

Strategic Plan 2022-2026
March 2022

Introduction

The Berkshire County Regional Employment Board, Inc. (BCREB) has been the region's primary catalyst and convener to address workforce development issues since 1983. Established by federal and state legislation, the BCREB is a business-driven; 501c3 non-profit corporation that oversees and sets policy for federally funded employment and training services in the region. BCREB is doing business as MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board effective October 2017.

The BCREB also has the broader role of addressing critical labor market issues and development strategic alliances with local leaders in economic development, the K-12 and higher education system, government agencies, chambers of commerce, community-based, and labor organizations. The BCREB is the recognized regional vehicle for innovative workforce development and primary resource for labor market information. The Board collects, analyzes and utilizes data to prioritize and allocate workforce resources, and researches, pilots and disseminates promising practices to improve the workforce system.

Mission Statement:

Current:

To provide leadership for workforce development in Berkshire County by aligning education and training with local labor market needs through private and public partnerships.

Proposed:

To develop partnerships, generate resources, and advocate for workforce solutions that result in a skilled workforce, prospering businesses, and equitable access to meaningful career pathways and quality employment for residents and youth.

Vision statement: Our vision is a thriving, inclusive, and resilient regional economy where businesses, residents and youth have equitable access to workforce development resources and to quality employment opportunities. We envision a better future for people, youth and businesses of Berkshire County through meaningful work and sustainable growth.

Diversity statement: As a leader in workforce development, Berkshire Workforce Board is committed to having Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion embedded into the programs and services we offer, reflected in the people we impact and our workplace culture. Our vision of a society where upward economic mobility is possible for all – cannot be accomplished alone, but through the collective efforts and support of our staff, partners, board members and the communities in which we live and serve.

Industry & Occupational Strategies: Berkshire Workforce Board helps employers build a competitive advantage by using data-driven, tailored grants designed to maximize impact with a focus on empowering diverse communities to solve their biggest workforce challenges. These programs aim to equip current and future generations with the tools they need to succeed in the marketplace by strategically investing in today's most pressing workforce needs while creating a more equitable and accessible society. Incumbents and unemployed workers can each access the resources and networks they need to grow their career.

Youth Advancement Strategies: Berkshire Workforce Board creates opportunities for youth and young adults to define an early career trajectory and reach their highest potential. Through a mix of in-person, hybrid, and virtual work experiences, innovative programming, dynamic partnerships, and comprehensive work readiness training, we meet the emerging needs of employers and foster career exploration for participants. Our hands-on career readiness curriculum, combined with tangible outcomes, supports participants in gaining sustainable and fulfilling employment. Since 1992, the BCREB has strived to improve the core competencies and readiness of Berkshire youth (ages 14-21) to be successful workforce contributors. The BCREB prepares youth to be ready for college and careers by integrating career awareness, skills building and work readiness opportunities into school, out-of-school programs and work-based learning opportunities.

Workforce development is our business. The BCREB helps bridge the skills gap between labor market needs and the workforce through coordination of resources/services. We identify the gaps between employer needs in priority occupations and the supply of workers, and work to increase the capacity for adult literacy programs and career centers. The BCREB has a strong sector-based approach for addressing labor force challenges in the region and has received both state and federal recognition for our efforts. Since 2000, the BCREB has also chartered and overseen MassHire Berkshire Career Center (formerly known as BerkshireWorks) which assist the 32 Berkshire Communities.

In 2009 the BCREB was designated as a High Performing Workforce Board - a process that involved documenting systems and procedures that ensure effective leadership and service to companies and job seekers in the region, development of strong partnerships, creativity in solutions to complex workforce problems, and accountability over public resources.

To ensure continued success for the BCREB's impact and initiatives, a comprehensive evaluation process is implemented and adherence to all funding source mandates. The BCREB actively engages key stakeholders to develop, market, and support the critical importance of workforce development to our regional economy.

BCREB services include:

- **For employers** (over 500 served each year): Finding and keeping the right employees through quality screening and assistance in identifying critical training opportunities.

- ***For youth*** (over 2,000 served each year): Providing internships and career information that lead to informed career and post-secondary decisions and help in finding the most important first job.
- ***For agencies and schools*** (over 75 served each year): Interpreting local labor market needs and helping design new programs for constituents that meet these needs.
- ***For adults*** (over 4,000 served each year): MassHire helps people understand their interests and capabilities, find appropriate training needs, and move into quality jobs.

Development of the Current Strategic Plan:

This new 5-year plan expanded from the BCREB's first Strategic Plan in 2004 which was subsequently updated for 2007, 2010 and 2017. The methods used to create these strategies included:

- Analyzing existing economic development reports for the region
- Researching existing and new workforce development programs
- Identifying successful initiatives to be expanded
- Researching best practices
- Conducting a Board member/community leader retreat with focus groups
- Issuing a community SWOT analysis (on-line)
- Reviewing job vacancy data, projected hiring needs and gathering additional labor market information
- Compile series of recommendations and incorporate the findings into a strategic plan

Summary of the Current Environment:

Conducted during the second half of 2021 and during a pandemic, this labor market blueprint is intended to assist economic and workforce development partners understand the regional labor market, with a specific focus on identifying opportunities for employers and job seekers. It will enable the workforce system and our economic and community partners to set priorities and make policy decisions regarding the use of public job training resources.

The Workforce Report provides information and analysis in three inter-connected arenas and provides an appendix which outlines data resources and detailed data tables.

- *Workforce Supply* – Describes the demographic characteristics of Berkshire County's populations and how it has changed over time.
- *Workforce Demand* – Identifies which industries and sectors drive the region's economy. Included are the industries and occupations that are most critical to employment wages.
- *Training and Skill Development* – Identifies the issues and opportunities facing employers and educators in determining and addressing workplace skills, including results from recent surveys of county employers

Workforce Supply

Unemployment rates have declined over the past several years, mirroring state and national trends, but still hover between 3-5% in the Berkshires. Workforce development strengths include the ability to develop training and lifelong learning opportunities quickly, the innovation and creative minds of the people, and the vast array of recreational and cultural opportunities. Business strengths include quality of life, close proximity to major cities, and quality educational systems.

Retaining, recruiting and developing a larger workforce are critical to enable business to replenish aging workers and to grow in size and volume. Workforce development challenges include the lack of a skilled workforce, out-migration of youth under the age of 18 (-4.9%) and 18-44 year old/young families (-42%), rising drop out rates, and a high percentage of 45-64 age workers about to retire. Business development challenges include healthcare costs, unemployment insurance, lack of tax credits and transportation.

Minority populations represent 5% of the population, but are growing rapidly. It is anticipated that 4% of the region's population may not speak English as their first language.

Berkshire County has a much greater high school graduate population than state and national averages, and has 5% fewer people with less than a high school education. Over 28% of the households in the region earn less than \$25,000 annually, and it is estimated that 6.5% of the families in the region live below poverty level.

Workforce Demand

Five critical industries stood out as being main sources of employment for residents, sustaining living wages, and based on occupational structure, holding some promise of career advancement for workers:

- Health Care and Social Assistance (19% of employment)
- Retail Trade (14.8% of employment)
- Travel and Tourism (11.5% of employment)
- Educational Services (10% of employment)
- Business Services (10% of employment)
- Manufacturing (8% of employment)
- Construction (12% seasonal)
- Other Sectors (15%) including; Trade & transportation, public admin; natural resources & mining; Gov't; other services (Source: ES202 data 2021)

A set of slightly different criteria revealed additional emerging industries:

- Retail (electronics and appliance, sporting goods/hobby/book/music, and building material/garden supply stores) – growing by 7.2%
- Manufacturing (fabricated metal product, nonmetallic mineral, and chemical) – growing by 2.8%
- Business Services (administrative and support services) – growing by 2.5%
- Travel and Tourism related (accommodation and food service) – growing by 2.3%
- Finance, Insurance and Real Estate (real estate, rental and leasing) – growing by 2.2%

Across these industries, labor shortages are common. As a result, employers in many fields are relaxing their entrance requirements and require more training. Retention is also a common issue, although it varies from industry to industry.

Occupations with the *most jobs* include retail salespersons, cashiers, waiters, office clerks, general managers, registered nurses and bookkeepers. Occupations *adding the most jobs* between 2020-2025 include food serve workers, registered nurses, teacher assistants, home health aids, landscaping workers and computer support specialists. Occupations *growing the fastest* between 2020-25 include computer support specialist, software engineers, network systems administrators, medical assistants, social/human service assistances, and personal care aides.

Training and Skill Development

There are more than 60 education and training providers in Berkshire County including community colleges, community based organizations, consultants and other public and private training programs that work with employers to develop training programs. The following training needs have been identified as priorities for the region:

- Personal skills (89%)
- Interpersonal skills (83%)
- Basic skills (79%)
- Thinking skills (71%)
- Resource skills (63%)
- Information skills (53%)
- Technology skills (38%)
- Systems skills (29%)

The top training needs for the next 3-5 years include

- Communication – including interpersonal skills and time management
- Management/Supervisory – including leadership development
- Computers/Information Systems – including spreadsheets, data manipulation, word processing and using the Internet
- Customer Service
- Human Resource Development – including employment law, recruitment and sexual harassment

More than ½ of the business community indicates that new technology, new equipment, new processes or work methods, and employee turnover will require their employees to acquire new knowledge or skills in the next 3-5 years alone. The top industry-specific training needs are:

- Customer satisfaction
- Healthcare specialists
- Teachers/Administrators
- OSHA and safety issues
- ADA Compliance

- Applied Technology and Manufacturing
- Cultural Competency

The development of basic skills leading to credentials is critical to retain employees. Employers need to retain the 18-44 year olds in the labor market through long-term employment and career ladder opportunities. It is imperative to prepare workers to fill immediate labor shortages in critical occupations. There is also a critical need to continually upgrade the current workforce in order to meet the needs of changing technology and processes.

Recommendations

With a few exceptions, there is generally a lack of awareness of the public workforce system and its programs. Employers did, however, have suggestions for a regional labor market intermediary. They included:

- Encourage and enhance training – with greater emphasis on essential skills of reading, basic math skills and general work readiness for new entrants to the labor market and incumbent workers.
- Encourage and support the development of youth.
- Increase resources for education and training, and provide assistance to employers to apply for public funds.
- Expand access to work for low-skilled, minority, and other disadvantaged workers, through improved transportation, child care and other supports.
- Assist employers to organize, both within and across industries, to meet common workforce development needs such as purchasing equipment; develop common training programs, and jointly promoting industries to youth.

This informational blueprint was developed to help prioritize regional workforce and economic development needs. For more information, please contact the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board (www.MassHireBerkshire.com).

Strategic Plan 2022-2026

Based on the comprehensive analysis of regional labor market needs, challenges and priorities, the following are the four strategic goals for the BCREB:

Goal 1 – To be the recognized catalyst for innovative workforce development and Labor Market Resource in Berkshire County

Objective A- To provide accurate and timely information on current and future employer hiring and training needs and the readiness of local workforce to fill those needs

- To produce quarterly labor market reports to distribute to the community. (Metric - 4 reports)
- To convene monthly with business leaders to obtain current labor market information (Metric - 12 business meetings)

Objective B - To increase the capacity of companies to access training resources in order to upgrade the skills of their workforce

- To promote the Workforce Training Fund, Express Program, and Hiring Incentive Training Grant to companies (Metric - conduct 3 training sessions; target 75 companies)
- To utilize marketing efforts to market programs (Metric - issue 250 flyers)
- To assist 15 companies with submitting applications (Metric - 15 successful applications)

Objective C - To increase the effectiveness and visibility of the BCREB and workforce system.

- To gain private sector leader advocates (Metric - 2 new private sector board members)
- To conduct executive meetings with businesses (Metric - 12 new employer meetings)
- To continue to review Workforce Training Fund applications (Metric - 100% participation in reviews)

Objective D – To implement Regional Skills Strategy Plan

- To convene regional stakeholders and review labor market supply and demand data in order to develop a countywide economic, education and workforce strategy (Metric – Regional Workforce, Economic & Educational Blueprint strategy)
- To market regional strategies & opportunities (Metric - 4 media outlets)

Goal 2 - To improve core competencies and readiness of youth

Objective A- To connect youth to career immersion (work-based learning activities)

- To increase the number of high school internships (Metric - 400 internships)
- To increase the number of STEM internships (Metric - 150 STEM)
- To increase the number of structured work based learning experiences (Metric - 100 Youth Works/WIA)

Objective B - To connect youth to career awareness & exploration activities

- To increase the number of youth participating in career awareness activities (Metric - 200 awareness)
- To increase the number of youth in exploration activities (Metric -800 exploration)

- To increase the number of youth in STEM focused activities (Metric - 400 STEM activities)

Objective C - To expand teacher externships and professional development opportunities

- To increase the number of educators participation in teacher externships (Metric – 10 teachers conduct externships)
- To increase the number of educators participating in college/career readiness professional development activities (Metric – 25 teachers participating in relevant professional development activities)
- To increase the number of youth participating (Metric - 80 youth obtain certificate)

Objective D - To sustain the Berkshire employer engagement campaign

- To increase the number of employers participating in career awareness (Metric - 150 employers)
- To increase the number of employers participating in career exploration activities (Metric - 400 employers)
- To increase the number of companies participating in immersion activities (Metric - 220 employers)

Goal 3 – Align skills gap between labor market needs and the workforce

Objective A - To provide current labor market information to community and training providers

- To update Workforce Blueprint twice annually (Metric - 2 blueprint updates)
- To update Careers brochures (Metric - brochures developed for Healthcare, Manufacturing, Finance, Education, Travel/Tourism and Construction and distributed to education/training providers)
- To provide Labor Market Fact Sheets to educators (Metric - 4 LMI reports)
- To explore innovative models for mentoring, business resources, and excellence centers (Metric - # of grants applied for and received)

Objective B - To educate training providers on labor market needs

- To use timely data to prioritize and allocate resources for adult and youth programs and career center services (Metric - # of ITAs in critical industries)
- To host labor market session for educators (Metric - 15 participants)

- To provide labor market information to 4 post-secondary trainers (Metric - 4 trainers)

Objective C - To develop and/or enhance healthcare sector training

- To conduct needs assessment for healthcare sector (Metric - needs analysis completed)
- To research funding and apply for resources to train healthcare workers (Metric - 50 trained)

Objective D - To develop and/or enhance manufacturing sector training

- To conduct needs assessment for manufacturing sector (Metric - needs analysis completed)
- To research funding and apply for resources to train manufacturing workers (Metric - 25 trained)

Goal 4 - To ensure continued success through evaluation and adherence to mandates

Objective A - To evaluate the work of the BCREB

- To actively engage all Board members in 1 committee (Metric 75% board participation)
- To develop/implement community evaluation tool (Metric - increase participation by 5%)

Objective B - To increase revenue for board operations

- To actively identify and apply for funding opportunities (Metric - increase the number of grants applied for and resources received; goal is \$25K)

Objective C - To maintain effective collaborative partnerships

- To continue to participate on 1Berkshire Alliance (Metric - attend 75% of meetings and participate in one activity/program)
- To continue to participate on Berkshire Compact (Metric - attend 75% of meetings and participate in one activity/program)
- To continue to participate on Berkshire Chamber (Metric - attend 75% of meetings and participate in one activity/program)
- To continue to be integrated into CEDS, Chamber, Compact and 1Berkshire strategies (Metric - workforce integrated into economic development plans)

Objective D - To maintain High Performing Workforce Investment Board status

- To complete REB certification process (Metric - certification)

Goal 5 – Road to reemployment and recovery – Strategy for employers, career changers, job seekers and youth

Objective A – Align strategies to assist companies with their short-term & long-term recruitment and retention efforts.

Objective B – Strengthen collaborations and partners to assist career changers and job seekers with their immediate workforce needs.

Objective C – Continue to promote and engage youth in career awareness, exploration and immersion activities.

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Berkshire County Workforce Development Priorities FY2022 – Building Tomorrow’s Workforce

*To provide leadership for workforce development in Berkshire County
by aligning education and training with local labor market needs*

Labor Market Need	Strategy	Objective	Metric	Goal	YTD
Recognized catalyst for innovative workforce development and Labor Market Resource	Implement Regional Skills Strategy Plan	Produce a regional workforce, economic, & education blueprint with labor market supply & demand	Host regional sessions Develop Blueprint Develop marketing strategies for career pathway enhancement	Blueprint by Dec	
	Provide current LMI data to community	Gather LMI data quarterly Convene with business leaders	Produce quarterly dashboard Annual workforce blueprint Meet monthly with business leaders	4 reports 1 annual 12 business	
	Increase the number of companies accessing training resources	Promote Workforce Training	Conduct 3 workforce training sessions; target 75 companies; 4 media outlets and 250 flyers mailed Assist 15 companies with applications	75 companies 4 media 250 flyers 15 apply	
	Increase effectiveness and visibility of BCREB and workforce system	Gain private sector leader advocates	Engage 2 private sector leaders on board Conduct site visits Review Workforce Training fund grants	3 leaders 12 new companies	
	Improve core competencies and readiness of youth	Connect youth to Career Immersion (work-based-learning) activities	Increase # of internships & structured work experiences; increased focus on STEM	# internships/work experiences # STEM internships # specialized WBL experiences (i.e. Youth Works, WIA)	400 150 100
	Connect youth to Career Awareness & Exploration activities	Increase # of Career Awareness (i.e. career fair) & Exploration (i.e. job shadow) activities	#youth in awareness activities #youth in exploration activities #youth in STEM focused activities	200 800 400	
	Expand teacher externships & professional development opportunities	*Increase # educators participating TE & college/career readiness professional development	# teachers in externships # educators participating in professional development	10 25	
	Sustain Employer Engagement campaign	*Increase # of employers participating in Activities *Market program to community	#employers in career awareness #employers in exploration #employers in immersion activities	150 400 220	

Bridge skills gap between labor market needs and workforce	Know Labor Market information	Update Blueprint Needs assessment Explore Innovative models for mentoring, business resources & excellence centers	Update career sheets Develop LMI Fact sheets Business Resources Models for Mentoring	5 career sheets 4LMI Assist 15 organizations	
	Educate training providers on LMI needs	Aligning curriculum with sector needs	Host labor market session Provide LMI to 4 post-secondary trainers 2 media outlets #ITAs in critical industries	15 attend 4 trainers 2 media 65% ITAs	
	Develop/enhance Healthcare sector training	Conduct assessment for healthcare Develop training for industry sector	Healthcare needs assessment to identify critical pathways # people trained and find employment	50 trained	
	Develop/enhance Manufacturing sector training	Conduct assessment for manufacturing Develop training for industry	Manufacturing needs assessment to identify pathway opportunities #people trained and find employment	25 trained	
Ensure continued success through evaluation and adherence to mandates	Evaluate work of the BCREB	Engage all Board members in 1 Committee Develop/implement community evaluation tool	Board engagement (22 Board members active) 5% community engagement	75% participation 5% community	
	Increase revenue for board operations	Identify and apply for funding opportunities	# grants applied for New resources	\$25K Add staff	
	Maintain effective collaborative partnerships	Participation on 1Berkshire Participation in Berkshire Chamber Participation in Berkshire Compact	75% participation Involvement in 1 activity/program BCREB integrated into economic development plans	75% participation	
	Complete REB Recertification process	Meet state/federal requirements	BCREB Certification	Certification & clean audit	
Road to Reemployment	Identify employer short term needs	Meet with 50 companies	Share aggregate report		
	Identify career changer & Job seeker	Gather info from 250 people	Share aggregate report & identify training		

	needs		opportunities		
	Identify youth needs immediate and longterm	Gather from 75 youth	Share aggregate report & establish solutions		