

The following Action Plan provides detailed strategies and specific actions, serving as a technical guide for implementing the recommendations of The Plan. These action plans are intended to be living documents, being revised and updated as Together North Jersey works with various partners on implementing recommendations in The Plan.

**TOGETHER NORTH JERSEY** **FOCUS AREA 4: Align workforce training with industry needs**

**What and Why.** Our region’s highly educated and skilled workforce has been a tremendous asset for decades. To thrive economically, our region must ensure that the skills our workers have match well with industry needs. We must make it a priority to improve the alignment between the workforce initiatives (training, education, etc.) and the skill demands of key industries. Doing so will ensure that residents have the skills they need to get and keep quality jobs and reduce hiring and turnover-related costs for employers. Currently our region has many existing programs working towards this goal, but we must build on these existing relationships and increase opportunities for collaboration between public and private players in order to increase the likelihood of success.


**How.** To achieve these ends, our region must emphasize workforce training initiatives that include certifications and degrees that provide pathways to careers in stable and growing industries. Programs should include training in both “soft” and occupation-specific skills and we must increase opportunities for internships and apprenticeships as well as support worker re-entry. Where successful initiatives exist, we should raise awareness of them and help leverage them fully. We must also ensure a robust flow of information, so all partners are operating with the same understanding of our region’s labor market needs and the availability of workers to fill vacant positions.

**TOGETHER NORTH JERSEY** **Strategy 4.1: Align workforce development efforts with industry needs through improved data collection and enhanced coordination**

**What and why.** Data used to inform training and career decisions is typically based on historical trends—not what’s on the horizon. Our region must develop a system to obtain better information from employers in order to understand their current and future workforce demands, while also improving data on training and educational capacity, enrollments and program completions. Toward this end, we should systematically catalog industry workforce needs, and develop a centralized repository of workforce training providers and programs in the region. Training resources should be directed towards programs designed to bridge the skills gap and lead to a credential or degree in a high-demand occupation and those that pay higher wages. Programs that facilitate re-entry into the workforce for laid-off incumbent workers, prisoners re-entering society and other disadvantaged populations should be emphasized.

<u>Actions:</u>	<u>Suggested Responsibility:</u>	<u>Timeframe:</u>
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1.	Define an “urgent, common need” that will serve as a call to action for employers.	NJDOL, WIBs	Short term
2.	Develop a centralized repository of workforce training providers in the region.	NJDOL, WIBs	Short term
3.	Formalize existing relationships—through board memberships, regular meetings and events—to better understand the current ecosystem and establish regional priorities.	NJTPA, NJDOL	Medium term
4.	Coordinate and consolidate virtual talent development services (including a professional development portal) when appropriate.	NJDOL	Medium term
5.	Target training resources at programs offering the highest potential to lead to an industry-recognized credential in a high-demand and/or high-wage occupation.	NJDOL, Talent Networks, WIBs	Medium term
6.	Enlist partners to organize an annual talent development conference where common issues, including data collection and sharing, will be addressed.	NJDOL, WIBs	Medium term
7.	Engage employers and partners in evaluating and prioritizing comprehensive, long-term strategies for improving access to economic opportunity for all residents. Programs that facilitate re-entry into the workforce for under-represented populations should be emphasized. (Examples of other “ladder of opportunity” strategies include increasing financial literacy; increasing the availability of high-quality early-childhood education programs; and connecting disadvantaged populations with local workforce training, employment centers, health care and other vital services through improved transportation access.)	NJDOL, WIBs	Short term



## Strategy 4.2: Expand occupational and soft skills training programs to address barriers to employment for disadvantaged workers.

**What and why.** Along with more intractable issues, such as a lack of reliable transportation or affordable childcare, many residents in our region face challenges related to soft skills—such as time management, literacy issues and customer service skills—as well as language barriers, lack of a high school degree and the inability to pass employment screening. Our region should expand available programs to address these soft skills barriers faced by many workers, including but not limited to, low-income adults, minorities, veterans and former inmates looking to re-enter the workforce.

	<u>Actions:</u>	<u>Suggested Responsibility:</u>	<u>Timeframe:</u>
1.	Validate barriers to employment using Talent Networks and roundtables with representative employers.	NJDOL, Talent Networks, WIBs	Short term

2.	Based on findings of validation task, create a plan for addressing specific barriers, using a sector-based approach where possible.	NJDOL, Talent Networks, WIBs	Medium term
3.	Look for opportunities within existing programs, including career pathways, to create on-ramps and stackable credentials (i.e., programs that combine English language instruction with entry-level occupational training, enabling participants to earn a paycheck more quickly than standard approaches).	NJDOL, Talent Networks, WIBs	Ongoing
4.	Based on the outcome of Strategy 4.1, work with employers and partners to implement and/or move the region forward with regard to comprehensive, long-term strategies for improving access to economic opportunity for all residents.	NJTPA, NJDOL, Talent Networks, WIBs	Medium term



### Strategy 4.3: Help incumbent workers transition to living wage occupations.

**What and why.** Even though workers may have successfully entered the workforce, their jobs may not pay enough to meet a reasonable standard of living or support a family. Our region needs to coordinate existing workforce development programs and create a greater variety of progressive pathways to better, livable wages. The most successful career pathway initiatives provide a series of linked education and training programs that lead to a clearly defined credential, allowing workers to advance within a targeted occupation or industry. To start, we should convene a multi-industry task force to inventory and coordinate the career pathways programs that already exist in the region. As needed, our region should pilot and evaluate new pathway initiatives and scale up those that prove the most successful.

	<u>Actions:</u>	<u>Suggested Responsibility:</u>	<u>Timeframe:</u>
1.	Convene an inter-agency task force to discuss the current status of career pathway initiatives in the region.	NJDOL, Talent Networks, WIBs	Ongoing
2.	Identify specific occupations/pathways within each Talent Network to serve as pilot program. (Build on existing pilots, such as Passaic County Technical Institute and Bergen County Technical Schools pilot program to prepare students for careers in global logistics/supply chain management.)	NJDOL, Talent Networks, WIBs	Ongoing
3.	Work to ensure that training programs are accessible to existing workers who may require evening or weekend programs. Look at offering training programs in multiple languages beyond English and Spanish.	NJDOL, Talent Networks, WIBs	Ongoing
4.	Identify potential funding sources for pilot program(s).	NJTPA, NJDOL	Short term


5.	Evaluate effectiveness of pilot program(s) and refine/expand as appropriate.	NJTPA, NJDOL	Medium term
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### Strategy 4.4: Create a regional apprenticeship and internship program for non-college-bound students.

**What and why.** The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) defines an apprenticeship as “a formal relationship between a worker and sponsor,” typically an employer or labor organization, and typically a skilled trade. These programs, most commonly found in construction, manufacturing and healthcare, offer a combination of on-the-job training and technical instruction, providing both practical and theoretical understanding of the occupation. Likewise, an internship program would provide on-the-job training opportunities for those occupations not typically associated with the skilled trades. Our region should inventory existing public, private and nonprofit work apprenticeship and internship programs. This inventory should be used to foster coordination and support of innovative and effective programs that include paid apprenticeship and internship opportunities. We should also work to increase funding for apprenticeships and internships, including through public sources, as well as trade associations and industry partnerships.


	<u>Actions:</u>	<u>Suggested Responsibility:</u>	<u>Timeframe:</u>
1.	Create an inventory of existing public, private, and nonprofit work apprenticeship programs.	Chambers of Commerce	Medium term
2.	Identify a mechanism for coordination and support of innovative and effective programs.	Chambers of Commerce	Medium term
3.	Work with industry to create paid internship opportunities for students participating in the apprenticeship programs.	Chambers of Commerce	Medium term
4.	Increase funding for apprenticeship and pre-employment training programs. Potential sources of funding include community development Block Grants (CDBG), NJDOL, trade associations and existing industry partnerships.	Chambers of Commerce, NJDOL, Trade Associations	Medium term



### Strategy 4.5: Promote skilled trades and other traditional vocational and technical programs

**What and why.** Middle-skills jobs are those that require more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree, such as construction workers, skilled trades— including plumbers, welders and electricians—drivers, mechanics and technicians. Many of these positions offer higher earnings potential than those requiring a four-year degree and are often among those listed by employers as hard to fill. Our region should raise awareness of middle-skills employment opportunities and ensure the availability of appropriate career and technical education programs. This would help employers meet demand for these positions and provide residents with viable career options that require less investment of time and money than a four-year degree. Our region should also target funding to programs that help workers obtain an industry-recognized credential in a high demand, middle-skills occupations. We can also connect young people to these opportunities by keeping school guidance counselors and teachers updated about career opportunities in skilled trades.

	<i>Actions:</i>	<i>Suggested Responsibility:</i>	<i>Timeframe:</i>
1.	Support the implementation of common standards for career and technical education.	NJ Higher Ed	Ongoing
2.	Identify and prioritize high-growth, high-wage, middle-skills occupations within each network and devise strategies for promoting these opportunities.	NJDOL, Talent Networks, WIBs	Ongoing
3.	Target training resources at programs offering the highest potential for an industry-recognized credential in a high-demand and/or high-wage middle-skills occupation.	NJDOL, Talent Networks, WIBs	Medium term
4.	Create mechanisms to keep school guidance counselors and teachers updated about career opportunities in skilled trades.	NJ Higher Ed	Medium term
5.	Host events that connect young people with concepts related to middle skills jobs (e.g., Mini Maker Faire).	NJDOL, Talent Networks, WIBs	Short term



## Strategy 4.6: Promote workforce development strategies to support the state’s tourism industry

**What and why.** Developing jobs in the tourism industry should be supported to the fullest extent possible. The Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism (RHT) Talent Network should be engaged as the vehicle for defining specific career pathways, and sharing resources and information with jobseekers. The RHT talent network should strengthen career pathway programs through assistance in the preparation and promotion of career resources, promoting relevant events such as Retail, Hospitality and Tourism Industry Week, and working with the education and training providers identified by the RHT talent network to ensure that pathways are clearly articulated and transferrable.

	<i>Actions:</i>	<i>Suggested Responsibility:</i>	<i>Timeframe:</i>

1.	Define job opportunities and career pathways in the tourism industry.	RHT Talent Network	Short term
2.	Provide support and help promote relevant events, such as Retail, Hospitality and Tourism Industry Week.	NJTPA, RHT Talent Network	Ongoing
3.	Support the RHT in the preparation and promotion of career resources.	NJTPA, RHT Talent Network	Ongoing
4.	Work with the education and training providers identified by the RHT to ensure that pathways are clearly articulated and transferrable.	NJTPA, RHT Talent Network	Ongoing

