

## Road to Recovery & Reemployment

- By Heather Boulger
- Apr 3, 2021



BEN GARVER — THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE

It's been over a year since the initial lockdown due to COVID-19, and our economy is slowly recovering. The pandemic has impacted the national economy in a manner not experienced in modern times. COVID-19 has affected every community and every industry. But, there is hope ... and jobs ... and training ... available right here in the Berkshires.

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.

As the regional organization responsible for workforce development in the region, the MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board commissioned a pandemic workforce impact report in April 2020 and again in March. Berkshire County has lost more than 6,000 jobs during this year (Massachusetts lost 335,000), most of which were in hospitality, retail and the restaurant industries.

Some of these jobs will not be there for workers to return to, as some companies have closed for good. Our region, however, is projected to recover 74.1 percent of lost jobs due to the pandemic, with employment reaching 61,387 by mid-2021, as consumer-driven industries including retail, food services and recreation will be on a path to recovery.

The unemployment swing in the Berkshires, from 4.5 percent in January 2020 to 8.8 percent in January 2021, does not include the many who have dropped out of the labor market, many of whom are women and people of color. While more than 5,400 people are currently unemployed, many more are underemployed and discouraged from searching for work and/or working fewer hours than they would like. As a result, many of these workers will need to make difficult career transitions as our economies reopen.

Now is the time to get back on track and start your job search!

The MassHire Berkshire 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, including the one coming up on April 27. 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. There are jobs

According to the state's Job Quest database, there are more than 2,500 job vacancies posted in the Berkshires, ranging from highly skilled positions to entry-level jobs. Many companies are frustrated with the limited job applicants — likely because of pandemic unemployment extensions, the child care and remote/hybrid education uncertainties, and the concern about getting sick/caring for others.

Several other companies have been successful in attracting local talent and others from around the world, while others are being creative with trying to identify workers through hiring incentive packages and internal training.

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 banks
- 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 Fund and other specialized training programs to upgrade the skills of both un/underemployed and incumbent workers
- Recruitment, hiring, training and retaining your workers is our specialty. Assistance can also be provided if your organization is considering downsizing or closing.

The MassHire Workforce Board has partnered with our education and training providers and is providing immediate, short-term entry-level health care 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.

The Berkshires are projected to recover all of the jobs lost during the pandemic and start expansion beyond its pre-pandemic level by the third quarter of 2022. Don't wait until the last minute to apply for jobs or to upgrade your skills. Be ready now.

During a time of continued uncertainty and significant digital "noise," it is imperative that our employers, job seekers and youths know where to go for workforce assistance. MassHire serves as a vital link between workers and employers to bring about economic opportunity.

Career Centers are helping put Berkshire residents back on the payroll, one person and one job at a time. The [MassHireBerkshireCC.com](https://www.masshireberkshirecc.com) and [MassHireBerkshire.com](https://www.masshireberkshire.com) websites are the best first steps to help get you on the workforce road to recovery.

Let's get to work!

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