

WIOA Regional & Local Strategic Plan

PROGRAM YEAR 2025 - 2028





Kentucky Department of Workforce Development (DWD)

Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board

500 Mero Street

Frankfort, KY 40601

Dear Interim Commission Yoder:

Pursuant to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and in accordance with Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board Guidance 21-007, please accept this as the formal submission of the WIOA Regional and Local Plan for the East Region planning area for Program Years 2025-2028.

The East Region comprises the following Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs):

- Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program (EKCEP)
- TENCO Workforce Development Board (TENCO)

This plan was developed collaboratively between the two LWDAs. As required, the plan was made available for public comment from March 27, 2025, through April 25, 2025. No comments were received from the public regarding the plan.

In accordance with Guidance 21-007, the leadership for the participating LWDAs are identified as follows:

Eastern Kentucky Concentrated Employment Program (EKCEP):

- Chief Local Elected Official (EKCEP Board Chair): Gilbert Holland
- Eastern Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board (EKWIB) Chair: Keith Gabbard
- Executive Director: Becky Carnes-Miller

TENCO Workforce Development Board:

- Chief Local Elected Official(s): Owen McNeill
- Workforce Development Board Chair: Michael Thoroughman
- Workforce Development Director: Denise Dials

This submission includes the comprehensive Regional Plan, incorporating the individual Local Plans for both EKCEP and TENCO. The required regional plan agreement signatory pages are also included. EKCEP is submitting this plan on behalf of the East Region.

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 East 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 25, 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 23, 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, and Kentucky Career Center – TENCO website, 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.

- B. 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.

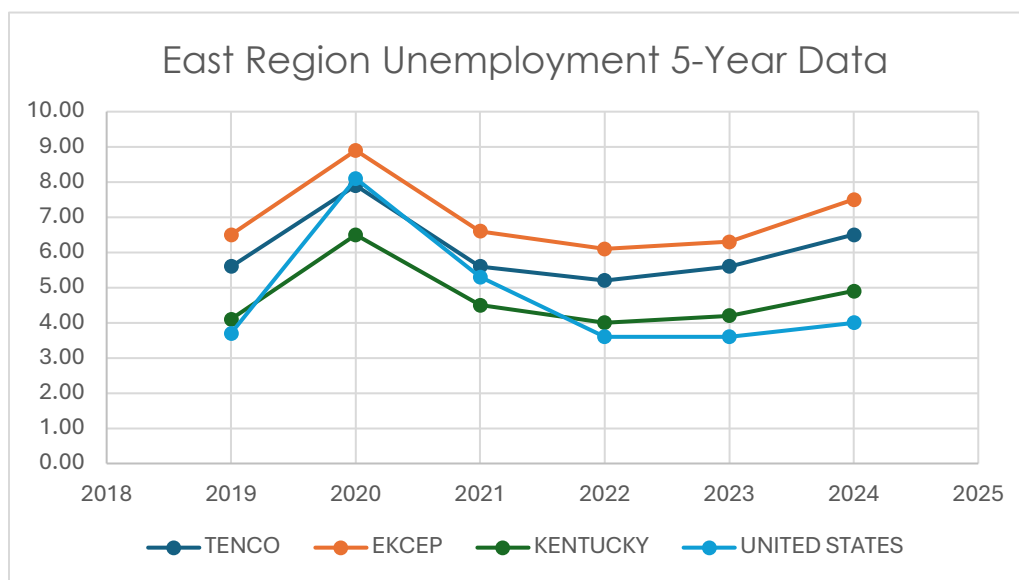
Unemployment Data

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

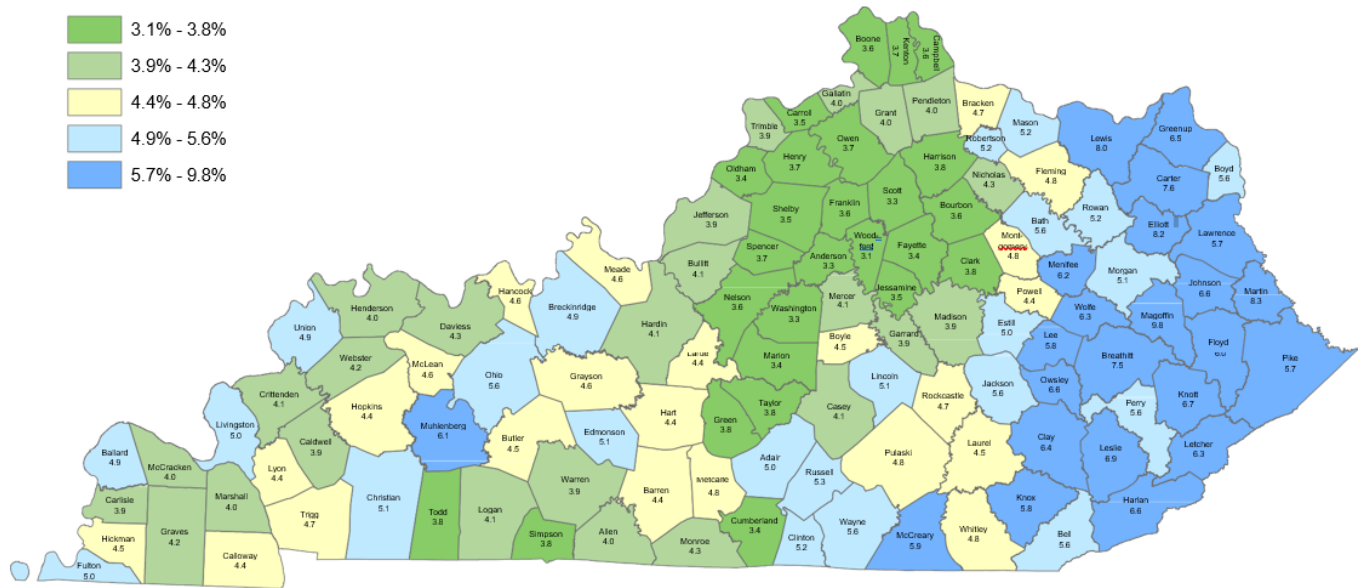
kystats.ky.gov

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

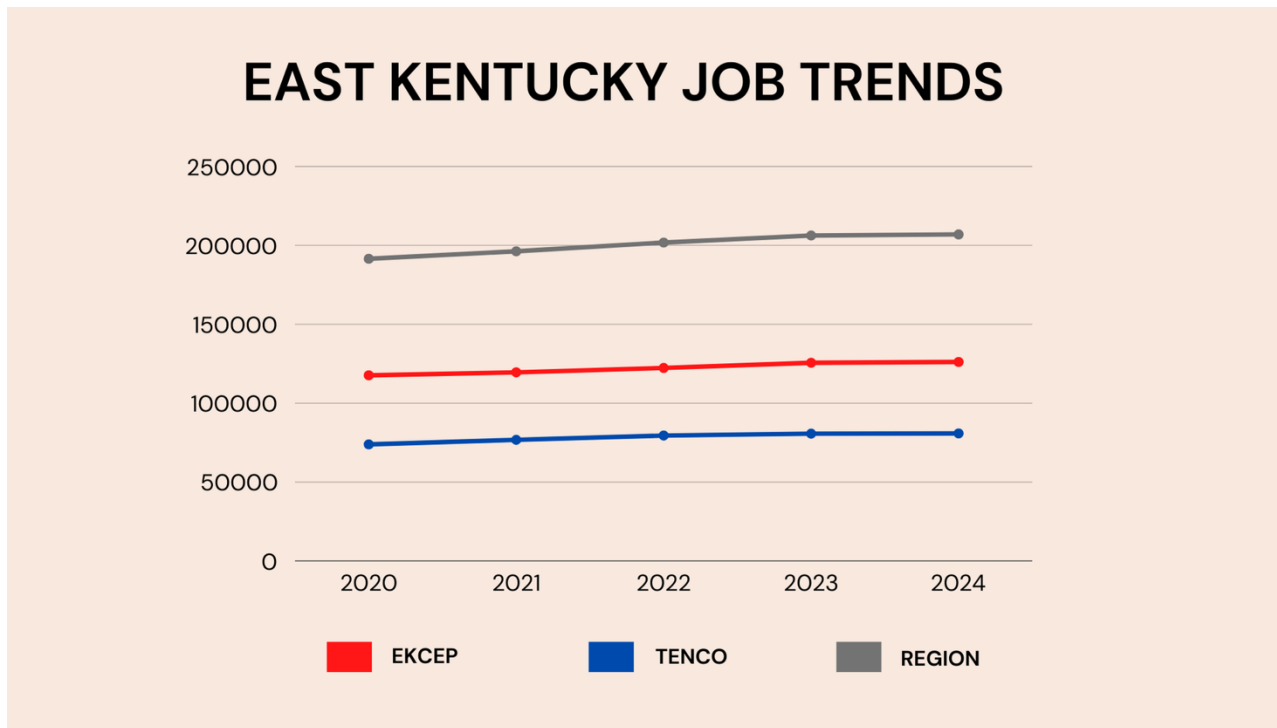
Jackson County	EKCEP	5.6
Johnson County	EKCEP	6.6
Knott County	EKCEP	6.7
Knox County	EKCEP	5.8
Lawrence County	EKCEP	5.7
Lee County	EKCEP	5.8
Leslie County	EKCEP	6.9
Letcher County	EKCEP	6.3
Lewis County	TENCO	8.0
Magoffin County	EKCEP	9.8
Martin County	EKCEP	8.3
Mason County	TENCO	5.2
Menifee County	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

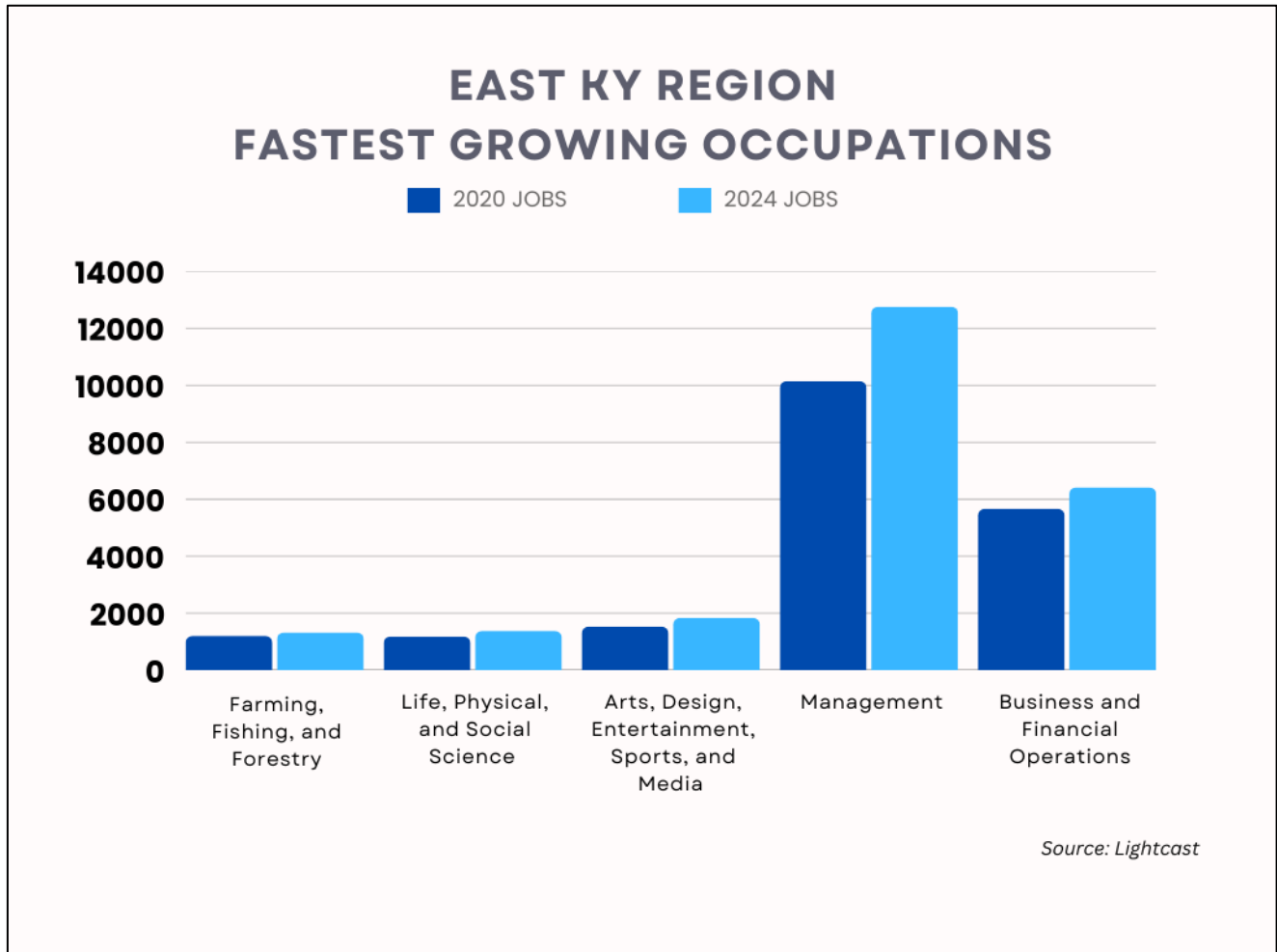
While job loss was a major economic issue in the East Region from 2015 through 2020, job trends in the East Region are positive over the past five years. The region has seen an increase in employment opportunities with a five-year total gain of 15,436 jobs (approximately 8.06% increase).



Job Data for 2020 – 2024

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
EKCEP	117,643	119,529	122,318	125,599	126,131
TENCO	73,876	76,745	79,473	80,671	80,824
Region	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.

C. (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.

U.S. Census Bureau

Kentucky Center for Statistics,

Breakdown of the Regional Analysis:

East Region Population

Comparison of 2020 -2024

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



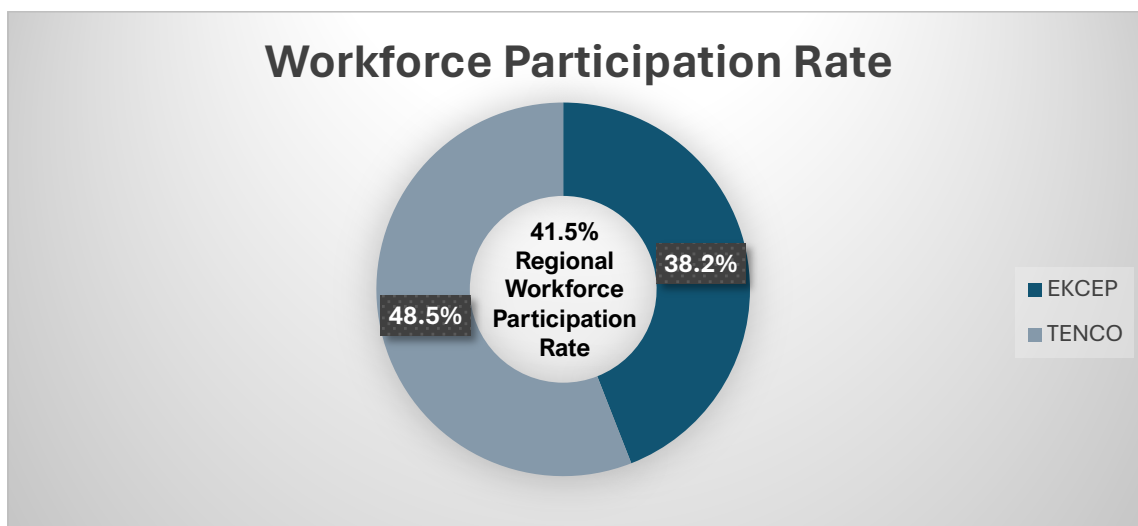
Overall, the East Region's population has declined by -.97% from 2020. EKCEP and TENCO have both experienced population declines in many of their counties.

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



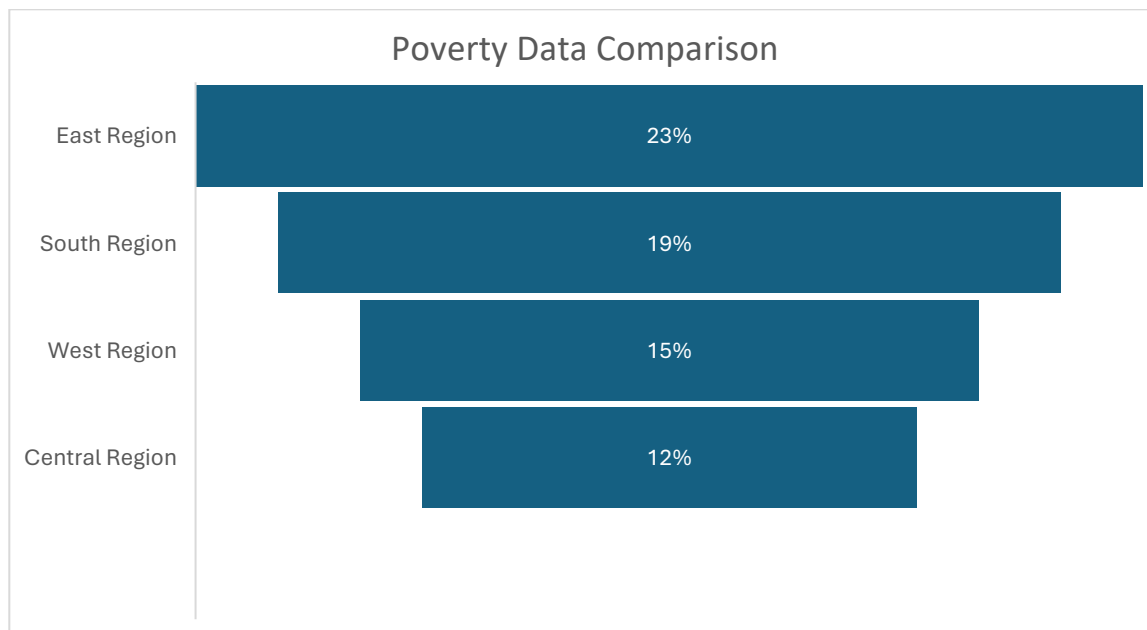
The East Region of Kentucky exhibits a significantly low workforce participation rate of 41.5%, the lowest in the state. Fifteen counties within the region fall below this average, with Martin County having the lowest rate at 27%. Other counties with notably low participation include Breathitt (29%), 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.

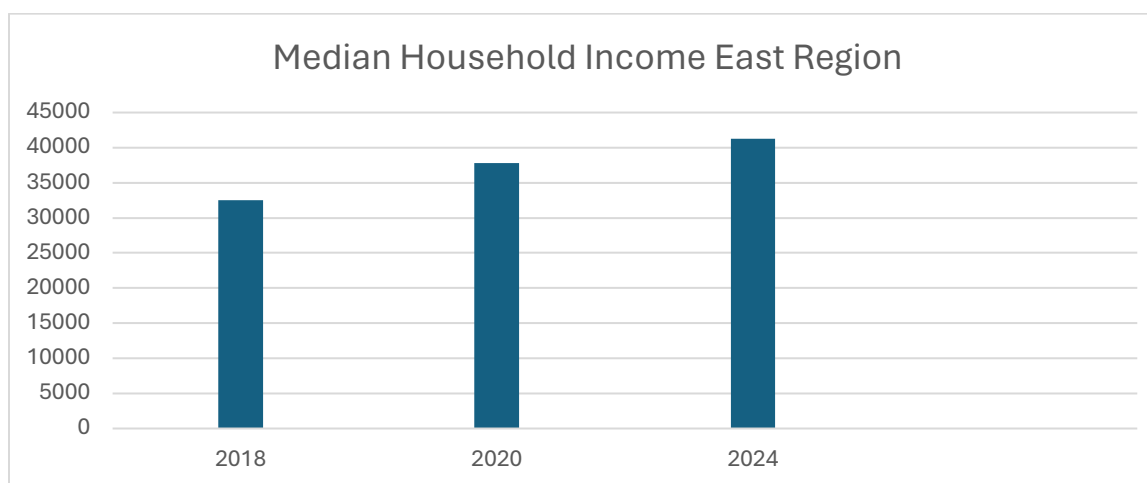
Poverty Levels

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)

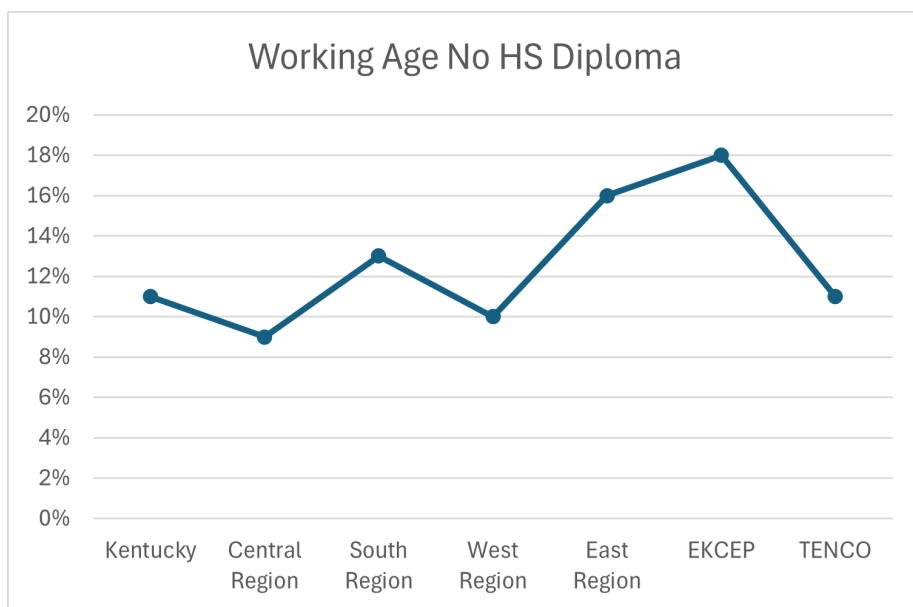
Education

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.

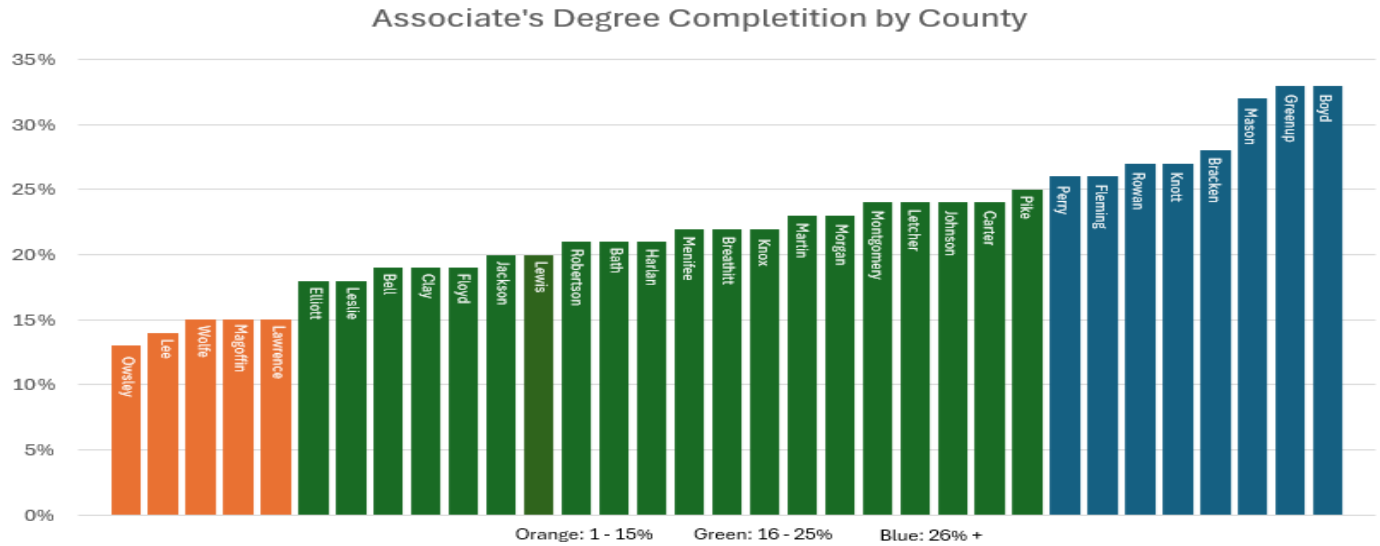
Work Ready Communities; October 2022

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.



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.

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
EKCEP	430,132	16,354	112,428	38,466	3,074	955	112	3,747	114,939
TENCO	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
HARLAN	1613	25652	0.063
PERRY	1380	27367	0.050
KNOX	1491	29773	0.050
BELL	1045	23611	0.044
FLOYD	1539	34918	0.044
ELLIOTT	320	7292	0.044
LESLIE	398	10049	0.040
PIKE	2137	56317	0.038
OWSLEY	138	4001	0.034
JOHNSON	748	22235	0.034
MAGOFFIN	374	11348	0.033
WOLFE	211	6416	0.033

MASON	554	16903	0.033
ROWAN	780	24372	0.032
LAWRENCE	502	16097	0.031
CARTER	814	26343	0.031
BREATHITT	408	13358	0.031
FLEMING	464	15278	0.030
JACKSON	392	12989	0.030
MENIFEE	182	6236	0.029
BOYD	1387	48059	0.029
CLAY	549	19874	0.028
LETCHER	549	20827	0.026
LEE	188	7273	0.026
MORGAN	313	14283	0.022
KNOTT	300	13847	0.022
LEWIS	275	12937	0.021
BATH	235	12828	0.018
MARTIN	192	11096	0.017
MONTGOMERY	470	28357	0.017
BRACKEN	119	8435	0.014
ROBERTSON	30	2247	0.013
GREENUP	314	35375	0.009
	20,411		

Kystatepolice.org, Crime in Kentucky 2023

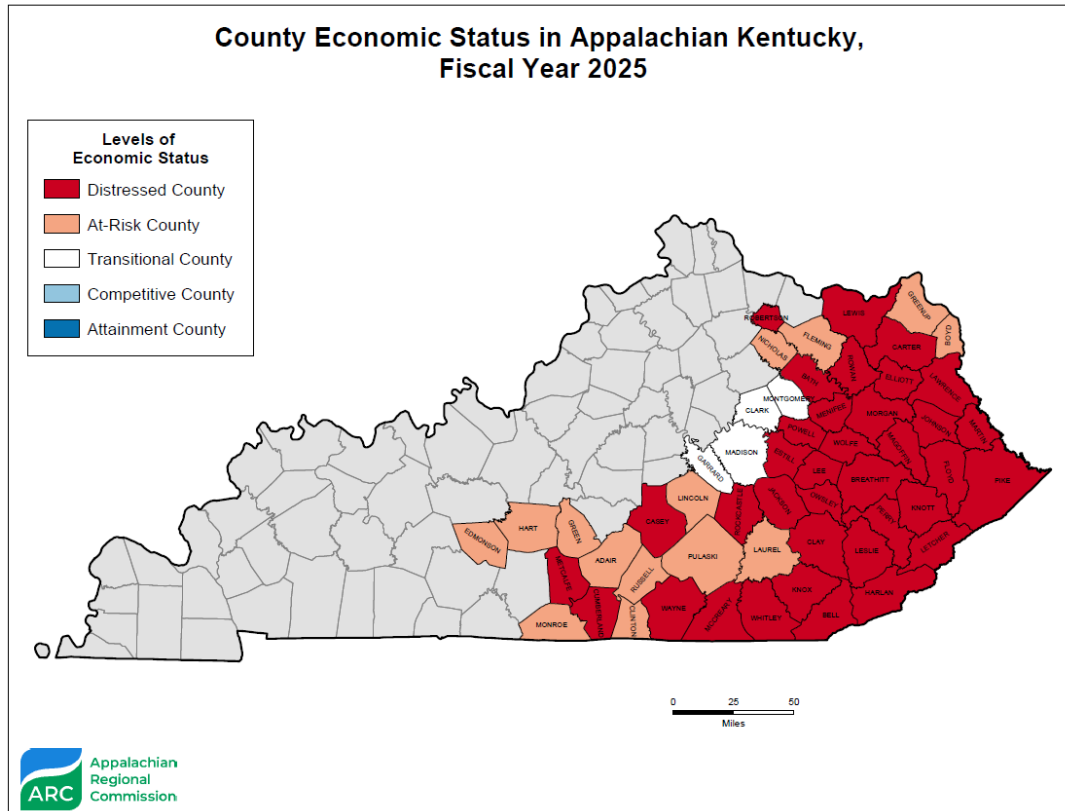
Commuting Distances - Due to limited employment opportunities in many of the region's counties, a significant number of individuals must commute outside of the county in which they reside to find employment. An average of 61% of the residents in the East Region travel outside of their home county for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

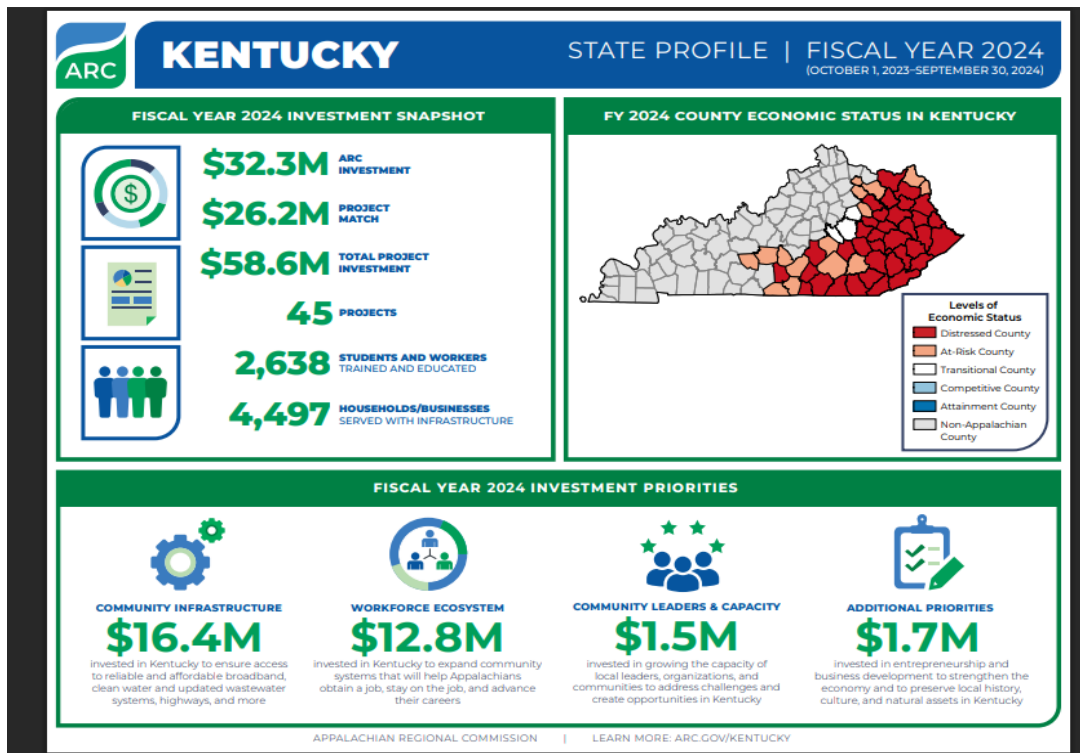
(2020 Commuting Patterns Report)

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.





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.

D. (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).

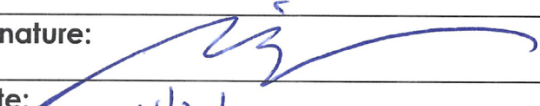
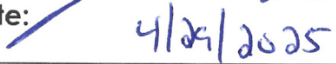
We the undersigned attest that this submittal is the Regional and Local Plan for our Local Workforce Development Area (LWDA) and certify that this plan has been prepared as required, and is in accordance with the applicable Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Regional Innovation and Local Comprehensive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

Local Workforce Development Board EKCEP Region	Chief Local Elected Official EKCEP Region
Name: Keith Gabbard	Name: Gilbert Holland
Title: EKWIB Chair	Title: EKCEP Board Chair
Signature: /s/ Keith Gabbard	Signature: /s/ Gilbert Holland
Date: 4/29/25	Date: 4/29/25

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.

Local Workforce Development Board BOARD CHAIR	Chief Local Elected Official
Name: Michael Thoroughman	Name: Owen McNeill
Title: TENCO WDB Board Chair	Title: Judge/Executive for Mason County
Signature:	Signature: 
Date:	Date: 4-29-25

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.

Local Workforce Development Board	Chief Local Elected Official
BOARD CHAIR	
Name: Michael Thoroughman	Name: Owen McNeill
Title: TENCO WDB Board Chair	Title: Judge/Executive for Mason County
Signature: 	Signature:
Date: 	Date: