer for success in obtaining and retaining employment. There are multiple ways WIOA supports the employment goal through work-based learning, business service activities, and partnerships with the Career Development Office. These connections allow staff to be aware of employer needs and make direct connections for customers.

One of the primary factors affecting workforce development services in the East Region is funding. As shown in the East Region demographics, the economy continues to struggle making it difficult for individuals and businesses to succeed. There is an increasing need for funding to ensure services are available to more East Region Kentuckians and businesses. Customers facing multiple significant barriers require more staff time and resources to be successful. As WIOA funding declines overall, it is vital that a commitment be made to support those who are most in need.

## East Region Strengths

In conclusion the East Region has many strengths as identified by community involvement and forums. There is a strong **partnership** among organizations, educational institutions, and businesses. Technical and professional **skills training** is readily available and easily accessible through multiple on-site locations and virtual opportunities. **Outreach** has significantly improved with more uniform web-based and virtual opportunities for customer accessibility to services. **Awareness** of programs such as apprenticeships, internships, and other work-based learning programs has dramatically increased participation. The **Business Service Team** regularly relays information to businesses on bonding, incentives, and WIOA services. The East Region has made a commitment to ensure WIOA staff have **quality training** and resources available to ensure high **quality customer service**. There is an awareness of the importance to **be inclusive for all groups** of people to meet business need. Therefore, WIOA programs are offered in a variety of ways to adults, dislocated workers, and youth – virtual, in-person, and off-site locations.

## East Region Obstacles

The East Region is strong in many areas, but as the demographics reflect, there are many obstacles facing the region. One of the biggest obstacles facing the region is **economic depression**. The area needs to be prepared for new business by ensuring the **infrastructure**, including **internet access**, meets business expectations. **Career awareness and exposure** through work-based learning, virtual reality devices, and mentoring are needed for all populations, but especially for youth. The East Region has the necessary workforce, but will need to resolve issues around **rural transportation issues, costs of and lack of childcare**, and **occupational skill advancement** in variety of high-demand occupations. While unemployment is high and can provide a selection of workers, there is also a significant number of individuals who are not in the workforce. East Kentucky's **labor force participation rate is 41.5%**. Many

things contribute to this rate including *low paying jobs* that prevent individuals from being self-sustaining and forcing them to continue to rely on supplemental government programs. The *Opioid crisis* continues to overshadow the East Region which often results in a lower workforce due to individuals being *incarcerated*. The “*benefit cliff*” has a significant role in individuals not seeking employment, as the government subsidies are more than the wages they’d earn if employed.

The local Workforce Development Boards ensure program services are available to individuals and businesses by providing holistic career, individualized, and training opportunities. Partnerships with multiple agencies are a priority. These partnerships allow the Workforce Development Boards to recognize and utilize the regional/local strengths and obstacles to produce independent strategic plans that support business service activity, partner services, community projects, school events, and individual customer services.

## Regional Coordination of Services

- A. (R) Describe efforts to coordinate supportive services provided through workforce investment activities in the local area including facilitating childcare, transportation, and other appropriate supportive services for customers. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(11) and 20 C.F.R. §§ 679.550-580]**

Because of the unique characteristics of the two local areas and the differences in budget and capacity identified by the analyses of the region, the local workforce development boards of the EKCEP and TENCO areas see no advantage in attempting to standardize the provision of supportive services across the region. The workforce boards have determined that each local area will be responsible for policies and procedures governing the type and level of supportive services provided to the customers in its area.

## Compliance/Performance/Administrative Cost

(Responses below should focus on the local area’s compliance with federal or state requirements.)

- A. (R) Describe the replicated cooperative agreements, as defined by WIOA 107(d)(11), in place between the local board and Workforce Investment’s Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) with respect to efforts that will enhance the provision of services to individuals with disabilities. Also, include other individuals, such as cross training of staff, technical assistance, use and sharing of information, cooperative efforts with employers, and other efforts of cooperation, collaboration, and coordination. WIOA Sec. 108(b)(14).**

The primary agreements that define and manage interactions between the East Region’s local workforce development boards (LWDBs) and the Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) with respect to collaborative efforts to enhance the provision of workforce services to individuals with disabilities are the one-stop center Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), along with their attendant Infrastructure Funding Agreements (IFAs). These signed MOUs enable and provide the matrix for enhancing such services through collaborative efforts such as cross-training of staff, technical assistance, collecting and sharing of information, and coordinated work with employers.

The regional OVR manager is an active member of both the EKCEP and TENCO workforce boards and plays an integral role in ensuring career centers are accessible and user friendly to individuals with disabilities. Representatives of OVR also provide valuable employer services through their active participation in the local business service teams.

**B. (R) Describe the establishment of the administrative cost arrangement including the pooling of funds for administrative costs, as appropriate for the region.**

The workforce development boards of the EKCEP and TENCO local workforce areas find no reason to pool funds for administrative costs. Such pooling would not provide any advantage or improvement in delivering services to meet the needs of the region’s employers or job seekers. Therefore, each local area will be responsible for the administration of their local funds, projects, and programs.

**C. (R) Describe the establishment of an agreement concerning how the planning region will collectively negotiate on and reach an agreement with the Governor on local levels of performance for, and report on, the performance accountability measures described in WIOA sec. 116(c) for local areas or the planning region.**

The local workforce development board of the EKCEP and TENCO local areas agree that there would be no advantage in collectively negotiating uniform performance levels for the East Region. Such uniform performance levels would be inappropriate because of the unique characteristics of the two local areas and their differences in budget, capacity, and priorities.

Additionally, both boards believe their position is supported by the Act, which specifically assigns to each local workforce development board and the chief elected official the responsibility to negotiate performance levels for the specific local area Sec.116 (c)(2).

We the undersigned attest that this submittal is the Regional and Local Plan for our Local Workforce Development Area (LWDA) and certify that this plan has been prepared as required, and is in accordance with the applicable Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Regional Innovation and Local Comprehensive Plan Guidance.

Local Workforce Development Board  BOARD CHAIR	Chief Local Elected Official
Name:	Name:
Title:	Title:
Signature:	Signature:
Date:	Date:



See additional page if more than one Chief Local Elected Official or Local Elected Official signature is required.

DRAFT

<b>Local Elected Official</b>	<b>Local Elected Official</b>
<b>Name:</b>	<b>Name:</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Title:</b>
<b>Signature:</b>	<b>Signature:</b>
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# WIOA Local Comprehensive Plan

**Local Workforce Development Area Name:** Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program, Inc.

**Local Workforce Board:** Eastern Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (EKWIB)

## Chapter 1: Workforce and Economic Analysis

- A. **(L) Provide an analysis of the knowledge and skills required to meet the employment needs of the employers in the local area, including employment requirements for in-demand industry sectors and occupations. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(1)(B)] and [20 CFR 679.560(a)]**

The job skills necessary to obtain the current and emerging employment opportunities in Eastern Kentucky vary widely by occupation. However, all occupations require basic skills in math, reading and comprehension, written and oral communication, problem-solving, reasoning, and human relations.

Employers also continue to ask the workforce system to help train job candidates in basic work ethics and essential skills such as attendance, punctuality, and teamwork.

Basic computer literacy remains a requirement for what continues to be an increasing percentage of jobs in today's digital economy. In this borderless economy, access to remote-work job opportunities grew exponentially with an expansion of remote work/telework opportunities related in part to the closure of "brick-and-mortar" offices resulting from 2020's COVID-19 pandemic. While restrictions on sharing workspace were largely lifted by 2022, teleworking still plays a significant role in the workforce. Knowledge-based employers are seeing increased productivity of employees and reduced physical-plant overhead costs thanks to the increasing emphasis and acceptance of teleworking. EKCEP's experience and growing employer partnerships reveal that this teleworking boom includes not only increased demand for entry-level customer service and technical support employees through EKCEP's Teleworks USA initiative, but also new, higher-skilled opportunities in other sectors, including cybersecurity, insurance claims adjusting, and others. These sectors are now more accepting of teleworking than ever before.

In some sectors, the paths to the necessary skills are clearly defined. For example, almost every job in the healthcare sector has a defined academic training program and certification that provides job seekers with the skills that qualify them for work. In other sectors, there are multiple paths that can lead to a successful career. For example, in the still-growing IT sector, defined two-year and four-year academic training programs are becoming increasingly less important to some tech-centric employers than specific skills-based certifications, internships, and other work-based learning situations that allow workers to produce actual products while demonstrating their abilities, capacity to learn, and creativity to potential employers and/or customers. Some of these high-tech internships may last nearly a year—such as programs that train computer programming/coding interns—while at the lower end of tech-based careers, unskilled job seekers still can learn enough basic computer skills and customer service skills in a four-week training to land home-based telework jobs working for remote employers.

For many Eastern Kentuckians, the best path to acquire the skills they need for a new career may be a work-based learning placement (i.e., work experience, internship, on-the-job training) in which they can earn while learning and proving their value and work ethics to their employer. EKCEP prioritizes connecting clients with diverse work-based learning opportunities, particularly work experiences and apprenticeships, recognizing their transformative potential. Work experiences offer a short-term, immersive taste of a specific industry, allowing individuals to explore career paths and develop foundational skills. Apprenticeships, on the other hand, provide structured, long-term training that combines classroom learning with on-the-job experience, leading to nationally recognized credentials. Both models offer the invaluable benefit of earning while learning, reducing financial barriers, and fostering a sense of accomplishment. EKCEP's investment in these pathways empowers individuals to build sustainable careers and contribute to the economic revitalization of Eastern Kentucky.

Recognizing the need to boost Eastern Kentucky's labor force participation rate, which has long lagged behind the national average, EKCEP recently launched its Prosper Appalachia, an innovative in-school youth program. This initiative places Career Development Specialists directly in high schools to engage with students early, providing career exploration opportunities and connecting them with local employment options—including internships and work experience placements—all before graduation. EKCEP aims to ensure that every senior in participating schools develops a comprehensive career plan, completes interest assessments to identify potential paths, and learns about the diverse range of career opportunities available within in Eastern Kentucky, empowering them to build their futures without having to leave the region. This program is a key component in achieving the Eastern Kentucky Workforce

Innovation Board's (EKWIB) strategic goal of increasing workforce participation in the EKCEP Local Workforce Development Area.

## Chapter 2: Strategic Vision and Goals

- A. **(L) Describe the local board’s strategic vision and goals aimed at fostering regional economic growth and self-sufficiency. Explain plans to prepare an educated and skilled workforce, especially for youth and individuals facing barriers to employment. As applicable, include a description of any plans to generate a new strategic vision and goals in the coming year and indicate the timeframe for such activities to occur. To the extent possible, strengthen goals relating to the performance accountability measures based on primary indicators of performance described in section 116(b)(2)(A) to support regional economic growth and economic self-sufficiency. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(1)(E)]**

The strategic vision and goals of the Eastern Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (EKWIB) are stated in its Strategic Plan, as follows:

**MISSION** — The Eastern Kentucky WIB’s mission is to “Prepare, advance, and expand the workforce of eastern Kentucky.”

**GOALS** — The Eastern Kentucky WIB’s goals are:

- More—and better—job opportunities for the citizens of our region.
  - EKCEP aims to significantly increase the percentage of program participants who secure quality, unsubsidized employment soon after completing their training. The focus is not just on job placement, but seeing those jobs translate into improved earnings and financial stability for Eastern Kentuckians.
- A better-educated and better-prepared workforce in our region.
  - Education and credential attainment are also key priorities. EKCEP is committed to increasing the number of individuals who earn recognized postsecondary credentials or high school equivalencies, opening doors to better opportunities. To ensure programs are truly effective, a strong emphasis is placed on measurable skill gains to see clear progress in skill development, setting individuals up for success in their chosen fields.
- A more diverse economy in our region.
  - EKCEP envisions a region where employers have access to a skilled and prepared workforce, where businesses thrive, and where residents have the tools they need to build fulfilling careers. To achieve this, we are actively engaging with employers, ensuring our programs align with their

needs and that our participants are well-prepared to meet the demands of the local labor market.

**VISION** — The Eastern Kentucky WIB’s Strategic Plan includes its visions for the region of Eastern Kentucky, the workforce system in Eastern Kentucky, and the role of the WIB:

- Vision for the Region of Eastern Kentucky—The WIB’s vision for the region of Eastern Kentucky includes the goals below that expand its influence with other key components of the workforce system like economic development, secondary and post-secondary education, and others—with the outcome being that the WIB will have a more tangible effect on job creation, educational and skills attainment, graduation rates, economic development and diversity, and job placement and retention. The goals associated with this vision are:
  - Employers—new, existing, and emerging—have an adequate supply of well-educated and well-trained workers.
  - Residents have the knowledge, skills, and aptitudes to work and earn incomes that make them self-sufficient.
  - The region exhibits improved college and career readiness among high school graduates
- Vision for the Region’s Workforce System—The WIB’s vision for the region’s Workforce System includes the goals below for services and programs driven by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the current federal law that guides service delivery for adults, dislocated workers, and youth. These goals also include those shared by the Workforce Innovation Board and various partner agencies in the overall, integrated workforce system, including: postsecondary education, Vocational Rehabilitation, Kentucky Adult Education, Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs, Kentucky Office of Employment and Training, Experience Works, Job Corps, YouthBuild, Kentucky Office for the Blind, and Kentucky Department for Community Based Services, as well as programs authorized under the federal Wagner-Peyser Act. The goals associated with this vision are:
  - Lifelong learning and skills development are integral parts of the workforce system. Long- standing relationships between employers and educators keep education and training opportunities one step ahead of the needs of the market.

- The system partners with those industries and businesses that drive the regional economy. It also works with chambers of commerce and economic development entities throughout the region to identify and support emerging industries vital to the region's continued growth and diversification.
- Strong commitments to innovation, productivity, accountability, and results keep the system flexible and responsive to employers' and residents' ever-changing workforce needs.
- Vision for the EKCEP Workforce Innovation Board—The WIB's vision for the role of the WIB includes the goals below that set the course for continued innovation in service delivery and the leveraging of additional funding to create new revenue streams that shape and guide organized activity outside the scope of WIOA. The goals associated with this vision are:
  - The EKCEP WIB will continue to explore ways to influence economic development and provide citizens' access to more and better jobs through the use of innovation and telework programs.
  - EKCEP will continue to identify and pursue new revenue streams and leverage funding to diversify the employment base and expand activity outside the scope of WIA.
  - The EKCEP WIB will set the regional workforce agenda. It will be widely recognized for its excellence as a leader and governing board, and for its commitment to making a difference.

**CORE VALUES** — In addition to defining its mission, goals, and visions, the Eastern Kentucky WIB's Strategic Plan also identifies five core values that the WIB believes must be embraced and practiced in order for it to succeed in its mission and attain its visions and goals. These core values are:

- Innovation — We believe we must remain creative and embrace emerging technologies and opportunities in order to not only strengthen economic development now, but also anticipate and plan for future growth and expansion.
- Diversity — We believe that if Eastern Kentucky is to grow to new levels, sustain our citizens, and support both new and existing business, we must pursue economic diversification.
- Collaboration — We believe we must seek, build, and nurture collaborative partnerships that will leverage the workforce system with other service providers

to bring about more success for jobseekers and employers than we can accomplish alone.

- Vision — We believe that to positively change the economic landscape of our region, it will take a unified strategic effort and focused planning powered by a strong vision that guides the collective actions of education, economic development, and workforce partners.
- Adaptability — We believe that we must remain nimble and flexible in creating and delivering relevant workforce and employer services that have the most impact on jobseekers and employers and economic development throughout the region.

EKCEP is committed to evolving its strategic direction and will initiate a comprehensive review and revitalization of its strategic plan, including vision and goals, within the coming year. This process will ensure our programs and initiatives remain aligned with the dynamic needs of our community.

**B. (L) Describe how the local board's vision and goals are intricately aligned with the Commonwealth's goals, initiatives, and priorities as outlined in the WIOA State Plan. This alignment is crucial in ensuring the success of the collective efforts.**

The Eastern Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board's (EKWIB) vision and goals are intricately aligned with the Commonwealth's goals, initiatives, and priorities as outlined in the WIOA State Plan. The state's workforce development vision is rooted in Kentucky's Workforce Strategic Plan, which aims to create a workforce development system that is value-driven for employers, aligns education with industry demands, prepares Kentuckians for the future of work, and drives economic development.

The EKWIB's mission to "prepare, advance, and expand the workforce of Eastern Kentucky" directly supports the state's vision. The board's goals of creating more and better job opportunities, improving the education and preparedness of the workforce, and diversifying the economy are also in direct alignment with the state's Strategic Goal #1 for employers (Actively engage employers to drive Kentucky's workforce development system), Strategic Goal #2 for education attainment (Align and integrate P-12, adult education and postsecondary education to provide lifelong opportunities for Kentuckians that prepare them for the rapidly shifting realities of work in the future), and Strategic Goal #3 for workforce participation (Increase Kentucky's workforce participation by creating opportunities, incenting workforce participation, and removing employment barriers for Kentuckians).



STRATEGIC GOAL #1: Employers — Several EKCEP initiatives and projects are designed to encourage “employers (large and small) to assume leadership roles in workforce development programming.” EKCEP concurs with the KWIB that employer engagement “is a key component to connecting dislocated workers, adult customers, and youth to the workforce.” A few of the EKCEP activities that reflect this vision include:

- Registered Apprenticeships — EKCEP is focusing on collaborating with employers to develop apprenticeship opportunities that offer a dual benefit: reducing costs associated with employee preparedness and training, while simultaneously satisfying their hiring needs. This focus aligns with the state's goal of promoting apprenticeships as pathways to high-paying careers and assisting employers in attracting and retaining skilled workers. The development of a pipeline of skilled workers through apprenticeships is helping to ensure that Eastern Kentucky has a trained and capable workforce ready to meet the demands of the local economy. As of the first quarter of 2025, EKCEP has 25 registered apprenticeship projects either ongoing or in the planning stages, and will continue to prioritize these initiatives moving forward.
- Employer Retention Services — EKCEP's Employer Retention Services (ERS) is another way the agency is helping to meet the strategic goal of employer engagement. The ERS program began in 2024 and provides a trained staff person to work directly with a company's existing workforce to help them overcome barriers that might prevent them from maintaining employment. By addressing these barriers, EKCEP is helping to ensure that employees have the support they need to stay in their jobs. This program is designed to directly assist employers in retaining a skilled workforce and reducing attrition and staff turnover.
- Teleworks USA — EKCEP's Teleworks USA initiative is wholly driven by the concept of assisting job seekers with connecting with remote-work employers to meet their hiring needs. As a result, Teleworks USA is able to recruit, prepare, and place Eastern Kentucky workers in home-based online jobs that include benefits, vacations, opportunities for advancement, etc. Teleworks USA has obviously not only established but sustained a clear channel for employer engagement in workforce development services.

Additionally, over the past two years, EKCEP has also significantly enhanced its business services model to strengthen its responsiveness to the Eastern Kentucky business community. This has been achieved by employing two dedicated business services coordinators within EKCEP staff to provide technical expertise and support and placing a business services consultant within each of its nine direct service delivery contractors. This structure ensures consistent and accessible services across all 23 counties within its

service area. The increased on-the-ground presence of business services professionals allows for a deeper understanding of local business needs, enabling the workforce system to provide more tailored and effective support. This localized approach fosters stronger relationships with employers, resulting in a more agile and attentive workforce system that directly addresses the unique challenges and opportunities present in Eastern Kentucky.

**STRATEGIC GOAL #2: Education Attainment** — EKCEP’s Prosper Appalachia In-School Youth initiative aligns strongly with the KWIB’s Objective 2a and 2c to “Increase career exploration opportunities while students are in P-12” and “Increase awareness of all market-relevant career pathways among students, educators, guidance counselors, career counselors and parents,” respectively.

EKCEP launched Prosper Appalachia’s In-School Youth component in the summer of 2024. This initiative places Career Development Specialists directly in high schools to engage with students early, providing career exploration opportunities and connecting them with local employment options—including internships and work experience placements—all before graduation. EKCEP aims to ensure that every senior in participating schools develops a comprehensive career plan, completes interest assessments to identify potential paths, and learns about the diverse range of career opportunities available within in Eastern Kentucky, empowering them to build their futures without having to leave the region.

**STRATEGIC GOAL #3: Workforce Participation** — Several EKCEP initiatives and programs are closely aligned with the KWIB’s Strategic Goal 3 — Workforce Participation: “Increase Kentucky’s workforce participation by creating opportunities, incenting workforce participation, and removing employment barriers for Kentuckians.” As the local workforce area with the lowest workforce participation rate in the state, EKCEP has long been focused on efforts to increase workforce participation. A few of the EKCEP initiatives and programs that align with this KWIB goal are:

- **SITE (Strategic Initiative for Transformational Employment)** — EKCEP administers and delivers the SITE (Strategic Initiative for Transformational Employment) program, which helps bridge the gulf between recovery and productive participation in the workforce for individuals in recovery by providing them with valuable career and supportive services, and by cultivating and supporting second-chance employment opportunities. SITE helps Kentucky businesses learn to provide a supportive environment for newly employed individuals in recovery, thus increasing the opportunities for work-based training and apprenticeships, while simultaneously partnering with addiction treatment providers to identify and recruit recovering individuals who are appropriate for those opportunities. Those targeted to be served and placed in employment by SITE have completed or are in the latter

stages of a reputable treatment program which provides aftercare that includes ongoing counseling, accountability, and support. This work aligns with the KWIB's Objective 3e, "Develop and Pursue strategies that increase the number of Kentuckians, work-ready and free from the influence of substance abuse," Objective 3d, "Develop and promote strategies for employers to address employment barriers," and Objective 3a, "Strengthen collaboration across workforce development, social services, employers and non-profits to address barriers to employment for individuals." SITE is funded by the Kentucky Overdose Response Effort (KORE) through the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services and with funding from the Kentucky Justice and Public Safety Cabinet's Office of Drug Control Policy (ODCP). This funding from two cabinets, along with EKCEP's administrative involvement, align with the KWIB's Objective 3c, "Embed programs serving specific populations across cabinets to promote workforce participation."

- **Prosper Appalachia** — EKCEP's Prosper Appalachia In-School Youth Program is funded by a first-time allocation of funds directly approved by the Kentucky General Assembly to improve workforce programming for youth in the Commonwealth. EKCEP developed Prosper Appalachia's In-School Youth component to directly address labor force participation within its 23-county service area. This initiative places Career Development Specialists directly in high schools to engage with students early, providing career exploration opportunities and connecting them with local employment options—including internships and work experience placements—all before graduation. EKCEP aims to ensure that every senior in participating schools develops a comprehensive career plan, completes interest assessments to identify potential paths, and learns about the diverse range of career opportunities available within Eastern Kentucky, empowering them to build their futures without having to leave the region.

This program is a key component in achieving the Eastern Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board's (EKWIB) strategic goal of increasing workforce participation in the EKCEP Local Workforce Development Area. It also aligns with the KWIB's Objective 3c, "Embed programs serving specific populations across cabinets to promote workforce participation."

- C. **(L) Describe how the local board's vision and goals are considered and provide an analysis of the strategies for working with the required partners and other entities to carry out the core programs and align resources.**

The vision and goals of the Eastern Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (EKWIB) were established through an inclusive strategic planning process that involved a wide array of stakeholders within the EKCEP region. EKCEP's process was designed to create a strategic plan that defined not only the ways EKCEP spends the dollars it controls in the region but also the ways its actions and programs reflect priorities shared with its partner organizations and, therefore, influence the ways they spend their allocations within the region.

To develop a consensus on regional vision and plan, EKCEP polled its partners and regional stakeholders in workforce development, secondary education, postsecondary education, government, community action, and business to determine their priorities and strategic objectives, and to quiz them on their vision for the role and most important functions of the workforce system and the WIB.

The resulting strategic plan is simple and very focused, clearly stating four primary results-based goals, as well as defining EKCEP's core values, mission, and vision for that region, the workforce system, and the WIB. Because it is a strategic document, the plan does not include tactics to accomplish goals or specific methods of measurement. However, the plan does reference these details as they appear in separate background support documents that clearly illustrate how the highlighted goals will be tracked and measured. It also includes a version of a "report card" showing how the region and work of the workforce system rate when compared to other comparable regions and sectors (for example, areas such as the Lake Cumberland LWIA and other states like West Virginia) in order to come up with a baseline against which to compare EKCEP's regional success.

The completed plan was shared with EKCEP's partners, and further comments were allowed. The plan was then adopted by the WIB.

EKCEP is committed to evolving its strategic direction and will initiate a comprehensive review and revitalization of its strategic plan, including vision and goals, within the coming year. This process will ensure our programs and initiatives remain aligned with the dynamic needs of our community.

Furthermore, EKCEP's deep involvement with the Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR) initiative and its strengthened relationships with other economic development entities like Kentucky Highlands Investment Corp. and One East Kentucky underscore its commitment to a unified regional vision for economic transition. By using this strategic plan as a guiding document, the EKWIB ensures that the collective input and shared vision of its diverse partners, including those in economic development, are

incorporated into the expenditures and guidance of the workforce development system, ultimately contributing to the building of a new economy for Eastern Kentucky.

## Chapter 3: Alignment of Local Area Partnerships and Investment Strategies

- A. **(L) Describe the local board’s strategy to work with the entities that carry out the core programs and other workforce development programs to support alignment and provide services, including programs of study authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq.), that support the strategy identified in the State plan under section 102(b)(1)(E); H. R. 803—442.1. This discussion should include a descriptive overview of the local workforce development system, including key stakeholders and entities associated with administrative and programmatic/service delivery functions. Examples include elected officials, advocacy groups, local workforce development board and committee structure, fiscal agent, operator(s), required program partners, and major contractors providing Adult/Dislocated Worker and Youth program elements. Describe respective roles and functional relationships to one another.**

*Note: WIOA identified six core programs: Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, Adult Education and Literacy, Wagner-Peyser Programs, and Vocational Rehabilitation. The elected partner plan programs are Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers, Jobs for Veterans State Grants, and Unemployment Insurance.*

The strategic vision for the Eastern Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (EKWIB) to achieve its mission (outlined in 2.A, above) emphasizes working closely with the required and optional partner agencies to align resources in order to carry out the core programs and meet the regional goals as efficiently as possible.

In Eastern Kentucky, the workforce system partners include:

- WIOA Title I programs for Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth — Operated by EKCEP’s nine contractor service providers (Bell-Whitley CAA, Big Sandy Area CAP, Daniel Boone CAA, Gateway CAA, Harlan County CAA, Knox County EOC CAP, LKLP CAC, Middle Kentucky CAP, Northeast Kentucky CAA).
- Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act - Career and Technical Education and Postsecondary Vocational Education — Provided through KCTCS and other postsecondary education institutions.
- Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
- Title II Adult Education — Skills U (Kentucky Adult Education).
- Veteran’s Workforce Programs — Kentucky Career Development Office.

- Unemployment Insurance — Kentucky Labor Cabinet.
- Wagner-Peyser Act — Kentucky Career Development Office.
- Title V - Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP).
- Job Corps.
- KTAP, TANF and SNAP — Kentucky Department for Community Based Services.
- CSBG Employment and Training — LKLP CAC.

In its solicitation for entities to perform the services of One-Stop Operator throughout Eastern Kentucky's workforce development network, the EKWIB tasked the selected operators with:

- Coordinating the delivery of services of participating one-stop partners and service providers in the county or counties that the One-Stop Operator serves.
- Fostering a culture of collaboration and excellent customer service among one-stop partners that promotes delivery of the innovative, high quality workforce development services to all customers of the workforce development system.
- Convening and leading regularly scheduled meetings of the one-stop partners to build the collaborative culture, improve service delivery, and evaluate progress toward shared goals.
- Serving as a resource for staff of all partner agencies in regard to the objectives, processes, requirements, and regulations of WIOA and the workforce services delivery system.

The administrative structure for the key stakeholders associated with the partners in Eastern Kentucky's workforce development system are listed below:

### **Administrative Structure**

#### **State Workforce Agency**

**Entity Name:** Kentucky Education & Labor Cabinet, Department for Workforce Development

**Address:** 500 Mero Street, Frankfort, KY 40621

**Contact Person:** Michael Yoder, Interim Commissioner, [michael.yoder@ky.gov](mailto:michael.yoder@ky.gov)

#### **Administrative Entity**

**Entity Name:** Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program (EKCEP) LWDB & LWIA

**Address:** 100 Airport Gardens Road, Suite 300, Hazard, KY 41701

**Contact Persons:**

Rebecca Carnes-Miller, Executive Director, [bmiller@ekcep.org](mailto:bmiller@ekcep.org)

Bridget Back, Deputy Director, [bback@ekcep.org](mailto:bback@ekcep.org)

**Fiscal Agent**

**Entity Name:** Eastern Kentucky CEP (EKCEP) LWDB & LWIA

**Address:** 100 Airport Gardens Road, Suite 300, Hazard, KY 41701

**Contact Persons:**

Rebecca Carnes-Miller, Executive Director, [bmiller@ekcep.org](mailto:bmiller@ekcep.org)

Tonya Collins, Director of Accounting, [tcollins@ekcep.org](mailto:tcollins@ekcep.org)

**Chief Elected Official**

Eastern Kentucky C.E.P., Inc. Board of Directors

**Contact Person:**

Gilbert Holland, Chairperson, [gilbertholland@gmail.com](mailto:gilbertholland@gmail.com)

Address: 411 Knox St. Barbourville, KY 40906

**Workforce Development Board**

Eastern Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (EKWIB)

**Contact Person:**

Keith Gabbard, Chairperson, [keith.gabbard@prtc.org](mailto:keith.gabbard@prtc.org)

**One-Stop Operator, Comprehensive Kentucky Career Center, Hazard (as procured by the EKWIB)**

**Entity Name:** LKLP Community Action Council

**Address:** 398 Roy Campbell Drive, Hazard, KY 41701

**Contact Persons:**

- Tawny Acker, Executive Director, [t.acker@lklp.net](mailto:t.acker@lklp.net)
- Abbie Little, KCC Manager, [a.little@lklp.net](mailto:a.little@lklp.net)
- Allison Brown, WIOA Director, [a.brown@lklp.net](mailto:a.brown@lklp.net)

**Counties Served:** Leslie, Knott, Letcher, Perry

**One-Stop Operators, KCC Network (as procured by the EKWIB)**

**Entity Name and Address:**

Bell-Whitley Community Action Agency

P.O. Box 159, Pineville, KY 40977

**Phone:** 606-337-3044

**Contact Person:**

Craig Brock, Executive Director, [craigbrock@bell-whitley.org](mailto:craigbrock@bell-whitley.org)

**Counties Served:** Bell

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**Entity Name and Address:**

Big Sandy Area Community Action Program

230 Court Street

Paintsville, KY 41240

**Phone:** 606-789-3641

**Contact Person:** Wanda Thacker, Executive Director, [wthacker@bsacap.org](mailto:wthacker@bsacap.org)

**Counties Served:** Floyd, Johnson, Magoffin, Martin, Pike

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**Entity Name and Address:**

Daniel Boone Community Action Agency



1535 Shamrock Road  
Manchester, KY 40962

**Phone:** 606-598-4330

**Contact Person:**

Robin Whitaker, Executive Director, [robin.whitaker@danielboonecaa.org](mailto:robin.whitaker@danielboonecaa.org)

**Counties Served:** Clay, Jackson

\*\*\*\*\*

**Entity Name and Address:**

Gateway Community Action Agency

151 University Dr.

P.O. Box 367

West Liberty, KY 41472

**Phone:** 606-743-3133

**Contact Person:** Martina Roe, Executive Director, [martina.roe@gatewaycaa.org](mailto:martina.roe@gatewaycaa.org)

**Counties Served:** Menifee, Morgan

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**Entity Name and Address:**

Harlan County Community Action Agency

319 Camden St.

P.O. Box 1556,

Harlan, KY 40831

**Phone:** 606-573-5335

**Contact Person:** Donna Pace, Executive Director, [dpace@harlancountycaa.com](mailto:dpace@harlancountycaa.com)

**Counties Served:** Harlan

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**Entity Name and Address:**

KCEOC Community Action Partnership

P.O. Box 490

Barbourville, KY 40906

**Phone:** 606-546-3152

**Contact Person:** Paul Dole, President and CEO, [pdole@kceoc.com](mailto:pdole@kceoc.com)

**Counties Served:** Knox

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**Entity Name and Address:**

Middle Kentucky Community Action Partnership

1137 Main St.

Suite 107

Jackson, KY 41339

**Phone:** 606-666-5902

**Contact Person:** Beth Spencer, Executive Director, [middlekyed@mkcap.org](mailto:middlekyed@mkcap.org)

**Counties Served:** Breathitt, Lee, Owsley, Wolfe

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**Entity Name and Address:**

Northeast Kentucky Community Action Agency

21039 West US 60

Olive Hill, KY 41164

**Phone:** 606-286-4443

**Contact Person:** Victoria Greene, Executive Director, [victoria.greene@nkcaa.net](mailto:victoria.greene@nkcaa.net)

**Counties Served:** Carter, Elliott, Lawrence

- B. (L) Describe how the LWDB, working with the entities carrying out core programs, will expand access to employment, training, education, and supportive services for eligible individuals, particularly eligible individuals with barriers to employment. Include how the local board will facilitate the development of career pathways and

**co-enrollment, as appropriate, in core programs, and improve access to activities that lead to a recognized postsecondary credential. This includes a credential that is an industry-recognized certificate or certification and is portable and stackable. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(3)]**

The Eastern Kentucky WIB has worked to expand access to employment, training, and supportive services to eligible Eastern Kentuckians by expanding the amounts and types of workforce funding it brings into the region. Over the past few years the EKWIB has risen to the challenge presented by the rising numbers of dislocated and underemployed workers in the region who need workforce services by pursuing and administering resources beyond WIOA formula funds with which to serve them.

The additional funds that the EKWIB has brought into the region include:

- **Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) POWER (Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization) Grant** – This \$2,000,000 grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission supports EKCEP’s “Career Pathfinder Network,” an In-School Youth workforce program that exists as part of EKCEP’s Prosper Appalachia initiative. The Career Pathfinder Network places in-school career specialists directly within five high schools in Clay, Knox, Letcher, and Owsley counties to deliver career exploration services and prepare high school seniors for career paths within their native Eastern Kentucky.
- **Putting Young Kentuckians First** – EKCEP was one of several LWDA’s in Kentucky to receive a special allocation of funding from the Kentucky General Assembly to provide workforce services to Kentucky’s youth as part of the Putting Young Kentuckians First program. EKCEP’s allocation of \$7,266,666 is funding its Prosper Appalachia In-School Youth initiative. This initiative places Career Development Specialists directly in high schools to engage with students early, providing career exploration opportunities and connecting them with local employment options—including internships and work experience placements—all before graduation. EKCEP aims to ensure that every senior in participating schools develops a comprehensive career plan, completes interest assessments to identify potential paths, and learns about the diverse range of career opportunities available within Eastern Kentucky, empowering them to build their futures without having to leave the region.
- **Kentucky Opioid Abatement Grant** – This grant totaling \$450,000 from the Kentucky Opioid Abatement Advisory Commission funds EKCEP’s Project REACH (Recovery Employment and Career Help), which provides career and

supportive services for people in recovery from Opioid Use Disorder in Breathitt, Knott, Lee, Leslie, Letcher, Owsley, Perry, and Wolfe counties.

- **Kentucky Overdose Response Effort (KORE) Funding** – This fund stream of \$3,881,262 (to date, with possible renewals) has been provided by the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services to support EKCEP’s administration and delivery of the statewide SITE (Strategic Initiative for Transformational Employment) program, which helps bridge the gulf between recovery and productive participation in the workforce for individuals in recovery by providing them with valuable career and supportive services, and by cultivating and supporting second-chance employment opportunities. SITE helps Kentucky businesses learn to provide a supportive environment for newly employed individuals in recovery, thus increasing the opportunities for work-based training and apprenticeships, while simultaneously partnering with addiction treatment providers to identify and recruit recovering individuals who are appropriate for those opportunities. Those targeted to be served and placed in employment by SITE have completed or are in the latter stages of a reputable treatment program which provides aftercare that includes ongoing counseling, accountability, and support.
- **Kentucky Justice and Public Safety Cabinet Funding** – This fund stream of \$6,630,942 (to date, with possible renewals) has been provided by the Kentucky Justice and Public Safety Cabinet’s Office of Drug Control Policy (ODCP) to support EKCEP’s administration and delivery of the statewide SITE (Strategic Initiative for Transformational Employment) program, which helps bridge the gulf between recovery and productive participation in the workforce for individuals in recovery by providing them with valuable career and supportive services, and by cultivating and supporting second-chance employment opportunities. SITE helps Kentucky businesses learn to provide a supportive environment for newly employed individuals in recovery, thus increasing the opportunities for work-based training and apprenticeships, while simultaneously partnering with addiction treatment providers to identify and recruit recovering individuals who are appropriate for those opportunities. Those targeted to be served and placed in employment by SITE have completed or are in the latter stages of a reputable treatment program which provides aftercare that includes ongoing counseling, accountability, and support.

NOTE: The fund totals listed here are for the entire terms of these grants; the total funds listed may not be available for the 2025-26 Program Year. (In some cases, the totals listed above include money already spent during previous years of those grants.)

These additional funds make workforce services accessible to hundreds more individuals than could be served by formula funds alone. The EKWIB will continue to pursue additional funding sources to expand access to employment, training, and supportive services to eligible Eastern Kentuckians.

**C. (L) Identify and describe (for each category below) the strategies and services that will be used to:**

**1. Meet the needs and facilitate the engagement of employers, including small employers and employers in in-demand industry sectors and occupations, in workforce development programs and targeted sector strategies.**

Per WIOA mandate, one role of the Eastern Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (EKWIB) is to engage the area's business community in order to learn its needs and develop innovative partnerships and strategies to meet those needs. To carry out that responsibility, EKCEP's staff Business Services Coordinators, along with EKCEP's contractor partners' staff Business Services Consultants, consistently reach out and market the services of the workforce development system to the region's businesses directly. Staff also attend meetings of chambers of commerce, trade and industry associations, and other business-oriented activities, where they engage business owners and managers in conversations about business needs and how the workforce development system might address those needs. Job fairs provide additional opportunities for EKCEP's representatives to network with businesses. EKCEP and contractors are in constant communication with businesses inside and outside of the EKCEP region. These business engagements lead to the development of strategies to meet identified business needs. These resulting strategies are communicated to training providers to ensure that training programs are employer-driven.

Additionally, EKCEP completes assessments with individual employers that describe the employer's workforce needs and outlines the services available to help satisfy staffing requirements. This targeted approach allows EKCEP to proactively address specific skill gaps within the local workforce, ensuring businesses have access to the talent they need to thrive. For employers, these assessments provide a clear roadmap to navigate available resources, streamlining the hiring process and fostering long-term growth.

This business- and industry-focused program structure also requires EKCEP's front-line staff to work with the region's community colleges and other training providers

to ensure that their curricula and the number and competency of their graduates satisfy the employer's requirements as identified in the agreement. As a component of this strategy, EKCEP's front-line and contracted workforce staff across the region work with the community colleges and other training providers to identify the barriers that keep students from completing training and work with community and workforce system partners in a "collaborative impact case management" approach to remove those barriers. The agreements spell out as specifically as possible the roles of community and workforce system partners in achieving business and industry objectives.

**2. Support a local workforce development system that meets the needs of businesses in the local area.**

Complying with the WIOA mandate for local workforce development boards to lead efforts to engage a diverse array of employers, EKCEP and contracted staff will continue to meet business leaders and owners face-to-face to discover and discuss their current and future workforce needs and develop and deliver timely solutions. EKCEP's Business Engagement and Services Team will also continue to serve as the convener and coordinator for quarterly, collaborative meetings with a larger group of partners and professionals consisting of business-services-targeted state staff, employers, workforce staff from system partners, education and training providers, and other stakeholders — all of whom are in constant communication with businesses inside and outside of the EKCEP region. Information from these business communications is discussed at the group's meetings, where joint strategies are developed to meet identified business needs.

Businesses will be invited to these group meetings periodically to allow them to provide feedback and suggestions for improving our services. EKCEP will use this information to develop workshops around the needs of businesses and to improve service delivery.

**3. Better coordinate workforce development programs with economic development partners and programs.**

Relationships between EKCEP and economic development entities (e.g., Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR), Kentucky Highlands Investment Corp., Mountain Association, One East Kentucky, Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky, and others) have been deepened and expanded as they have worked in partnership to identify and address the area's needs and opportunities. EKCEP leadership will continue to be available to work with any economic development entity that serves Eastern

Kentucky to help build the new economy that will begin to fill the gap left by the decline of the coal industry.

**4. Strengthen linkages between the one-stop delivery system and unemployment insurance programs.**

In recent years, Kentucky's approach to unemployment insurance (UI) claim management saw a move towards online applications and centralized, marginally staffed call centers. While intended to streamline processes, this shift created challenges for frontline staff within WIOA and other Kentucky Career Center partner programs in effectively interacting with the UI system and personnel. The surge in UI applications during the COVID-19 pandemic further strained this automated system, underscoring the critical need for accessible, in-person UI assistance. Recognizing this, a subsequent decision was made to reintegrate face-to-face UI services within the Kentucky Career Centers statewide, a move that has helped to physically reconnect UI and partner programs within the one-stop delivery system.

However, while the co-location of services offers opportunities for better customer orientation and program awareness, a key area for further strengthening the linkage between the one-stop system and UI programs remains the need for enhanced data access. As experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic when temporary access was granted, providing WIOA and partner staff with appropriate access to the UI database system would be crucial for effective service delivery, case management, and a truly integrated approach to assisting job seekers. Addressing this limitation would significantly improve the ability of the one-stop partners to provide comprehensive and coordinated support to individuals navigating both unemployment and re-employment services.

**5. Increase competitive, integrated employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Include the implementation of incumbent worker training programs, on-the-job training programs, work-based learning programs, apprenticeship models, customized training programs, industry and sector strategies, career pathway initiatives, or use of effective business intermediaries and other business services and strategies that support the local board's strategy. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(4)(A) and (B)].**

In addition to the routine collaborations on client services that WIOA staff and other one-stop partner staff have with the staff of Office for Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) in Eastern Kentucky's career centers, EKCEP is currently considering ways in which EKCEP's Teleworks USA initiative can be used to increase the job

opportunities available for individuals with disabilities throughout Kentucky. Teleworks USA links job seekers to employers worldwide who hire home-based workers. These Internet-based work-from-home jobs—primarily in customer service but now expanding into other fields such as cybersecurity—bring outside wages into the region, boosting local economies and broadening employment opportunities for the region’s workforce. During the past six years, ongoing improvements in both the Teleworks USA workshops and the staff’s relationships with employers have brought significant success to the initiative. EKCEP believes that home-based jobs transacted over the internet could be a great benefit to disabled individuals with mobility issues or other challenges that would make performing in-person jobs in an office or retail location difficult.

**D. (L) Describe local and regional efforts to support and/or promote entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services in coordination with economic development and other partners. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(5)]**

In support of emerging and existing entrepreneurs, EKCEP actively engages in collaborative activities with a range of economic development entities across the region. This includes EKCEP’s continued partnership with Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR). EKCEP also works closely with organizations such as One East Kentucky, Southeast Kentucky Economic Development Corporation, Harlan County Economic Development Authority, Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation, and others dedicated to fostering economic growth in Appalachian Kentucky. These collaborations facilitate a comprehensive approach to supporting entrepreneurship.

These diverse partnerships are essential for fostering a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem within the region because each entity contributes unique and complementary strengths. Economic development organizations like One East Kentucky and the Southeast Kentucky Economic Development Corporation possess a deep understanding of the local market landscape, key industry sectors, and available resources, ensuring that entrepreneurial support is strategically aligned with regional growth priorities. SOAR's focus on innovation and regional collaboration helps to cultivate a culture of forward-thinking business development. Organizations such as the Harlan County Economic Development Authority provide crucial local-level expertise and connections within specific communities. Furthermore, the Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation offers vital access to capital and financial guidance, often a critical need for emerging and expanding businesses in our area. By working together, EKCEP and these partners create a comprehensive and interconnected network of support, providing entrepreneurs within the local area with the knowledge, resources, mentorship, and financial tools necessary to launch, sustain, and grow



successful ventures, ultimately contributing to job creation and economic diversification within the local Appalachian communities.

**E. (L) Describe the type and availability of youth workforce activities, including activities for youth with disabilities. Identify successful models and best practices for youth workforce activities relevant to the local area. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(9)]**

EKCEP's WIOA Youth Program—called “Prosper Appalachia”—is designed as a robustly structured community-based program that addresses essential life skills and work skills, training, career coaching, and support services for youth between the ages of 16-24. The program delivers services that are relevant to the employment and training needs of these youth, using structured curricula in a progression that leads each youth to obtain an industry-recognized credential and/or unsubsidized employment as a part of a career path that leads toward a high-wage, high-demand occupation.

EKCEP's youth service model focuses on Eastern Kentuckians who are at risk of long-term unemployment or under-employment, emphasizing career advising and transition into employment. Although EKCEP's youth programs ensure that eligible youth have opportunities to develop and achieve career goals through education and workforce training, they also emphasize shorter-term training assistance and more direct paths to employment, especially for out-of-school youth.

**Providing Youth Services** — EKCEP provides youth services through contractors who hire youth staff and deliver services in their local areas. Staff work closely with community partners and employers to implement EKCEP's policies and develop strategies for youth services that:

- Effectively connect eligible youth to available services, either in person or virtually.
- Provide a thorough review of the occupational and workforce service needs of each youth.
- Provide an individualized service strategy for each youth that includes appropriate career goals and plans for overcoming barriers.
- Integrate WIOA services with other appropriate community services provided by partners, including social service agencies, adult education, vocational rehabilitation services, residential treatment providers, medical and behavioral health care agencies, the criminal justice system, and other entities that provide the program elements and services to assist clients to lead happy, healthy, and successful lives.
- Prepare youth to meet employers' needs.

EKCEP's youth WIOA program is based upon developing a collaborative partnership with each youth being served that respects and values that youth's potential. These collaborative partnerships are based on recognizing that the youth and program staff are jointly responsible for working together to solve problems and act courageously to create a pathway to self-sustainability and meaning. Based upon individual needs, these 14 service elements are available to EKCEP's youth clients:

- Tutoring, study skills training, and instruction leading to secondary school completion, including dropout prevention strategies;
- Alternative secondary school offerings or dropout recovery services, as appropriate;
- Paid and unpaid work experiences that include a component of academic and occupational education, including:
  - Summer employment opportunities and other employment opportunities throughout the year;
  - Pre-apprenticeship programs;
  - Internships and job shadowing;
  - On-the-job training.
- Occupational skill training, which may include training programs that lead to postsecondary credentials or are linked to in-demand sectors;
- Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster;
- Leadership development opportunities, which may include community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility and other positive social behaviors;
- Supportive services;
- Adult mentoring for the period of participation and subsequently, for a total a duration of at least 12 months;
- Follow-up services for not less than 12 months after completion, as appropriate;
- Comprehensive guidance and counseling, including drug and alcohol abuse counseling, as well as referrals to counseling, as appropriate to the needs of the individual youth;
- Financial literacy education;
- Entrepreneurial skills training;
- Services that provide labor market and employment information about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in the local area, such as career awareness, career counseling, and career exploration services; and

- Activities that help youth prepare for and transition to postsecondary education and training.

**Out-of-School Youth Services** — Because of limited funding and the requirement under WIOA that 75% of Youth funds be spent on Out-of-School Youth, for WIOA services specifically, EKCEP primarily targets Out-of-School Youth ages 18 to 24—the portion of the eligible population that is most critically in need of rapid assistance to enter employment. The program is expected to spend 75% of its budget on serving Out-of-School Youth.

Youth services focus on the uniqueness of individualized youths' needs to overcome their barriers to entering and succeeding in the workforce. It is not uncommon for a participating youth to be eligible for services based on more than one barrier; some are even eligible based on all the barriers. The program is designed to identify the complex challenges to entering and succeeding in the workforce or education faced by these youth, provide assistance and guidance to overcome these barriers, and make it possible for these youth to re-engage and succeed.

Work experience opportunities are featured prominently for Out-of-School Youth. Work experience placements introduce and acclimate participants to the world of work and the out-of-school component of Prosper Appalachia is designed to give multiple opportunities in more than one specific career field if necessary in order to find a good fit with the right employer, who may be hiring soon. Although it does not exclude other options, EKCEP's Out-of-School Youth program emphasizes real local employment opportunities and the short-term skills development that will qualify clients to take advantage of those opportunities.

**In-School Youth Services** —EKCEP's in-school youth services are funded by a blend of WIOA funding and a dedicated allocation from the Kentucky General Assembly outside of WIOA. They are designed to provide high school students with career exploration opportunities and connect them with local employment options. This initiative places Career Development Specialists directly in high schools to engage with students early, helping them develop comprehensive career plans, explore potential career paths through interest assessments, and learn about the diverse range of opportunities available in Eastern Kentucky. The goal is to empower students to build their futures in the region without having to relocate, ensuring that every high school senior is prepared for the workforce or post-secondary education.

**F. (L) Describe how the LWDB coordinates education and workforce investment activities with relevant secondary and postsecondary education programs and activities to coordinate strategies, enhance services, and avoid duplication of services. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(10)]**

The staff of the Eastern Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (EKWIB) coordinates education and workforce activities with Area Technology Centers, Kentucky Community & Technical College System (KCTCS) institutions, and other postsecondary education providers in the region. Coordination with educational agencies may include: regular meetings for improved communication and development of strategies and goals; joint planning and implementation of professional development/training; collaborative work on important initiatives such as Work Ready Communities; joint planning of and participation in career fairs and job fairs; sharing labor market information and employer feedback about high demand training leading directly to jobs in order to improve training offerings in the region; and partnering on customized training projects to meet the needs of key employers in the region.

EKCEP has also included the employer services representatives of area postsecondary institutions on the Business and Employer Services Team that EKCEP convened and facilitates to serve the region. In addition to the business services representatives of EKCEP and area postsecondary institutions, these teams consist of employer and business services representatives from other workforce system partners, training providers, and other stakeholders. These representatives are in constant communication with businesses inside and outside of the EKCEP region to determine employers' needs. The sharing of information through these teams' bi-monthly meetings reduces redundant efforts to serve employers, and the joint strategies developed by these teams ensure that the resources of all members are brought to bear to meet identified business needs.

As the number of successfully completed projects have increased and important outcomes have been achieved in Eastern Kentucky as the result of these partnerships, staff and leadership with education and workforce agencies have become more and more committed to working together to achieve common goals and shared visions. This continuous collaboration enhances service delivery for customers and clients and avoids duplication of services through enhanced communication and partnership.

**G. (L) Describe strategies to implement the operational goals of the local one-stop system, maximizing the coordination of services provided by DWD merit staff and**

**the LWDB's contract providers to improve services and avoid duplication. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(12)]**

The staff of the Eastern Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (EKWIB) works closely with DWD's merit staff in the local area and with EKCEP's contracted direct service providers to implement the operational goals of Eastern Kentucky's one-stop system. The MOU (including the Resource Sharing Agreements for full-time partners co-located in a Full Service or Affiliate Center) that provides the framework for all partners to share in the collaborative operation of the Kentucky Career Center EKCEP one-stop operation and the jointly planned and implemented professional development training for partner staff all ensure that the workforce system partners work fluidly together and avoid duplication and repetition. Ongoing partner meetings at the county and regional level also ensure that detailed communication takes place on a regular basis to improve coordination and implement the best strategies for operational goals within the EKCEP local one-stop system. The One-Stop Operators for EKCEP's Kentucky Career Center workforce development network in Eastern Kentucky have been tasked with:

- Coordinating the delivery of services of participating one-stop partners and service providers in the county or counties that the One-Stop Operator serves.
- Fostering a culture of collaboration and excellent customer service among one-stop partners that promotes delivery of the innovative, high quality workforce development services to all customers of the workforce development system.
- Convening and leading regularly scheduled meetings of the one-stop partners to build the collaborative culture, improve service delivery, and evaluate progress toward shared goals.

Additionally, the vision and goals of the Eastern Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (EKWIB) were established through an inclusive strategic planning process that involved a wide array of stakeholders within the EKCEP region. EKCEP's process was designed to create a strategic plan that defined not only the ways EKCEP spends the dollars it controls in the region, but also the ways its actions and programs reflect priorities shared with its partner organizations and therefore influence the ways they spend their allocations within the region. To develop a consensus on regional vision and plan, EKCEP polled its partners and regional stakeholders in workforce development, secondary education, postsecondary education, government, community action, and business to determine their priorities and strategic objectives, and to quiz them on their vision for the role and most important functions of the workforce system and the WIB.

The resulting strategic plan is simple and very focused, clearly stating four primary results-based goals, as well as defining EKCEP's core values, mission, and vision for

that region, the workforce system, and the WIB. By using this strategic plan to guide its decisions and operational strategies, the EKWIB is incorporating the input and vision of its partners and other interested stakeholders, creating a higher level of “buy-in” and unified spirit.

- I. **(L) Describe how the local board will collaborate with WIOA Title II Adult Education and Literacy consistent with the local plan (as described in WIOA Sec. 107(d)(11) and WIOA Sec. 232. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(13)]. This will include a discussion of how the local WDB will consistently review local applications submitted under Title II with WIOA sec. 107(d) (11) (A) and (B) (i) and WIOA sec. 232.**

The EKCEP local board will collaborate with Kentucky Skills U (WIOA Title II Adult Education and Literacy) providers at both the local level and state level. Kentucky Skills U contracts with a service provider for each of the 23 counties within the EKCEP local area. Both EKCEP’s staff and direct services contractors work with these service providers to coordinate the referrals of clients for assessments, testing and diagnostics, GED instruction, and remediation services to bring basic skills up in order to enable clients to continue to postsecondary education.

Skills U providers are located on-site and provide services at the Kentucky Career Center (KCC), Full Service Center, in Hazard and the KCC, Affiliate Center, in Pikeville.

In counties where the local Skills U provider is not co-located with the other workforce partners, all partners work together to plan and execute regular meetings to improve communication and referrals among partner staff for greater customer service and satisfaction in the local workforce development system. EKCEP local board staff also work with Kentucky Skills U leadership staff to improve coordination and planning, and to discuss appropriate training and/or professional development for one-stop staff in the region.

- J. **(L) Please describe any plans to follow the strategies of the state and the local WDB to the one-stop operator to ensure priority for adult career and training services will be given to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient consistent with WIOA sec—134 (c) (3) (E).**

**Client Selection Procedures for ITAs: WIOA Adults** — The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires that local workforce areas give priority to recipients of public assistance and low-income individuals when selecting qualified adults into training. Veterans must also be given priority.

Program operators and career advisors must provide documentation that their client-selection process for Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) gives priority to these groups in the following order of priority:

### **Adult Program Order of Priority for ITAs**

1st Priority: Veterans and/or eligible spouses who are public assistance recipients or low-income individuals who also meet the existing ITA eligibility requirements.

2nd Priority: Nonveterans who are public assistance recipients or low-income individuals who also meet existing ITA eligibility requirements.

3rd Priority: Veterans and/or eligible spouses who meet the existing ITA eligibility requirements.

4th Priority: Non-veterans who meet the existing ITA eligibility requirements. In order to adhere to this policy, career advisors will be required to keep a complete record of the qualified Adult clients who were being considered for ITAs at the time of each selection process.

NOTE: Regulations state, in accordance with 38 U.S. Code Part 4213, that “any amounts received as military pay or allowance by any person who served on active duty, and certain other specified benefits, must be disregarded when determining if a person is a ‘low-income individual’ for eligibility purposes.”

Client Selection Procedures for ITAs: WIOA Dislocated Workers —WIOA requires that local workforce areas give priority to veterans when selecting qualified dislocated workers into training. Program operators and career advisors must provide documentation that their client selection process for ITAs gives priority to these groups in the following order of priority:

### **Dislocated Worker Program Order of Priority for ITAs**

1st Priority: Veterans and/or eligible spouses who meet the existing ITA eligibility requirements.

2nd Priority: Nonveterans who meet the existing ITA eligibility requirements.

In order to adhere to this policy, career advisors are required to keep a complete record of the qualified Dislocated Worker clients who were being considered for ITAs at the time of each selection process.

Client Selection Procedures for ITAs: WIOA Out-of-School Youth — WIOA requires that local workforce areas give priority to veterans when selecting qualified out-of-school youth into training.

Program operators and career advisors must provide documentation that their client selection process for ITAs gives priority to these groups in the following order of priority:

**Out-of-School Youth Order of Priority for ITAs**

1st Priority: Veterans and/or eligible spouses who meet existing ITA eligibility requirements.

2nd Priority: Nonveterans who meet existing ITA eligibility requirements.

In order to adhere to this policy, career advisors are required to keep a complete record of the qualified Out-of-School Youth clients who were being considered for ITAs at the time of each selection process.

- K. **(L) Please describe how the Kentucky Career Centers are implementing and transitioning to an integrated, technology-enabled intake and case management information system for programs carried out under WIOA and by one-stop partners.**

The Commonwealth of Kentucky supplies and requires the use of its case management information systems for the WIOA and Wagner-Peyser programs. The use of KEE-Suite—the primary existing system—is mandated because it allows the Commonwealth to track and tabulate participant performance information. As long as it retains this prerogative to mandate usage, the Commonwealth will be responsible for implementing and transitioning any technology-enabled intake and case management system.

EKCEP offers a convenient virtual intake process utilizing a secure Google platform, enabling potential clients to complete and submit all necessary eligibility information online. This enhancement provides a valuable avenue for individuals to access WIOA services remotely, eliminating the need for an initial in-person appointment. This virtual option increases accessibility and flexibility for clients, allowing them to begin their journey towards employment and training from the comfort of their own homes or any location with internet access.

## Chapter 4: Program Design and Evaluation

- A. **(L) Describe the one-stop delivery system in the local area, including:**



**1. The local board's efforts to collaborate with employers, to provide continuous improvement of business services, and to operate a "job-driven" delivery system.**

EKCEP's business solutions team and contracted business services providers work closely with the region's employers to stay abreast of their workforce needs and to collaborate with employers to craft training solutions that meet those needs.

EKCEP also convene quarterly a larger group of partners and professionals from throughout the area comprised of partners such as: state business-services-focused staff, chambers of commerce, Career Development Office, Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) institutions, Cabinet for Economic Development, Vocational Rehabilitation, Job Corps, and others. The team members make a collaborative effort to be in the field regularly, talking with employers to identify emerging industries, hiring needs, and training needs, and to detect declining businesses and industries as early as possible. The team approach ensures that all the represented partners are aware of the services provided by each partner, therefore enabling them to collaborate or make appropriate referrals as needed. EKCEP will employ the use of tools such as Survey Monkey to periodically poll businesses about their needs, our responsiveness to their needs, and to ask for suggestions and other feedback.

Businesses will be invited to these group meetings periodically to allow them to provide feedback and suggestions for improving our services. EKCEP will use this information to develop workshops around the needs of businesses and to improve service delivery.

**2. The local board's efforts to ensure the continuous improvement of eligible providers of services, including contracted services providers and providers on the eligible training provider list, through the system and ensure that such providers meet the employment needs of local employers, workers, and job seekers. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(6)(A)]**

The Eastern Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (EKWIB) staff works with the state Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) Coordinator, meeting on a regular basis and obtaining training updates within the KEE-Suite system and the Kentucky Center for Statistics (KYSTATS) state systems that capture and report eligible training provider registration and performance.

ETPL information must be reported by each institution and is stored in KYSTATS. The data may be used for research by EKCEP management to determine if local and state-eligible training providers are meeting the required performance benchmarks to maintain their high-demand status for each ETPL program offered within their institution. The EKWIB uses this performance data as the basis for decisions on whether to continue or discontinue using training providers. These decisions ensure that training that is offered to job seekers in the region is in high demand by employers in the local workforce system and will result in good jobs that pay sustainable wages upon completion of the training.

**3. How the local board will facilitate access to services provided through the one-stop delivery system in remote areas with technology and other means. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(6)(B)]**

The Eastern Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (EKWIB) will work with its partners in the workforce system to facilitate access to the services provided through the one-stop delivery system and related Kentucky Career Center network locations. The technology used will include video conferencing and webinars for partner staff meetings and professional development and training, as well as for customer services, when needed and as appropriate.

In addition, EKCEP has created a virtual intake process utilizing a Google platform that allows potential clients to fill out any and all eligibility information online and transmit through a secure Google connection. This enhancement enables clients to access services through WIOA via virtual entry without the need for a physical appointment.

The use of these technologies offers expanded opportunities for the services of all partners to be provided to staff and customers in remote areas. The use of technologies makes it possible to deliver services and collaborate more economically, conserving closely budgeted funds for service provision rather than expending them on travel, redundant staffing, and other costs of geographically distributing services. The use of communications technologies and web-based data collection will allow more of the workforce partners' funds to be used to accomplish their specific goals and attain their outcomes while allowing customers to access services without having to physically travel to a one-stop center.

**4. How entities within the one-stop delivery system, including one-stop operators and the one-stop partners, will comply with WIOA section 188, if applicable, and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 regarding the**

**physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs and services, technology and materials for individuals with disabilities, including providing staff training and support for addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(6)(C)]**

In the Eastern Kentucky local workforce area, the One-Stop Operators and all one-stop partners work together to ensure the physical and programmatic accessibility of all facilities, programs and services, technology, and materials to individuals with disabilities. All partners within the EKCEP's KCC network may serve individuals with disabilities.

The Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation [OVR] partners in EKCEP's KCC network to lend their expertise and specialized resources to Eastern Kentucky's full-service and affiliate KCC facilities and other KCC network locations, providing annual ADA Compliance inspections and certifications, as well as technology and materials for disabled job seeker customers to utilize in the resource rooms at KCC locations, as needed in the EKCEP region. The ADA evaluations of existing facilities focus largely on four priorities for accessibility: (1) approach and entrance to the building; (2) access to goods and services; (3) access to toilet rooms; (4) additional access (e.g., water fountains, public phones, etc.).

The Vocational Rehabilitation partners provide OVR staff presence at KCC locations for on-site referrals of eligible customers and clients. The expertise of OVR staff is also utilized in Eastern Kentucky's one-stop delivery system to provide staff training and support throughout the locations in the KCC network.

**5. Describe the process used by the local board to provide an opportunity for public comment, including comments by representatives of businesses and representatives of labor organizations, and input into the development of the Local Plan, prior to submission of this plan.**

The draft of the EKCEP Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Regional and Local Plan was posted on the EKCEP website and notices of the posting and inviting comment were placed online through social media and in key newspapers. Per instructions, public comments were accepted through the website for 14 days, allowing representatives of businesses and labor organizations to volunteer input. Additionally, the public comment notification included an invitation to a virtual public comment meeting held online to accept oral comments.

EKCEP staff will consider any significant comments or input received during the public comment period and bring those comments to the EKWIB for consideration during final approval of the plan.

**B. (L) Describe the local board’s assessment of the type and availability of adult and dislocated worker employment and training activities in the local area. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(7)]**

The Eastern Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (EKWIB) has determined that its local area needs more industry-driven and workplace-based training in order to adequately prepare the area’s workforce to compete for jobs and provide the capacity for expansion for the region’s growing and/or emerging industries and businesses. For example, the EKWIB finds that the “off-the-shelf” trainings available in information technology, computer coding, computer programming, and application development trainings are often inadequate to position job seekers for success in these rapidly evolving occupations. Therefore, the EKWIB is using the on-the-job training model, internships, and other innovative methodologies in partnerships with employers to prepare the region’s workforce to precisely meet those employers’ needs.

To address these needs, EKCEP has significantly bolstered its work-based learning focus, emphasizing work experiences, internships, and apprenticeships. These programs offer a dynamic approach to skill development, allowing participants to gain practical experience in real-world work settings. Partnering directly with employers in in-demand industries, such as the construction trades and technology fields, allows EKCEP to tailor these on-the-job learning opportunities to meet specific employer requirements. This targeted approach enables individuals to rapidly acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in these fields, leading to quicker employment and a more responsive workforce that directly supports the region's economic growth. Furthermore, these programs provide a pathway for individuals to not only gain immediate employment but also build long-term, sustainable careers within these growing sectors.

The EKWIB also believes the local area could use more micro-enterprise training and entrepreneurial trainings. The EKWIB believes that entrepreneurship and small business growth will play a major role in driving the economic recovery of the Eastern Kentucky region and the entire Commonwealth.

Recognizing the critical role of entrepreneurship and small business development in the region's economic revitalization, EKCEP has forged a strategic partnership with the University of the Highlands to provide accessible and flexible training opportunities. This collaboration has resulted in the creation of comprehensive online training courses focused on essential skills for aspiring entrepreneurs, including essential skills, customer service, and financial literacy. By delivering these resources through an online platform, EKCEP ensures greater flexibility for participants, allowing them to balance their training with other commitments and access learning materials at their own pace.

The EKWIB also believes that the number of unfilled registered nursing jobs in the local area indicates that the registered nurse training in the local area has not been adequate to meet the demand of the area's healthcare industry.

Additionally, the EKWIB recognizes the need to continue to emphasize and expand the available trainings that can ensure high school students are able to graduate with a certification or other recognized workplace credential that will allow them to more directly into a job.

**C. (L) Describe how the local board will coordinate workforce investment activities carried out in the local area with statewide rapid response activities. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(8)]**

Rapid Response activities in the EKWIB area are led by the State Rapid Response Coordinator. When the state receives a WARN notice or becomes aware of a pending mass layoff or closure, the State Rapid Response Coordinator takes the lead in initial contact and coordination. EKCEP staff collaborates closely with the State Rapid Response Coordinator to provide timely and effective services to affected employers and employees in our region.

Upon notification from the state regarding a potential layoff, EKCEP staff stands ready to assist in the delivery of Rapid Response services. The agency's role involves working in partnership with the State Rapid Response Coordinator and the impacted company to understand the specific needs of the dislocated workers. This helps to organize and deliver informational meetings and resource events, ensuring that affected employees are aware of available employment and training services through the Kentucky Career Center system, including WIOA programs, unemployment insurance information, and other community resources. While the state coordinates the initial notification and overall strategy, EKCEP plays a vital role in the local delivery of these crucial support services, ensuring a smooth transition for individuals facing job loss.

**D. (L) Provide an analysis and description of youth workforce activities, including activities for youth with disabilities. Identify successful models and best practices for youth workforce activities relevant to the local area. Describe strategies the LWDA will use to increase the minimum WIOA out-of-school youth expenditure rate to 75 percent. Provide information on types of work-based learning activities planned for youth. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(9)]**

EKCEP's WIOA Youth Program—called Prosper Appalachia—is designed as a robustly structured community-based program that addresses essential life skills and work skills, training, career coaching, and support services for youth who are disengaged from the workforce and education. The program delivers services that are relevant to the employment and training needs of these youth, using structured curricula in a progression that leads each youth to obtain an industry-recognized credential and/or unsubsidized employment as a part of a career path that leads toward a high-wage, high-demand occupation.

EKCEP's Prosper Appalachia service model focuses on Eastern Kentuckians ages 18-24 who are not attending school of any kind and are at risk of long-term unemployment or under-employment, emphasizing career advising and transition into employment. Although EKCEP's youth programs ensure that eligible youth have opportunities to develop and achieve career goals through education and workforce training, they also emphasize shorter-term training assistance and more direct paths to employment, especially for out-of-school youth.

Providing Youth Services — EKCEP provides youth services directly or through contractors who hire youth staff and deliver services in their local areas. Registration and services have been and will continue to be available either in person or virtually, depending on the client's barriers, location, and ability to utilize such services.

Prosper Appalachia staff work closely with community partners and employers to implement EKCEP's policies and develop strategies for youth services that:

- Effectively connect eligible youth to available services, either in person or virtually.
- Provide a thorough review of the occupational and workforce service needs of each youth.
- Provide an individualized service strategy for each youth that includes appropriate career goals and plans for overcoming barriers.
- Integrate WIOA services with other appropriate community services provided by partners, including: social service agencies, adult education, vocational

rehabilitation services, residential treatment providers, medical and behavioral health care agencies, the criminal justice system, and other entities that provide the program elements and services to assist out-of-school youth ages 18-24 to lead happy, healthy and successful lives.

- Prepare youth to meet employers' needs.

EKCEP's Prosper Appalachia WIOA program is based upon developing a collaborative partnership with each youth being served that respects and values that youth's potential. These collaborative partnerships are based on recognizing that the youth and program staff are jointly responsible for working together to solve problems and act courageously to create a pathway to self-sustainability and meaning. Based upon individual needs, these 14 service elements are available to Prosper Appalachia clients:

- Tutoring, study skills training, and instruction leading to secondary school completion, including dropout prevention strategies;
- Alternative secondary school offerings or dropout recovery services, as appropriate;

Paid and unpaid work experiences that include a component of academic and occupational education, including:

- Summer employment opportunities and other employment opportunities throughout the year;
- Pre-apprenticeship programs;
- Internships and job shadowing;
- On-the-job training.
- Occupational skill training, which may include training programs that lead to postsecondary credentials or are linked to in-demand sectors.
- Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster.
- Leadership development opportunities, which may include community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility and other positive social behaviors;
- Supportive services;
- Adult mentoring for the period of participation and subsequently, for a total a duration of at least 12 months;
- Follow-up services for not less than 12 months after completion, as appropriate;

- Comprehensive guidance and counseling, including drug and alcohol abuse counseling, as well as referrals to counseling, as appropriate to the needs of the individual youth;
- Financial literacy education;
- Entrepreneurial skills training;
- Services that provide labor market and employment information about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in the local area, such as career awareness, career counseling, and career exploration services; and
- Activities that help youth prepare for and transition to postsecondary education and training.

**Out-of-School Youth Services** — Because of limited funding and the requirement under WIOA that 75% of Youth funds be spent on Out-of-School Youth, EKCEP designed its WIOA youth services program to primarily target Out-of-School Youth ages 18 to 24—the portion of the eligible population that is most critically in need of rapid assistance to enter employment. EKCEP expects to spend 75% of its WIOA services budget on serving Out-of-School Youth.

Prosper Appalachia services focus on the uniqueness of individualized youths' needs to overcome their barriers to entering and succeeding in the workforce. It is not uncommon for a participating youth to be eligible for services based on more than one barrier; some are even eligible based on all the barriers. Prosper Appalachia is designed to identify the complex challenges to entering and succeeding in the workforce or education faced by these youth, provide assistance and guidance to overcome these barriers, and make it possible for these youth to re-engage and succeed.

Work experience opportunities are featured prominently for Out-of-School Youth. Work experience placements introduce and acclimate participants to the world of work and the Opportunity Youth program is designed to give multiple opportunities in more than one specific career field if necessary in order to find a good fit with the right employer, who may be hiring soon. Although it does not exclude other options, EKCEP's Out-of-School Youth program emphasizes real local employment opportunities and the short-term skills development that will qualify clients to take advantage of those opportunities.

**In-School Youth Services** — In-school youth can receive a variety of services to help them overcome barriers to career or academic success, through a service model that focuses on the uniqueness of each youth's barriers and needs. The program emphasizes work experience placements, the skills necessary to acquire a job, and career advising to help the youth make informed career and educational choices and



define the steps needed to pursue their career or educational goals. Work experience placements introduce and acclimate participants to the world of work and the youth program is designed to give multiple opportunities in more than one specific career field if necessary in order to find a good fit with the right employer who may be hiring soon.

**The 75%/25% Fund Expenditure Requirement** — EKCEP has consistently demonstrated a strong commitment to serving Out-of-School Youth, exceeding the WIOA requirement of allocating at least 75% of Youth funds to this important population for several years. This sustained success indicates that our current approaches are effectively meeting the needs of Out-of-School Youth, and therefore, specific new strategies focused solely on increasing the minimum expenditure rate are not currently necessary.

- E. **(L) Describe how training services will be provided in accordance with WIOA Sec. 134(c)(3)(G), as well as the process and criteria for issuing individual training accounts. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(19)]. This should include how contracts will be coordinated with the use of Individual Training Accounts and how the LWDB will ensure informed customer choice in the selection of training programs.**

In cases where training is not provided through a work-based training placement (e.g., on-the-job training work experience) or other contract for non-ITA training services, EKCEP funds training services for eligible individuals through the use of individual training accounts (ITAs). In Eastern Kentucky, the workforce system funds trainings only in the industry sectors or occupations that the Eastern Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (EKWIB) has identified as in-demand because they are either growing or emerging and have a high potential for sustained demand in the local area.

**Client Selection Procedures for ITAs: WIOA Adults** — The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires that local workforce areas give priority to recipients of public assistance and low-income individuals when selecting qualified adults into training. Veterans must also be given priority.

Program operators and career advisors must provide documentation that their client-selection process for Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) gives priority to these groups in the following order of priority:

**Adult Program Order of Priority for ITAs**

1st Priority: Veterans and/or eligible spouses who are public assistance recipients or low-income individuals who also meet existing ITA eligibility requirements.

2nd Priority: Nonveterans who are public assistance recipients or low-income individuals who also meet existing ITA eligibility requirements.

3rd Priority: Veterans and/or eligible spouses who meet existing ITA eligibility requirements. 4th Priority: Non-veterans who meet existing ITA eligibility requirements. In order to adhere to this policy, career advisors will be required to keep a complete record of the qualified Adult clients who were being considered for ITAs at the time of each selection process.

NOTE: Regulations state, in accordance with 38 U.S. Code Part 4213, that “any amounts received as military pay or allowance by any person who served on active duty, and certain other specified benefits, must be disregarded when determining if a person is a ‘low-income individual’ for eligibility purposes.”

**Client Selection Procedures for ITAs: WIOA Dislocated Workers** —WIOA requires that local workforce areas give priority to veterans when selecting qualified dislocated workers into training. Program operators and career advisors must provide documentation that their client selection process for ITAs gives priority to these groups in the following order of priority:

#### Dislocated Worker Program Order of Priority for ITAs

1st Priority: Veterans and/or eligible spouses who meet existing ITA eligibility requirements.

2nd Priority: Nonveterans who meet existing ITA eligibility requirements.

In order to adhere to this policy, career advisors are required to keep a complete record of the qualified Dislocated Worker clients who were being considered for ITAs at the time of each selection process.

**Client Selection Procedures for ITAs: WIOA Out-of-School Youth** — WIOA requires that local workforce areas give priority to veterans when selecting qualified out-of-school youth into training. Program operators and career advisors must provide documentation that their client selection process for ITAs gives priority to these groups in the following order of priority:

#### Out-of-School Youth Order of Priority for ITAs

1st Priority: Veterans and/or eligible spouses who meet existing ITA eligibility requirements.

2nd Priority: Nonveterans who meet existing ITA eligibility requirements.

In order to adhere to this policy, career advisors are required to keep a complete record of the qualified Out-of-School Youth clients who were being considered for ITAs at the time of each selection process.

## Chapter 5: Compliance/Performance/Administrative Cost

Responses should be focused on the local area's compliance with federal or state requirements.

**A. (L) Identify the local grant recipient of Title 1 responsible for the disbursement of grant funds. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(15)]**

The Eastern Kentucky C.E.P., Inc. Board of Directors serves as the Chief Local Elected Official for the Eastern Kentucky C.E.P. local area, in accordance with the Section 107(c)(1)(C) of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

As Chief Elected Official, this board receives the funds. Because this board has chosen to act as its own fiscal agent, rather than procuring an outside entity to act as fiscal agent, it is responsible for disbursement of the local area's funds.

**B. (L) Describe the competitive and non-competitive processes, as well as the method for sole sourcing, used for procuring goods and services within the local area. This includes but is not limited to the method used to award funds to a one-stop operator and other sub-recipients/contractors of WIOA Title I adult, dislocated worker, and youth services. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(16)]**

To ensure consistency and compliance across the state, all Kentucky local areas, as directed by the Kentucky Education and Labor Cabinet, operate under the Commonwealth's procurement policies and procedures. These established guidelines are detailed in Kentucky Revised Statutes (KRS) 45.A and are referenced as the standard for all procurement activities.

The current One-Stop Operators for the Eastern Kentucky CEP local workforce area were chosen through an open procurement process in April through June 2021. On April 16, 2021, EKCEP published solicitations for proposals to:

- Deliver Direct Workforce Services to Adults and Dislocated Workers
- Deliver Direct Workforce Services to Youth
- Provide Business Services to Employers
- Serve as a One-Stop Operator in Eastern Kentucky's Kentucky Career Center Network

EKCEP chose to bid the One-Stop Operator function in combination with the Workforce Services functions because the two are closely interrelated. Bidders were invited to designate the area in which they proposed to deliver services and serve as One-Stop Operator — allowing them to propose to serve anything from a single county up to EKCEP’s entire 23-county area. Once the proposals were received, staff reviewed them and presented recommendations for contract awards to both the Eastern Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (EKWIB) and the Eastern Kentucky C.E.P., Inc. Board of Directors (serving as the CLEO as prescribed by WIOA), which awarded the contracts in June 2021.

EKCEP is currently in the process of re-procuring contractors that will:

- Deliver Direct Workforce Services to Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth.
- Serve as a One-Stop Operator in either or both of Eastern Kentucky’s two comprehensive Kentucky Career Centers.

Contracts awarded under these procurements will go into effect July 1, 2025.

**C. (L) Describe the indicators currently used or intended by the local board to measure the performance and effectiveness of the regional fiscal agent (where appropriate), eligible providers, and the one-stop delivery system in the local area. [WIOA Sec. 108(b)(17)]**

***Note:** This description may include when, how, and by whom the indicators are being employed and if the measured performance and effectiveness are used in a continuous improvement process.*

Measuring the performance of the Fiscal Agent for the EKCEP local area is not appropriate, because the grant recipient is the fiscal agent in the EKCEP local area. The integrity and accuracy of EKCEP’s fiscal processes and procedures are established by the agency’s annual fiscal audit.

Performance information must be reported by each institution or provider that is on the Commonwealth of Kentucky’s Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). This information is stored in the Kentucky Center for Statistics system, where it may be accessed and used by EKCEP management to determine if these eligible training providers are meeting the required performance benchmarks to maintain their high-demand status for each ETPL program. The Eastern Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (EKWIB) can use this performance data as the basis for decisions on whether to continue or discontinue using training providers. The EKWIB’s criteria are that training that is offered to Eastern

Kentucky job seekers must be in high demand by employers in the local workforce system, be in the sectors of emphasis selected by the EKWIB, and result in good jobs that pay sustainable wages upon completion of the training.

The performance of the one-stop workforce delivery system in Eastern Kentucky is measured mostly by its performance against the WIOA performance indicators. WIOA includes the following performance measures for all programs within the one-stop delivery system in the EKCEP local area for services to Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth:

**WIOA Adult program performance indicators include:**

Employment Rate (Q2 post-exit),  
Employment Rate (Q4 post-exit),  
Median Earning,  
Credential Rate,  
Measurable Skills Gain.

**WIOA Dislocated Worker program performance indicators include:**

Employment Rate (Q2 post-exit)  
Employment Rate (Q4 post-exit)  
Median Earnings  
Credential Rate  
Measurable Skills Gain.

**WIOA Youth program performance indicators include:**

Placement in Employment/Training/Education (Q2 post-exit)  
Placement in Employment/Training/Education (Q4 post-exit)  
Median Earnings  
Credential Rate  
Measurable Skills Gain.