

## Inside the Job Market

### Heather Boulger: March Madness can be a nice distraction from the daily grind at the office

By Heather Boulger

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Lisa Moeller takes a photo of the NCAA bracket for the 2021 NCAA college basketball tournament on the side of the JW Marriott in downtown Indianapolis.

AP FILE PHOTO

March Madness starts this week and many workplaces throughout the country will soon be experiencing bouts of cheers and groans while employees complete their brackets in hopes of choosing the ultimate winner and securing bragging rights with their coworkers.

Cellphones and computers make it easy for employees to “secretly” check scores, pools and even streaming games online. It’s inevitable that March Madness is going to impact office productivity, but if managed correctly, it’s also a great opportunity to establish an annual ritual that builds office morale and employee engagement.

While the obsession with college basketball may seem like an unwelcome distraction at work, nearly one in four companies encourages their employees to celebrate the annual NCAA tournament. Fifty-three percent of employees celebrate sporting events like March Madness with coworkers, 39 percent say it supports a

healthy mix of work and play, 27 percent say it fosters team work, and 25 percent say it offers a nice distraction from the daily grind.

It seems like March Madness for us at the Berkshire Workforce Board (BWB), MassHire Career Center, and our many team partners as we prepare for a frenzy of organized workforce activity during the months of March and April. It's our hope that these initiatives will benefit our companies, job seekers and career changers, and meet your expectations for workforce success.

In thinking about the myriad of workforce programs, we take great pride with the initiatives that are made possible through the efforts of a strong team that includes staff, corporate partners, board of directors, vendors, committees and our community partners. Here are some examples that confirm the belief that, as a strong team, we can win.

#### Weekly workshops for job seekers

The MassHire Career Center plays a critical role in helping those who are on unemployment insurance and/or looking for work find jobs and upskilling opportunities. Career Center staff help connect individuals to training and education opportunities, provide case management to ensure they succeed, and connect those who complete programs to in-demand jobs at local businesses. Critical job seeker services include virtual services, information, tools and individual supports. There are dozens of virtual workshops to help with skill building, resume writing, interviewing, and a variety of career and job fairs. MassHire promotes individualized and flexible training opportunities for unemployed residents and provides job matching opportunities as well.

There are reemployment resources to help long-term unemployed who may have barriers to employment, specialized services for our veterans, and assistance to anyone over the age of 16 find employment opportunities.

Visit [MassHireBerkshireCC.com](http://MassHireBerkshireCC.com) or call 413-499-2220 for dozens of virtual workshops, counseling and services being provided at no cost to the job seeker.

### Job fair

MassHire Career Center is hosting a Spring Job Fair from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. March 30. This event will be virtual. There are dozens of in-person recruitments happening each month at the Career Center, 160 North St., third floor in Pittsfield.

### Training opportunities

MassHire has partnered with our education and training providers and is providing immediate, short-term entry-level healthcare and manufacturing training programs for residents as well as on-the-job training opportunities. There are also dozens of virtual, hybrid and in person training opportunities provided by Berkshire Community College, McCann Tech and many others that will help provide skill building and enhancement. This spring there are manufacturing trainings for unemployed and underemployed individuals in welding and entry level manufacturing, and ToolingU (virtual) programs available. MassHire is offering CDL training as well. There are also opportunities for healthcare training for nursing assistants and medical assistants. All trainings are at no cost to participants. Contact [Sara@MassHireBerkshire.com](mailto:Sara@MassHireBerkshire.com) or 413.442.7177x118 for more information.

### Jobs4Youth campaign

Employers – we need your help! Please support our youth, grow our economy and enhance the region's workforce! Sponsor a youth for just \$2,500 to provide a young person with a six-week summer work experience that will greatly impact their future career pursuits, personal aspirations and lifetime self-sufficiency. Serve as a corporate sponsor to help expand and sustain youth programming. Participate as a host employer by providing low-income youth with a subsidized work experience. Or hire a youth ages 14-21 directly to help shape a young person's future and help the region qualify for additional resources.

Contact [YouthDirector@MassHireBerkshire.com](mailto:YouthDirector@MassHireBerkshire.com). Interested young people should contact their school's guidance counselor to see if you qualify.

### Employment data

In December 2021, the Berkshire County unemployment rate was 4.4 percent which was 3.7 percent lower than the previous year with 398 more people working than in December 2020. Based on December's statistics 59,981 people are listed in the Berkshire labor market with 57,323 employed and 2,658 unemployed. There are 2,986 available positions in the Berkshires listed on JobQuest, ranging from entry-level jobs to high-level professional opportunities.

### Hall of fame

MassHire understands the challenges facing employers due to changing and uncertain economic conditions, and is available to assist businesses with:

- Hosting virtual career/job fairs
- Posting jobs and search resumes on free online job bank
- Writing effective job postings
- Recruiting and pre-screen job candidates, including Veterans
- Determine competitive salary for positions
- Connect to local resources for training employees, including on-the-job training and apprentice programs
- Hiring incentives and tax credits
- Accessing Workforce Training Funds and other specialized training programs to upgrade the skills of both un/underemployed and incumbent workers

Our services are at no cost to companies. Recruitment, hiring, training and retaining your workers is our specialty. Assistance can also be provided if your organization is considering downsizing or closing.

The rally continues

Celebrating, educating, and networking are in store for you. The BWB is your “final four” business resource for labor market information, training grants, college and career readiness programs and connecting to employment opportunities. No madness ... just the BWB and partnering efforts that help create your winning team. Now more than ever, the MassHire Berkshire workforce system and our partners can deliver critical support to job seekers and businesses in the region. MassHire is here to help connect companies to workers, and job seekers to opportunities. Let's get to work!

Heather Boulger is executive director of the MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board in Pittsfield.