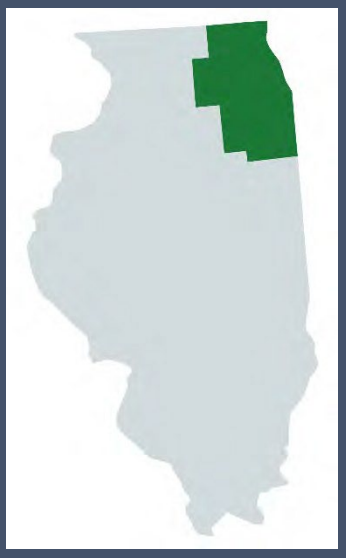
NORTHEAST ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REGION (NEEDR)



Regional WIOA Plan, 2024-2028

Plan Modification 2026

ILLINOIS workNet® CENTER

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CHAPTER 1: ECONOMIC & WORKFORCE ANALYSIS

A. Provide an analysis of the factors listed below:

1. Economic conditions including existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations (Sec. 679.560(a)(1)(i))
   a. What are the targeted industries, high-impact industry clusters, and in-demand occupations in the region?
   b. What industries have favorable location quotients?
   c. What industries and occupations have favorable demand projections based on growth?
   d. What industries and occupations have favorable demand projections based on replacements?
   e. What industries are considered mature but still important to the economy?
   f. What industries are considered emerging in the regional economy?
   g. What is the projected regional key in-demand occupations?
   h. What sources of supply and demand data were used to determine the targeted industries occupations and skills?

Introduction to Labor Market Information

The data analysis conducted for this plan includes data provided by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity in the 2024 Regional Plan Data Packet for EDR 4 – Northeast, the Illinois Department of Employment Security's Labor Market Information Resource Center, and Lightcast (formerly EMSI/Burning Glass). This plan was updated in 2026 with the by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity in the 2025 Regional Plan Data Packet for EDR 4 – Northeast. The combination of these three data sources provides the broadest perspective on the labor market situation for the NEEDR. Because the region is very large and densely populated it is critical to be able to refine the data analysis to identify trends and conditions that will impact the workforce and employment strategies of the region.

Much of the data analysis is based on 2020-2024 when available. The 10-year projection data may be able to provide a picture of where the regional economy is headed but will be influenced by the impacts of the pandemic and the recovery coming out of that time period.

Using the data to map out a plan for the future is going to require additional intelligence for the Regional Integrated Business Team to best understand the industry pains and areas of opportunity for real-time services. Looking at the labor market data through an inclusivity lens requires an analysis of the workforce in 2026. There are lingering challenges contributing to some groups not rejoining the workforce and these challenges pose needed service strategies that the region can focus on in the near and long term. The current data sets do not capture this information fully. As industry continues to be challenged with filling open positions, the region will continue to see changes in the skills and education requirements, changes in wages and benefits, and movement in the workforce seeking out better jobs, wages and work/life balance not readily captured in data.

Through the draft Illinois' Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Unified State Plan, the State has provided direction on analysis of economic conditions. This Northeast Economic Development Region (NEEDR) plan will use similar analysis in this document. Table 1 details the changes in gross domestic product (GDP) and personal income for the NEEDR and Illinois between 2018 and 2024. Data was obtained through the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. While there was a slight dip in GDP between 2019 and 2020 presumably due to the pandemic, there is an upward trend which is significant when examined over time.

Table 1	**Gross Domestic Product (millions of dollars)**									
	2018	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**	**2018-2022**	**2020-2022**	**2018-2023(4)**
NEEDR	$656,826	$664,321	$628,745	$663,479	$672,649	$690,888	NA	2.41%	6.98%	5.18%
Illinois	$851,517	$857,985	$810,210	$852,749	$864,170	$884,965	$899,126	1.48%	6.66%	5.59%
	Personal Income									
	2018	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**			
NEEDR	$546,635	$561,950	$592,684	$640,985	$639,985	NA	NA	17.078%	7.98%	NA
Illinois	$707,359	$722,326	$752,460	$775,012	$725,404	$761,677	NA	2.55%	(3.59%)	7.68%

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, Department of Commerce, Updated January 2026

Between 2018-2020 the NEEDR's GDP change fared well and was comparable to the State of Illinois GDP change in the same time period. Personal Income increased in NEEDR and state and nation between 2018 and 2022, with a significant jump after the pandemic. The State did not see the same increase in personal income after 2020. Since 2022, the GDP and Personal Income continue to increase past pre-pandemic levels.

Table 2 details industry sectors in the NEEDR at the 2-digit NAICS (North American Industry Classification System) level, as well as employment changes between 2020-2030, location quotient and demand. The information used for this table was produced by IDES, however, due to the timing of the data production and planning cycle, the level of demand (Leading, Emerging, Maturing Industries) and Location Quotients were obtained using Lightcast data.

The top industries in the NEEDR at the 2-digit NAICS level based on projected employment numbers in 2030 are Health Care & Social Assistance (604,424 jobs), Retail Trade (407,698 jobs), Professional/Scientific/Technical Services (397,151 jobs), Manufacturing (376,843 jobs), and Educational Services (370,839 jobs). These top industries have only changed somewhat in order since 2020 but each industry's projected job growth is estimated to expand. The Health Care & Social Assistance industry reports the greatest job change of 9.17% or over 55,000 jobs. In fact, the overall region's employment base is showing growth projections during this time period of nearly 9%.

Table 2 was updated with 2024 Location Quotients to understand the regional shifts within industry. Accommodation and Food Services saw the highest growth going from .90 to .96. Several areas such as Health Care, Retail, and Manufacturing saw slight growth with just raising a point or two (.01). Management of Companies and Information saw the greatest decline with losing .10 in the market. Professional Services also saw a decline of .08 within their Location Quotient.

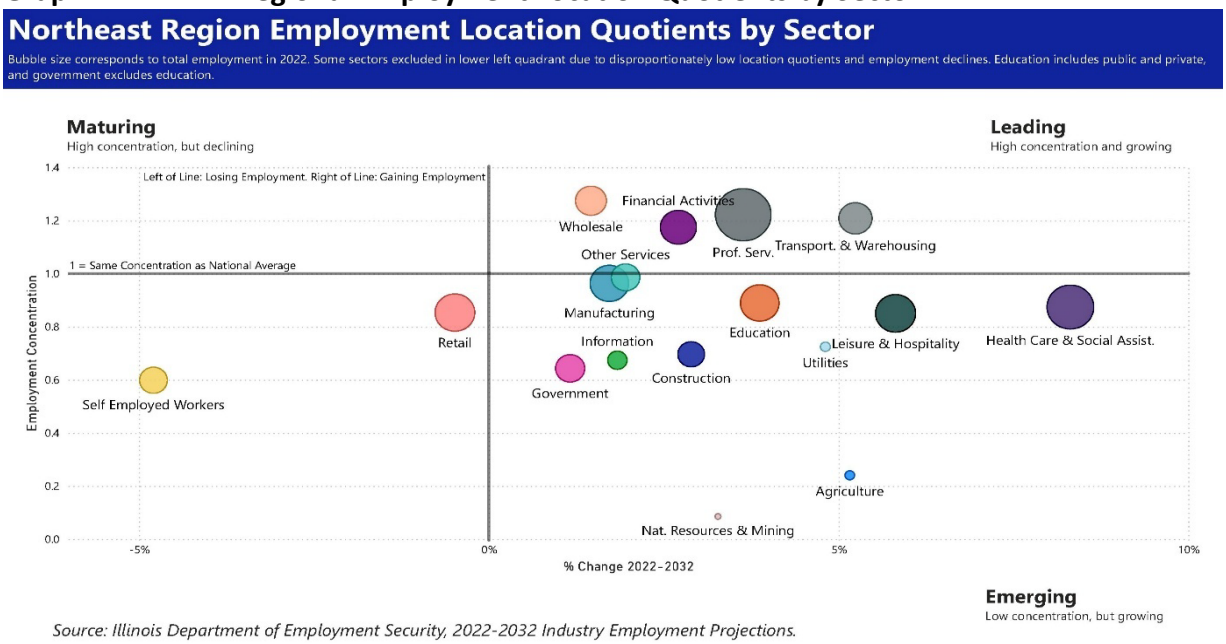
Table 2: NEEDR Employment by Major Industry Sector

NAICS Title	2020 Employment	Share of Total 2020 NEEDR Employment	2030 Employment	Net Employment Change 2020-2030	Percent Employment Change 2020-2030	Employment and LQ (2020)	Employment and LQ (2024)
Health Care and Social Assistance	549,018	12.65%	604,424	55,406	9.17%	(.98) Emerging	(.99) Emerging
Retail Trade	385,436	8.88%	417,697	32,261	7.72%	(.92) Emerging	(.93) Emerging
Manufacturing	364,410	8.40%	376,843	12,433	3.30%	(1.07) Leading	(1.09) Leading
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	360,985	8.32%	397,151	36,166	9.11%	(1.23) Leading	(1.15) Leading
Educational Services	358,162	8.25%	370,839	12,677	3.42%	(1.34) Leading	(1.31) Leading
Admin. & Support & Waste Mgmt. & Remediation Services	329,135	7.58%	357,993	28,858	8.06%	(1.24) Leading	(1.19) Leading
Accommodation and Food Services	276,492	6.37%	369,112	92,620	25.09%	(.90) Emerging	(.96) Emerging
Finance and Insurance	257,357	5.93%	271,627	14,270	5.25%	(1.29) Leading	(1.25) Leading
Transportation, Warehousing	254,229	5.86%	300,957	46,728	15.53%	(1.37) Leading	(1.37) Leading
Wholesale Trade	220,321	5.08%	227,070	6,749	2.97%	(1.30) Leading	(1.30) Leading
Government	207,167	4.77%	222,656	15,489	6.96%	(.77) Emerging	(.80) Emerging
Other Services	182,060	4.20%	201,462	19,402	9.63%	(1.02) Leading	(1.03) Leading
Construction	152,739	3.52%	170,781	18,042	10.56%	(.74) Emerging	(.73) Emerging
Information	71,857	1.66%	73,932	2,075	2.81%	(.89) Emerging	(.79) Emerging
Management of Companies and Enterprises	67,428	1.55%	68,214	786	1.15%	(1.02) Leading	.92) Leading
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	64,306	1.48%	69,190	4,884	7.06%	(.98) Emerging	(.95) Emerging
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	49,356	1.14%	84,343	34,987	41.48%	(1.01) Leading	(1.02) Leading
Agricultural Production	10,337	0.24%	10,523	186	1.77%	(.19) Emerging	(.19) Emerging
Natural Resources and Mining	1,581	0.04%	1,643	62	3.77%	(.11) Emerging	(.09) Emerging
Total	**4,339,339**	**100.00%**	**4,760,646**	**421,307**	**8.85%**		

Source 2020-2030 Employment: Illinois Department of Employment Security
Source 2020 and 2024 Location Quotient: Lightcast Data Analytics

Graph 1 provides an updated look at the employment projections from 2022 to 2032. Health Care & Social Assistance remains the top Leading industry with showing growth well over 5% with Leisure & Hospitality and Transportation & Warehousing coming in 2nd and 3rd respectively. Professional/Scientific/Technical Services and Education still show high concentration of employment along with growth although not quite hitting the 5% mark as the other three industries. Retail on the other hand is predicting a decline within the regional both in employment and concentration compared to the national average.

Graph 1 – NEEDR Regional Employment Location Quotients by Sector



Source: Illinois Department of Employment Security, 2022-2032 Industry Employment Projections.

Table 3 below details the top occupations at the 2-digit SOC (Standard Occupational Classification) level. The top occupations in the NEEDR in 2020 included Office and Administrative Support Occupations (571,042 jobs); Transportation and Material Moving Occupations (441,037 jobs); Sales and Related Occupations (415,264 jobs); Management Occupations (339,039 jobs) and Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations (285,099 jobs).

Office and Administrative Support Occupations makes up the largest percentage share of occupations in the NEEDR in 2020 at 13.31% of all jobs and is projected to experience a slight decline in jobs between 2020-2030 (-6,344 jobs or -1.10%). Not surprisingly, Transportation and Material Moving Occupations is projected to have an increase of over 65,000 jobs, which is nearly 15% in the 10-year period. With the exception of Office and Administrative Support, all other major occupational categories are projected to grow over the 10-year timeframe with the regional total of 421,307 jobs or nearly 10% growth.

All but one of the twenty-two major occupational categories are projecting a level of positive job change. Not unexpectedly, Food Preparation and Serving Occupations are projected to add the largest number of jobs in the 10-year period which is mainly a result of the rebound from the job loss in this sector during the pandemic. Given the significant increase in jobs in the Transportation and Distribution industry sector, there will be a similar increase in

Table 3: Regional Employment by Major Occupational Sector

Standard Occupational Classification (SOC)		2020	Share of Total	2030	Employment Change 2020-2030		Average Annual Job Openings due to			
Code	Title	Emp.	2020	Emp.	Number	Percent	Exits	Transfer	Growth	Total
43-0000	Office & Administrative Support Occupations	577,386	13.31%	571,042	-6,344	-1.10	27,499	35,732	-634	62,597
53-0000	Transportation & Material Moving Occupations	441,037	10.16%	506,339	65,302	14.81	21,848	37,409	6,530	65,787
41-0000	Sales & Related Occupations	415,264	9.57%	443,536	28,272	6.81	20,645	33,304	2,827	56,776
11-0000	Management Occupations	339,039	7.81%	376,574	37,535	11.07	8,272	19,893	3,754	31,919
13-0000	Business & Financial Operations Occupations	288,093	6.64%	315,460	27,367	9.50	7,903	17,753	2,737	28,393
35-0000	Food Preparation & Serving Occupations	285,099	6.57%	366,520	81,421	28.56	24,806	33,113	8,142	66,061
51-0000	Production Occupations	280,156	6.46%	286,000	5,844	2.09	10,742	20,235	584	31,561
29-0000	Healthcare Practitioners & Technical Occs	254,119	5.86%	274,712	20,593	8.10	6,662	7,940	2,059	16,661
25-0000	Education, Training & Library Occupations	243,144	5.60%	258,484	15,340	6.31	10,401	11,588	1,534	23,523
31-0000	Healthcare Support Occupations	160,367	3.70%	184,416	24,049	15.00	10,167	10,565	2,405	23,137
15-0000	Computer & Mathematical Occupations	156,743	3.61%	173,571	16,828	10.74	3,431	8,140	1,683	13,254
49-0000	Installation, Maintenance & Repair Occs	151,140	3.48%	166,429	15,289	10.12	5,065	9,968	1,529	16,562
47-0000	Construction & Extraction Occupations	139,466	3.21%	153,572	14,106	10.11	4,322	9,859	1,411	15,592
37-0000	Building & Grounds Cleaning & Maint. Occs	135,012	3.11%	148,634	13,622	10.09	8,091	10,326	1,362	19,779
33-0000	Protective Service Occupations	95,256	2.20%	105,997	10,741	11.28	4,781	6,512	1,074	12,367
39-0000	Personal Care & Service Occupations	92,185	2.12%	116,688	24,503	26.58	6,495	8,243	2,450	17,188
21-0000	Community & Social Services Occupations	77,098	1.78%	84,741	7,643	9.91	2,813	5,151	764	8,728
27-0000	Arts/Design/Entertainment, Sports/Media Occs	71,353	1.64%	78,156	6,803	9.53	2,821	4,689	680	8,190
17-0000	Architecture & Engineering Occupations	58,655	1.35%	62,899	4,244	7.24	1,448	2,902	424	4,774
23-0000	Legal Occupations	42,033	0.97%	47,289	5,256	12.50	1,201	1,684	526	3,411
19-0000	Life, Physical & Social Science Occupations	31,468	0.73%	34,223	2,755	8.75	669	2,258	276	3,203
45-0000	Farming, Fishing & Forestry Occupations	5,226	0.12%	5,364	138	2.64	223	599	14	836
00-0000	**Total, All Occupations**	**4,339,339**	**100.00%**	**4,760,646**	**421,307**	**9.71**	**190,304**	**297,864**	**42,131**	**530,299**

Source 2020-2030 Employment: Illinois Department of Employment Security
Source 2020 Location Quotient: Lightcast Data Analytics

Transportation and Material Moving Occupations employment change. This trend holds for the average annual opening in major occupational categories where employment growth is strongest in Food Preparation and Serving occupations and Transportation and Material Moving Occupations. It is important to note that strong growth is expected in Sales, Management, Finance, and Healthcare Occupational categories as well. These occupational trends provide strong support for the selected industry targets for the NEEDR highlighted later in this chapter.

Location quotient is a helpful way of understanding how concentrated a specific industry is in a Region compared to the nation and what makes a Region "unique" in comparison to the national average. Industry sectors are defined in three separate groupings based on location quotient. These grouping detail the level of demand the industry is in the Region:

Category	Number of Workers	Projected Change	Location Quotient
LEADING	High/Medium	Net Growth	Above 1.0
EMERGING	Medium/Low	Net Growth	Below 1.0
MATURING	High/Medium	Net Loss	Below 1.0

- **Leading Industries**: industries that are expected to grow during the projection period, and which are important within the state (i.e., have a location quotient greater than 1.0)
- **Emerging Industries**: industries that are not strongly represented in the current economy (i.e., have a location quotient that is less than 1.0), but are expected to grow during the projection period.
- **Maturing Industries**: industries that are important within the state but are not expected to grow during the projection period.

Each of these categories is significant for the economy, job growth and availability and are therefore important for the planning of WIOA and partner programs. In summary, LEADING industries are those that will likely provide the largest numbers of job openings due to their combination of size and growth; EMERGING industries are those that are currently small but are quickly gaining in economic importance and job creation; and MATURING industries are those which have slower job growth but still have significant presence in the economy and will continue to create job openings.

Using Location Quotients provides an indication if an industry has a comparative advantage in employment versus the rest of the US. A value of 1.0 indicates the industry is at the national level, values greater than 1.0 indicate the industry has a comparative advantage versus the nation and those with values less than 1.0 indicate a comparative disadvantage. When an industry has a comparative advantage, the area would want to support continued growth in that sector.

Leading industries in the NEEDR which have the largest employment base include Professional/Scientific/Technical Services, Manufacturing, Administrative Support/Waste Management/Remediation Services, Financial Services, Transportation and Warehousing, and Wholesale Trade. While several industries are categorized as Emerging, they are large and very close to moving above the 1.0 location quotient concentration divider between Leading and Emerging. These include Health Care and Social Assistance, Retail, Accommodation/Food

Services, and Construction.

Tables 4 and 5 display the results of categorizing (according to this methodology) the major industries from Table 3. Major industry categories that are not included in one of these three categories are now dropped from the analysis. Since 2024, there has been slight increases and decreases to the location quotients of these industries. Within Leading Industries, Finance and Insurance, Professional/Scientific/Technical Services, and Administrative Support/Waste Management/Remediation Services showed decreases in their concentration. Manufacturing was the only one that saw a slight increase with the remaining industries staying steady. Within the Emerging Industries, the biggest change came from the Accommodation/Food Services with an increase of .06 concentration. Construction was the only industry that is showing a very slight decrease (-.01) with the rest of the industries showing a slight increase (+.01).

Table 4
LEADING INDUSTRY SECTORS

Industry	2020 Employment	2030 Employment	2020-2030 Net Employment Change	Location Quotient (2020)	Location Quotient (2024)
Total, All Industries	**4,339,339**	**4,760,646**	**421,307**	**1.00**	**1.00**
Transportation and Warehousing	254,229	300,957	46,728	1.37	1.37
Wholesale Trade	220,321	227,070	6,749	1.30	1.30
Finance and Insurance	257,357	271,627	14,270	1.29	1.25
Admin/Support/Waste Mgmt/Remed. Svcs.	329,135	357.993	28,858	1.24	1.19
Professional/Scientific/Technical Services	360,985	397,151	36,166	1.23	1.15
Manufacturing	364,410	376,843	12,433	1.07	1.09

Table 5
EMERGING INDUSTRY SECTORS

Industry	2020 Employment	2030 Employment	2020-2030 Net Employment Change	Location Quotient (2020)	Location Quotient (2024)
Total, All Industries	**4,339,339**	**4,760,646**	**421,307**	**1.00**	**1.00**
Health Care/Social Assistance	549,018	604,424	55,406	0.98	0.99
Retail Trade	385,436	417,697	32,261	0.92	0.93
Accommodations/Food Services	276,492	369,112	92,620	0.9	0.96
Construction	152,739	170,781	18,042	0.74	0.73

2. Employment needs of employers in existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations (§ 679.560(a)(1)(ii)

Based on the data examined in the previous pages and the trends that are known to the LWIAs through their Business Services Representatives and Economic Development Partners, the NEEDR has chosen to focus sector efforts on the following industries, with the understanding that both Clean Energy and Information Technology (IT) underlie many of the other sectors and are important economic drivers in their own right. As an update for 2026, all sectors are relevant within the region and IT continues to grow with the expansion of artificial intelligence (AI).

- Healthcare and Social Assistance (including Life Sciences)
- Manufacturing (with an emphasis on Advanced Manufacturing)
- Transportation and Warehousing
- Information Technology and Professional Services (including Artificial Intelligence (AI))
- Clean Energy – Exploring for future sector efforts

As outlined in Table 2, the first three sectors above are critical to the NEEDR economy and are emerging or leading sectors. NEEDR has broadened its understanding of the Healthcare industry to include the broader Life Sciences industry recognizing the value to the local economy of this industry that bridges sectors such as pharmaceuticals, food manufacturing, environmental and ecological sciences, biotechnology and more. Local Workforce Innovation Areas (LWIA) in the NEEDR also focus on additional sectors as warranted by local conditions.

Update in 2026, Transportation and Warehousing continue to be a mainstay within the area and leads all other industries within Location Quotient. Professional Services also shows consistency and relevance to being included in the conversation as a focused sector of the region. Since this plans conception in 2024, Artificial Intelligence has ballooned as an expanding industry. New technology is allowing new and innovative methods to streamline work in all industries and provide efficiencies.

The economic impact these industries have in the NEEDR is considerable. Table 6 details the aggregate effect on jobs for the Region by industry. Manufacturing is, and continues to be, a sector with tremendous innovation. The Region has always been at the forefront of technological innovation in this industry and intends to maintain that place in national leadership.

Table 6: NEEDR Annual Impact by Sector (Event Size = 100)

	Added Jobs	Direct Jobs	Indirect Jobs	Induced Jobs
Healthcare (62)	100	25	13	77
Jobs to Earning Multiplier	100	$1,988,247.75	$1,054,373.72	$5,394,450.23
Manufacturing (31-33)	100	47	29	164
Jobs to Earning Multiplier	100	$4,880,979	$2,537,140	$12,13,942
IT	100	35	14	141
Jobs to Earning Multiplier	100	$2,710,298.4	$1,034,898	$9,359,893
Transportation and Warehousing	100	37	14	93
Jobs to Earning Multiplier	100	$ 3,069,717	$ 1,405,264	$ 8,081,305

Source: Lightcast 2021.4, Bureau of Economic Analysis

Table 7 below provides a summary of the 20 most frequently posted positions in the NEEDR on common online platforms. This data was updated with data from 2025 to reflect the current market. The most frequently posted positions continue to be those that are tied to the key industry sectors that are being targeted in the Region. To identify demand for employees, a report on all jobs posted in the major employment sectors was reviewed. The data used in the following analysis is from Lightcast. Lightcast collects job postings from common online platforms and identifies the most commonly required skills and certifications. Tables 8, 9, and 10 display the most frequently cited "specialized skills," "common skills," and "software skills" found in the 2025 job postings.

Additional analysis of the demand for employees in specific occupations found in the targeted industry sectors is discussed in more detail later in this Chapter.In addition to the secondary data trends that have been displayed in this Chapter, it is important to recognize the change in working arrangements since the pandemic. There has been a significant increase in remote and work from home (WFH) employment arrangements. In the Illinois WIOA Plan for 2024-2028 it was noted that the pandemic permanency increased work from home employment equivalent to almost 40 years of pre-pandemic growth. Data indicates that working from home is more common in major cities than in smaller cities and towns. Given that the NEEDR is a major metropolitan area, it is expected that WFH employment status will continue to exist in the region. This trend has implications for the employment needs of the employers in the region and local workforce areas in the NEEDR will continue to incorporate strategies that address this trend especially when conducting career coaching with job seekers and working with employers on recruitment activities. In 2026, WFH options with fully remote and hybrid jobs being standard in job searches.

Table 7 – Top 20 Job Postings in the NEEDR (2026)

Occupation (SOC)	Unique Postings (Jan 2025 – Dec 2025)	Number of Employers Competing (Jan 2025 – Dec 2025)	Median Posting Duration in Days
Registered Nurses	48,718	1,952	19
Retail Salespersons	26,065	2,324	28
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	25,196	2,130	31
Software Developers	19,760	3,083	19
Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products	17,395	4,275	27
Customer Service Representatives	16,905	3,834	23
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	16,224	952	24
First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	15,487	1,948	26
Financial Managers	14,828	3,208	25
Computer Occupations, All Other	14,486	2,635	22
General and Operations Managers	13,941	3,759	25
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	13,656	2,688	22
Sales Managers	13,130	4,165	28
Medical and Health Services Managers	12,906	1,979	25
Project Management Specialists	12,525	3,081	21
Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	12,083	3,028	26
Health Technologists and Technicians, All Other	11,125	1,120	23
Marketing Managers	11,078	2,527	25
First-Line Supervisors of Office and Administrative Support Workers	10,418	3,410	24
Financial and Investment Analysts	9,992	2,088	25

Source: Lightcast, Job Posting Analytics (2026)

Table 8 – Top Specialized Skills - Updated 2026

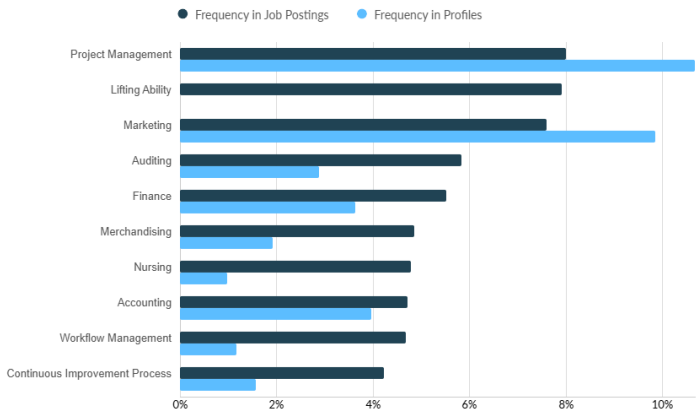


Table 9 – Top Common Skills - Updated 2026

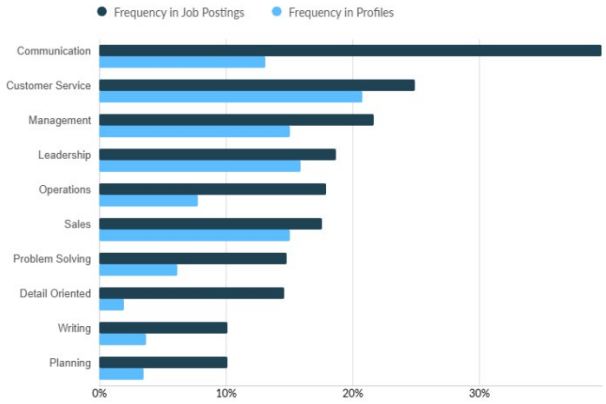
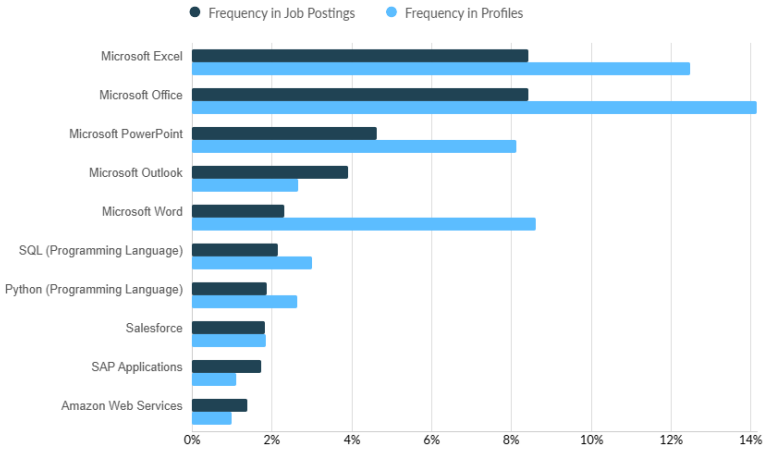


Table 10 – Top Software Skills - Updated 2026



3. Knowledge and skills needed to meet the employment needs of the employers in the region, including employment needs in in-demand industry sectors and occupations (§ 679.560(a)(2));
   a. What are the targeted career pathway clusters in the region?
   b. What skills are in demand in the region?
   c. How well do the existing skills of job seekers match the demands of local businesses?

The Region is targeting the five industry sectors of Healthcare and Social Assistance, Manufacturing, Transportation and Warehousing, Information Technology, and Clean Energy for its work overall, and each is also an area where the Region has or is developing comprehensive career pathways and training opportunities. As an update in 2026, the regional is including Professional Services (including Artificial Intelligence (AI)) with the Information Technology sector. This expansion represents needed industry that is highlighted to be in growth over the next 10 years in Graph 1 above.

In 2016 the Region received funding from DCEO and hired a consultant (EDSI, Inc.) to develop industry guides and manuals, industry and occupational focused PowerPoint templates, industry sector information sheets, and demand occupation information sheets. This project was intended to aid both One-Stop staff and job seeking customers in understanding opportunities in the ten county Region in the four main industry sectors:

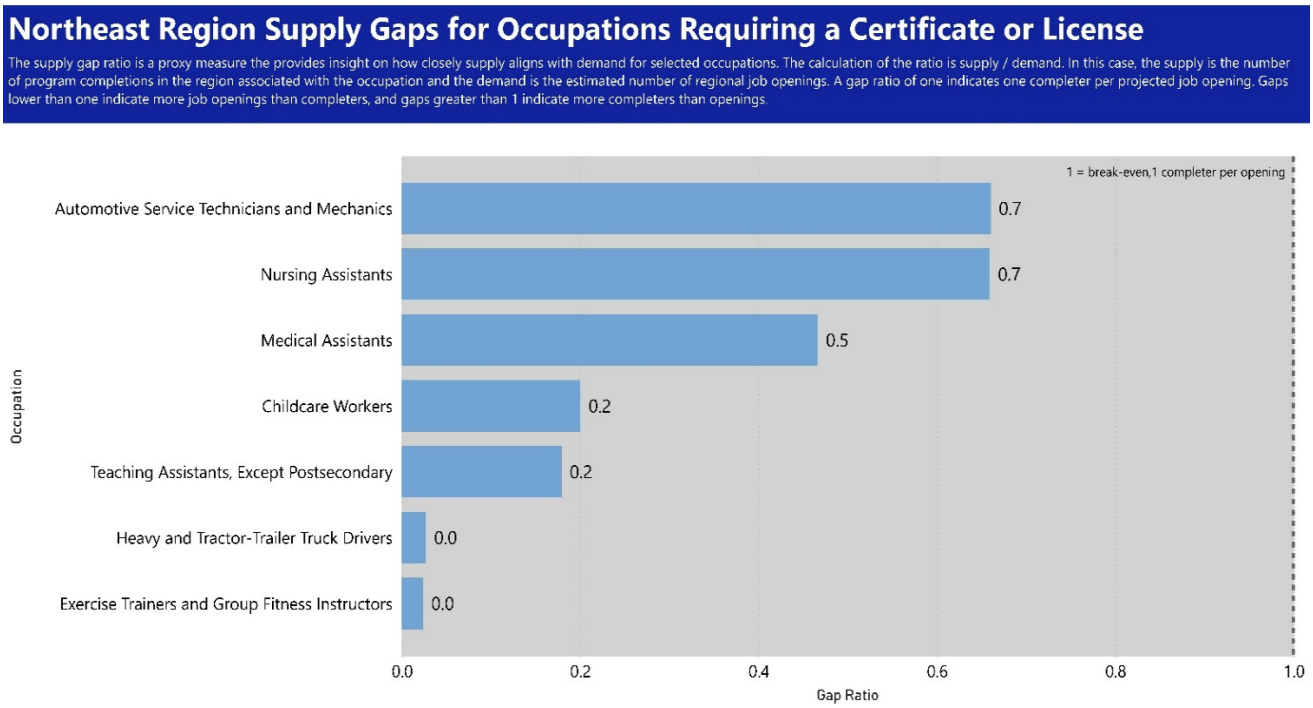
- Healthcare
- Information Technology (industry-occupation hybrid)
- Manufacturing
- Transportation/Logistics (including Wholesale Trade)

The guides and manuals incorporate career pathway materials and information to help individuals, workforce career counseling staff, other staff, and business customers in developing pathway-focused training and worker preparation activities. Over the last eight years, these guides and manuals have been modified and updated to meet the local needs of each LWIA. Additionally, the Region utilizes the Illinois Pathways web platform as well as tools developed and utilized by community colleges in the Region and from other sources to provide graphic pathway maps and the details that align with them.

The Region looks at how the region's job seekers are matching demands of local business through job posting analytics. Table 7 displayed earlier in this Chapter was updated and provides the 2026 Job Postings from Lightcast. Charts 1 through 4 were also updated utilizing the 2026 Northeast Regional Plan Daat Packet that identify the supply gap ratio for these openings as a proxy measure that provides insight on how closely supply aligns with demand for selected occupations. The supply in the below charts is the number of program completions in the region associated with the occupation and the demand is the estimated number of regional job openings. The occupations with the smallest values (at the bottom of these charts) are the ones with the largest gap between the current supply and the anticipated demand for that occupation. It is important to note that the gaps identified in these charts are only an indicator of the variation between supply and demand in an occupation. Because the completion data

only includes those institutions in the NEEDR, it is not a completely accurate display of the situation. Because the NEEDR is an area that attracts employees from across the US, the gap may not be as large in some instances as the charts reflect.

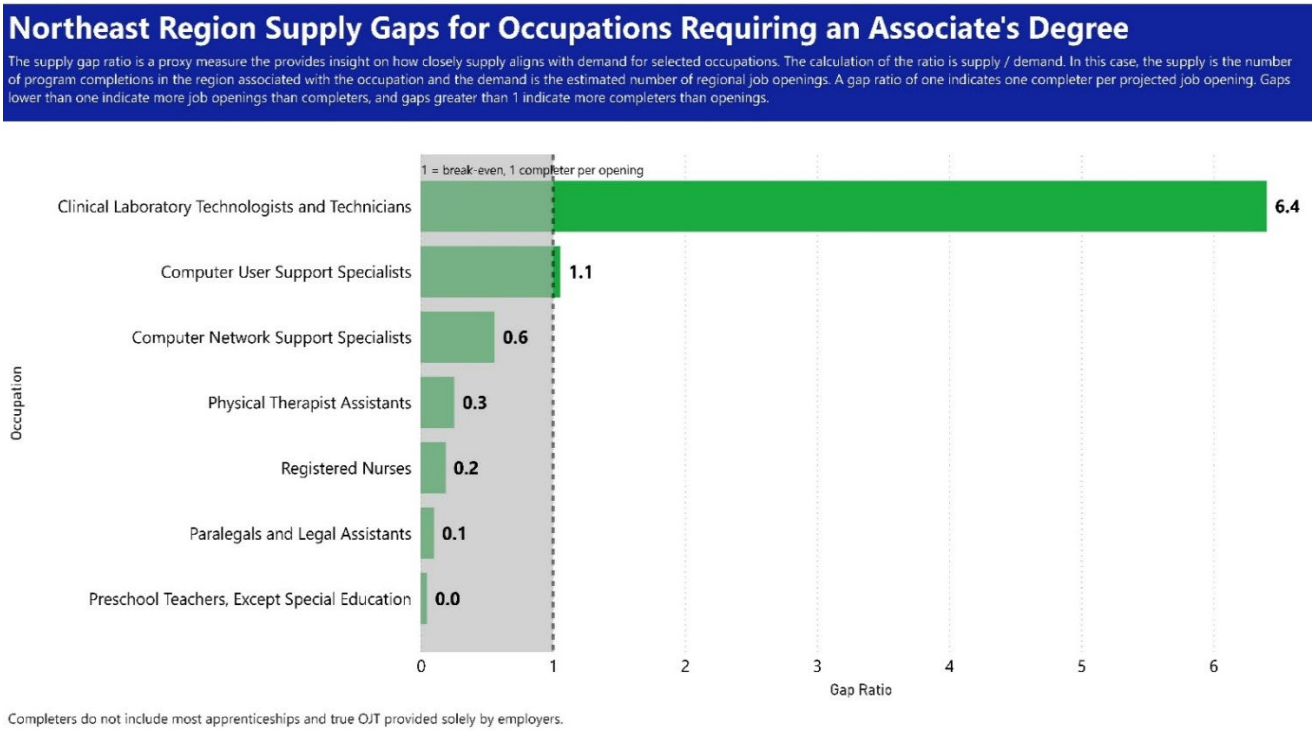
CHART 1: Supply Gap Analysis for Occupations Requiring Certificate or License (Updated 2026)



Completers do not include most apprenticeships and true OJT provided solely by employers.

Source: Illinois Department of Employment Security, Illinois Board of Higher Education, & Lightcast, 2024.

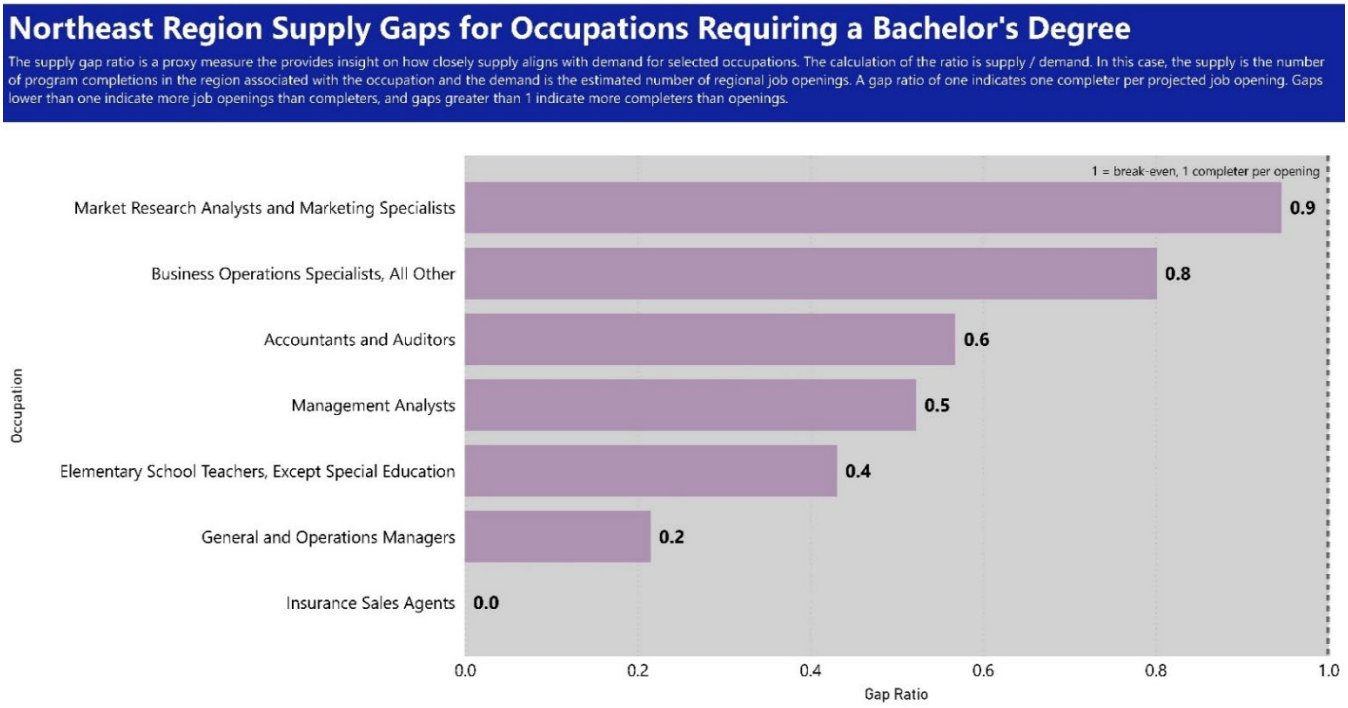
CHART 2: Supply Gap Analysis for Occupations Requiring associate degree (Updated 2026)



Completers do not include most apprenticeships and true OJT provided solely by employers.

Source: Illinois Department of Employment Security, Illinois Board of Higher Education, & Lightcast, 2024.

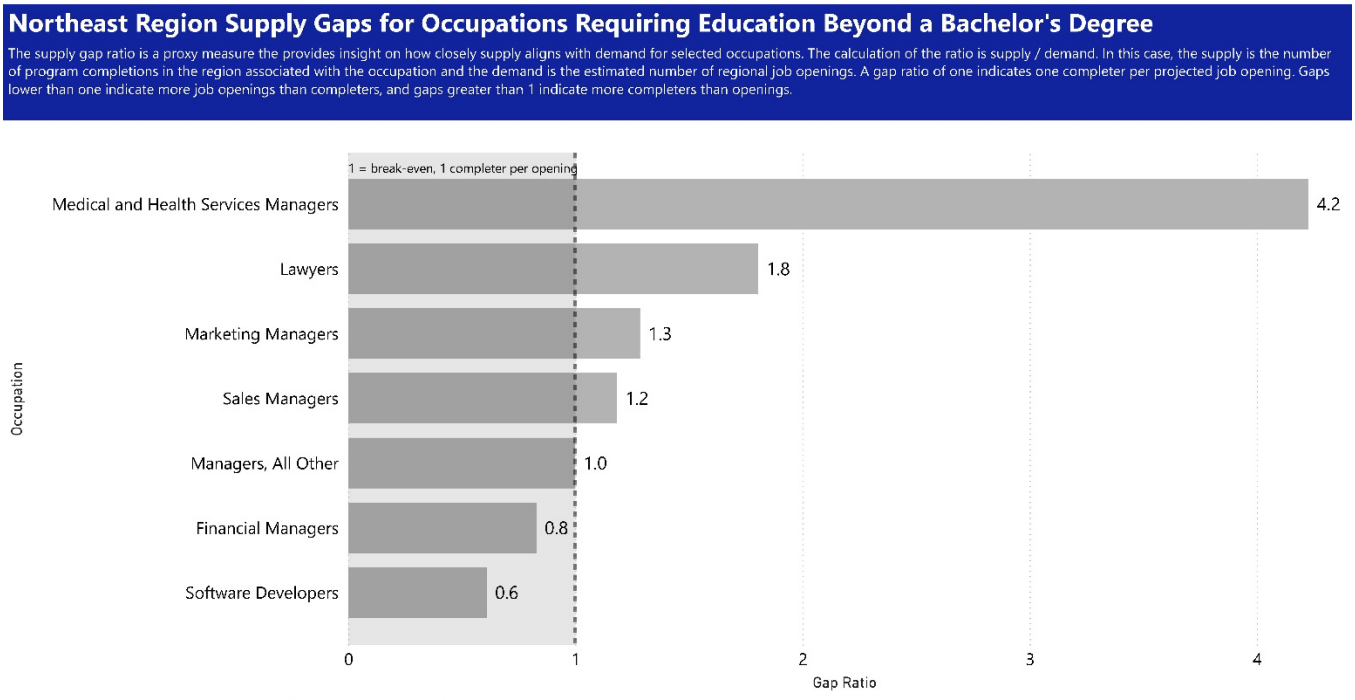
CHART 3: Supply Gap Analysis for Occupations Requiring Bachelor's Degree (Updated 2026)



Completers do not include most apprenticeships and true OJT provided solely by employers.

Source: Illinois Department of Employment Security, Illinois Board of Higher Education, & Lightcast, 2024.

CHART 4: Supply Gap Analysis for Occupations Requiring BA or Higher (Updated 2026)



Completers do not include most apprenticeships and true OJT provided solely by employers.

Source: Illinois Department of Employment Security, Illinois Board of Higher Education, & Lightcast, 2024.

Table 11 provides detail on the job postings identified for the targeted industries in the NEEDR. The job postings within the targeted industries of Healthcare, IT and Professional Services (including Artificial Intelligence (AI)), Manufacturing, and TDL show the most required skills and qualifications focus on an increase demand for post-secondary education, advanced technological skills, process improvements, customer service, direct care, management and leadership skills, and basic computer/software literacy. The demand occupations in the Clean Energy sector are being researched because the data around this sector is recently emerging and not as universally understood as that for the other targeted industry sectors. One important note about the job posting data is that this is an aggregation of job posts across a wide range of on-line sources. It is not intended to be exact enumerators of the occupational demand but to provide general indicators of the demand.

Based on the data sets, the NEEDR demonstrates it can meet the skill demands as NEEDR has a high rate of college-educated residents – higher than the state and nation at 48% of the population possessing a college degree. It is the adults having a high school diploma or less that poses the greatest disconnect with the needs of the workforce and low-wage earners advancing in the workforce to family sustaining wage employment. To address this challenge, the partners across the NEEDR are prioritizing the coordination and delivery of employment and training services to address the skills gap; the skills gap being unique to each of the four key industries and being addressed at the qualification and skills level. The NEEDR has been advocating for skills-based hiring among employers to address the deficit of candidates for a wide variety of open positions. Encouraging employers to explore more expansive hiring practices can assist those job seekers with barriers to employment.

- Major healthcare providers and systems in the region such as Advocate Aurora Health, Northwestern Memorial Health Care, Ascension Healthcare, and Mercy Health have a high demand for certified care givers such as Registered Nurses which is the number one occupation in job postings for the region. The job postings show employers require a variety of technical skills like nursing and CPR. NEEDR has a high supply of RNs and LPNs and are able to meet the demand of these qualifications and skills.

- Key industry leaders in the IT Sector such as Capital One, Uline, Michael Page, and Request Technology have a high need for technical skills in programming and computer science along with communications and customer service skills – advance training throughout the NEEDR give job seekers the opportunity to gain the required skills and qualifications to meet the industry's high demand. With the increase in AI, the IT and professional service sectors are growing their efficiency by utilizing this valuable tool.

- NEEDR has a high demand for skills and qualifications in the manufacturing and transportation industries that are key industries in the region with employment opportunities across all occupations and skill levels. The NEEDR has strong training program availability in the top occupations in these two sectors, however, the employer demand has exceeded both the availability of training program completers as well as interested job seekers. It will be key to identify additional labor force participants to meet the strong employer demand that is seen in these sectors.

- The NEEDR has begun planning to target clean energy jobs and identify qualified training providers

to prepare workers for the job openings. Continued involvement in the Illinois Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA) initiatives will be a significant component of the NEEDR's clean energy industry strategy moving forward. According to the 2023 U.S. Energy and Employment Jobs Report, clean energy jobs increased in every state and grew 3.9% nationally from 2021 to 2022. The number of jobs in battery electric vehicles increased by 28,366 (+27%) from 2021 to 2022, which was the fastest growth of any energy technology. Clean energy electricity technologies, such as solar and wind, accounted for nearly 87% of net new electric power generation jobs, adding 22,279 jobs (+3.6%). The number of women working in energy increased by 149,732 (+7.8%), meaning that over half of the net jobs added in 2022 were held by women. Veterans made up 9% of the U.S. energy workforce, higher than their representation in the overall U.S. economy (5%). These trends will be important considerations as the NEEDR addresses the employment needs of employers in the Clean Energy sector. Additionally, Clean Energy jobs can be found through other industries including manufacturing. With current trends to focus manufacturing back to the States, this industry may see continued growth for years to come.

Overall, while there is a supply gap in some occupations in the targeted sectors, it is important to note that the NEEDR is a top attractor for educated talent, especially from elsewhere in the Midwest. Chicago repeatedly ranks among the top metro areas where students want to live after graduation. Within a five-hour drive of the NEEDR, over 500,000 students earn a degree yearly, with an additional 142,000 students earning non-degree certificates.

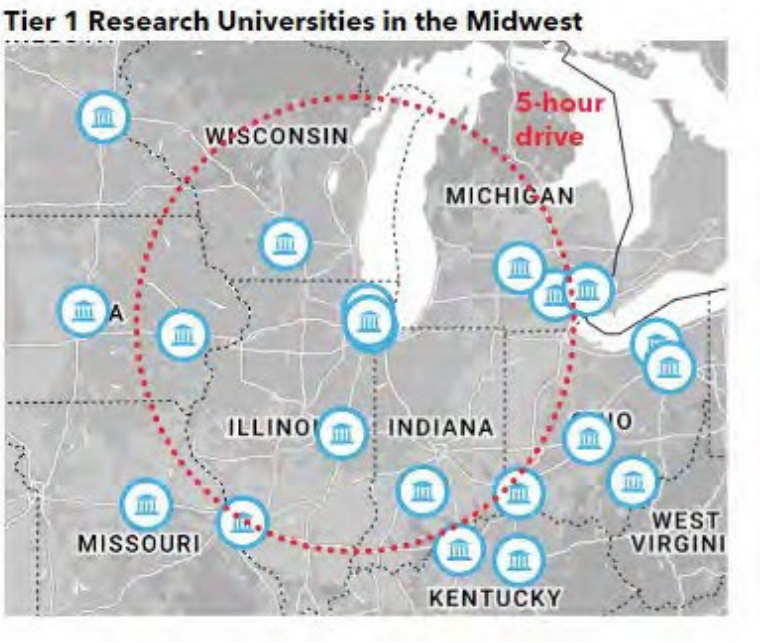


Table 11: Job Analytic Data Analysis for Targeted Industries in the NEEDR

Healthcare	Information Technology	Manufacturing	Transportation & Logistics
510,353	212,482	223,773	149,250
There were 510,353 total job postings from January 2023 to December 2023, of which 153,689 were unique.	There were 212,482 total job postings from January 2023 to December 2023, of which 70,089 were unique.	There were 223,723 total job postings from January 2023 to December 2023, of which 76,792 were unique.	There were 149,250 total job postings from January 2023 to December 2023, of which 34,188 were unique.
Top Companies	**Top Companies**	**Top Companies**	**Top Companies**
Advocate Aurora Health	Capital One	AbbVie	United Airlines
Northwestern Memorial Healthcare	Uline	Kraft Heinz	FedEx
Ascension Healthcare	Michael Page	S & C Electric Company	RJW Logistics
Northwestern Medicine	Request Technology	Abbott Laboratories	UPS
Loyola University Health System	Randstad	Medline Industries	Transdev
Edward-Elmhurst Health	Edward Jones	Northrop Grumman	Roehl Transport
NorthShore University Health System	Motion Recruitment	Horizon Therapeutics	Uber
Rush University Medical Center	Robert Half	Siemens	United States Postal Service
Franciscan Ministries	Walgreens Boots Alliance	Baxter International	Penske Automotive Group
Trinity Health	Healthcare Service Corporation	Motorola Solutions	Lineage Logistics
Top Posted Job Titles	**Top Posted Job Titles**	**Top Posted Job Titles**	**Top Posted Job Titles**
Registered Nurses	Software Engineers	Material Handlers	CDL-A Truck Drivers
Patient Care Technicians	Data Engineers	Maintenance Technicians	OTR CDL-A Truck Drivers
Caregivers	Software Developers	Machine Operators	CDL-A Flatbed Truck Drivers
Licensed Practical Nurses	Network Engineers	Customer Service Representatives	Forklift Operators
Physical Therapists	DevOps Engineers	Forklift Operators	Regional/Company CDL-A Truck Drivers
Medical Assistants	Full Stack Software Engineers	Maintenance Mechanics	Drivers
Phlebotomists	System Engineers	Production Supervisors	Material Handlers
Certified Nursing Assistants	Solutions Architects	CDL-A Truck Drivers	Customer Service Representatives
Patient Service Representatives	Java Developers	Assemblers	Warehouse Package Handlers
Nurse Practitioners	IT Project Managers	Warehouse Associates	Diesel Mechanics
Education Breakdown	**Education Breakdown**	**Education Breakdown**	**Education Breakdown**
HS or GED 29%	HS or GED 6%	HS or GED 24%	HS or GED 22%
Post Secondary degree 51%	Post Secondary degree 76%	Post Secondary degree 69%	Post Secondary degree 25%
Healthcare	**Information Technology**	**Manufacturing**	**Transportation & Logistics**
Top Specialized/Technical Skills	**Top Specialized/Technical Skills**	**Top Specialized/Technical Skills**	**Top Specialized/Technical Skills**
Nursing	Computer Science	Project Management	Truck Driving
Medical Records	Agile Methodology	Marketing	Warehousing
Nursing Care	SQL Programming Language	Finance	Forklift Truck
CPR	Project Management	Auditing	Auditing
Billing	Python Programming Language	New Product Development	Project Management
Treatment Planning	Java Programming Language	Warehousing	Flatbed Truck Operation
Direct Patient Care	Amazon Web Services	Process Improvement	Supply Chain
Electronic Medical Record	Microsoft Azure	Supply Chain	Pallet Jacks
Pediatrics	Automation	Accounting	Accounting
Discharge Planning	Software Engineering	SAP Applications	Finance
Top Common Skills	**Top Common Skills**	**Top Common Skills**	**Top Common Skills**
Communications	Communication	Communications	Communication
Customer Service	Management	Management	Customer Service
Management	Troubleshooting (Problem Solving)	Sales	Operations
Leadership	Problem Solving	Operations	Management
Planning	Leadership	Leadership	Sales
Ethical Standards and Conduct	Operations	Customer Service	Leadership
Top Qualifications	**Top Qualifications**	**Top Qualifications**	**Top Qualifications**
Registered Nurse (RN)	Certified Information Systems Security Professional	Valid Driver's License	Commercial Driver's License (CDL) Class A
Basic Life Support (BLS) Certification	Valid Driver's License	Master of Business Administration (MBA)	Commercial Driver's License (CDL)
Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) Certification	Project Management Professional Certification	Forklift Certification	Valid Driver's License
Valid Driver's License	Certified Information System Auditor (CISA)	Project Management Professional Certification	Tanker Endorsement
Certified Nursing Assistant (CAN)	CompTIA A+	Certified Public Accountant	Hazmat Endorsement
Licensed Practical Nurse (LPM)	Cisco Certified Network Associate	Security Clearance	Forklift Certification
American Red Cross (ARC) Certification	Master of Business Administration (MBA)	Top Secret-Sensitive Compartmented Information (TS/SCI) Clerance	Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC) Card
Advanced Cardiovascular Life Support (ACLS) Certification	Certified Internal Auditor	CDL Class A License	Tanker and Hazmat Combo X Endorsement
Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW)	Cisco Certified Network Professional	Commercial Driver's License (CDL)	Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) Certification
Nurse Practitioner (APRN-CNP)	Microsoft Certified Professional		Master of Business Administration (MBA)

Source: Lightcast, 2023.4; Job Posting Analytics

4. Regional workforce considering current labor force employment and unemployment data, information on labor market trends, and educational and skill levels of the workforce, including individuals with barriers to employment (§ 679.510(a)(1)(iv) and § 679.560(a)(3));
   a. How is the region changing in terms of demographics, labor supply and occupational demand?
   b. What special populations exist in the region, what is their magnitude, and what are the policy and service implications to meet the needs of these individuals?

Labor Force Size, Demographic Employment and Unemployment

Table 12 details the labor force statistics of the NEEDR between 2018-2025. The greatest employment figure was reported in 2024 when the NEEDR had a total of 4,472,730 individuals employed but as of November 2025 the number of employed individuals has almost returned to that level (4,468,513). The labor force participation numbers have continued to climb since the pandemic from a low of 4,451,444 in 2020 to very close to pre-pandemic numbers in 2024 of 4,714,181. Unemployment in the NEEDR has continually decreased since the high of 9.7% during the pandemic in 2020 to 4.5% in November of 2025. The increase in labor force participation has been a positive trend for employers in the region who have been struggling to recruit talent for the last several years.

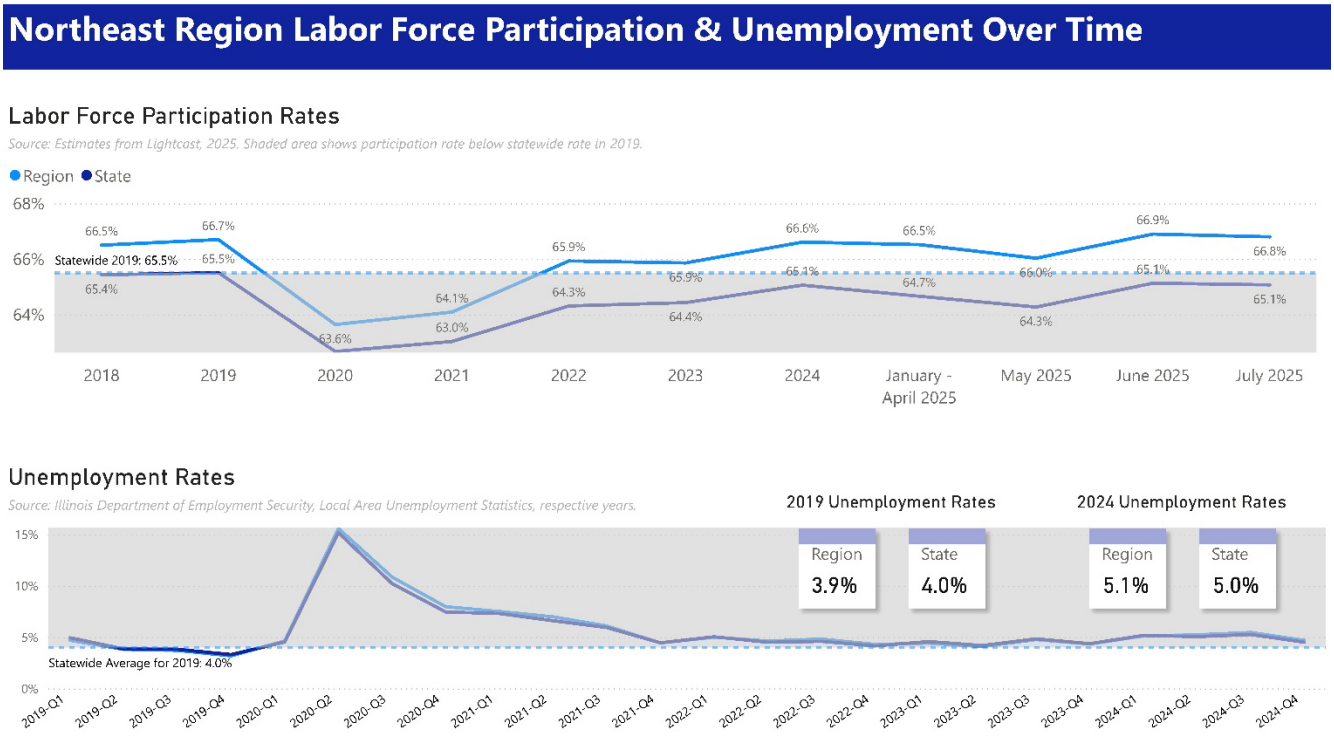
Table 12: Labor Force Statistics in the NEEDR, 2018-2025

Year	Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Percent Unemployed
2025 (Nov)	4,681,429	4,468,513	212,916	4.5%
2024	4,714,181	4,472,730	241,451	5.1%
2023	4,603,798	4,401,233	202,565	4.4%
2022	4,588,802	4,373,969	214,833	4.7%
2021	4,475,519	4,196,284	279,235	6.2%
2020	4,451,444	4,019,109	432,335	9.7%
2019	4,587,811	4,411,039	176,772	3.9%
2018	4,579,942	4,390,158	189,784	4.1%

Source: IDES, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, 2018-2025

Figure 1 below reflects the unemployment rate for the NEEDR which had been declining in 2019 to a low of 3.2%. It jumped to the highest level in the second quarter of 2020 during the pandemic to an incredibly high rate of 15.6%. Since then, the unemployment rate in the region has shown significant decline over the next 3 years to 4.5% in November of 2025.

Figure 1: Unemployment Rate, 2008-2024



The NEEDR Region has an aging population. The population cohorts that increased the most between 2013-2023 were the cohorts from 55-64 and over 65 years of age with a net increase of 377,964 people. All other age cohorts experienced a decline in the population numbers with the greatest decline in the future workforce cohort of 5- to 19-year-olds with a decrease of (163,086) followed by the current workforce of 35 to 54 years old recording a decline of (135,462). In an 2026 update, from the population by age in 2024 data set, the top population cohorts were the cohorts from 30-34 with7.3% of population, 25-29 with 7.0%, and35-39 with 7.0% of the population. The 65 and over age cohort represents 16.8% of the regions pollution. In addition, the age groups 50 – 64 years old represent 18% of the total population. While there is a maturing workforce, the 10-24 population age cohort represents 19% of the region's population.

The NEEDR population in 2024 was reported at 8,788,653, which is less than 1% decrease (-.12%) from the 2014 population. . The region represents a significant proportion of the total population of the State of Illinois (69.1%%). The largest demographic population was White (49.3%), followed by Hispanic (24.1%%), Black (15.8%%), and then Asian (7.5%%). The diverse population in the region contributes to the region reporting 31.5%% of the residents speak a language other than English at home – this percentage is higher than the statewide level of 23.8% and national level of 22.5%.

The statewide median income for all households was $81,702, which is 4% higher than the national level of $78,358. In Illinois, median income for married couples with children was $102,968. With the exception of DeKalb County, the median income for the region was over $125,000. DeKalb County median income was between $100,000 - $125,000.

The demographic shift that is occurring has deep implications for workforce development

activities, especially as it relates to the total available labor force, the aging of the population, and the diversity of residents.

Figure 2: Population by Age

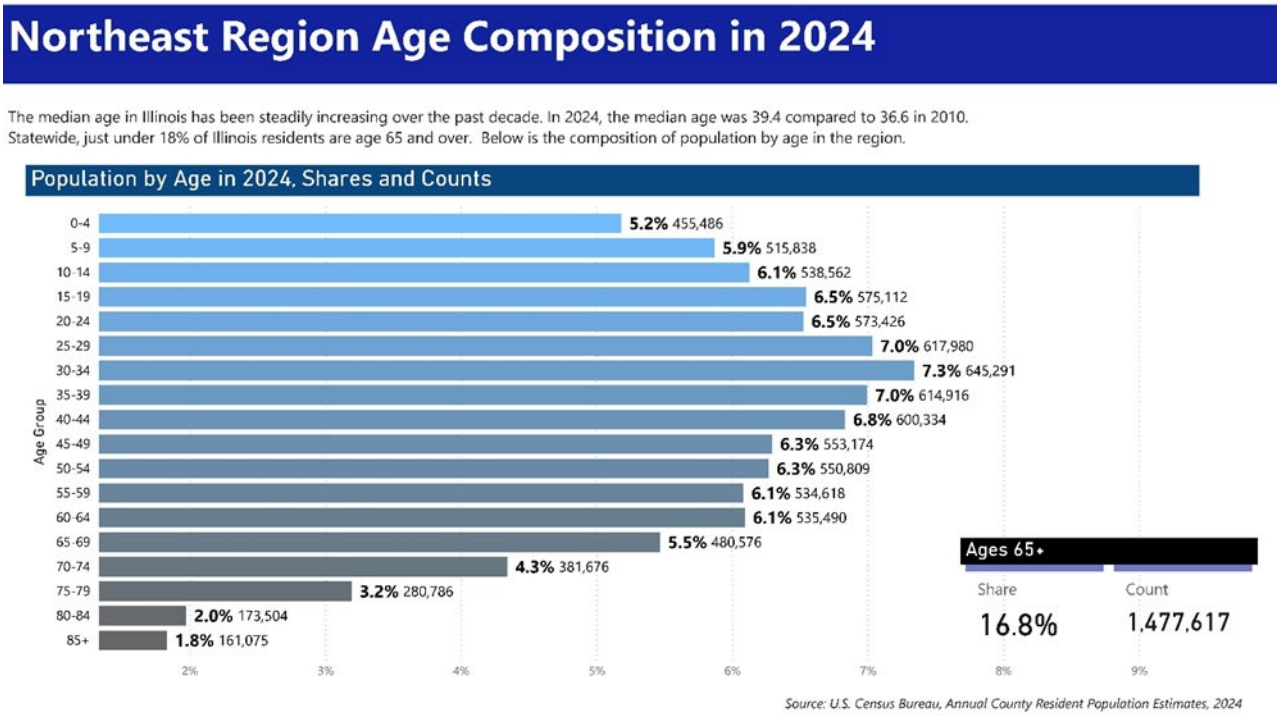
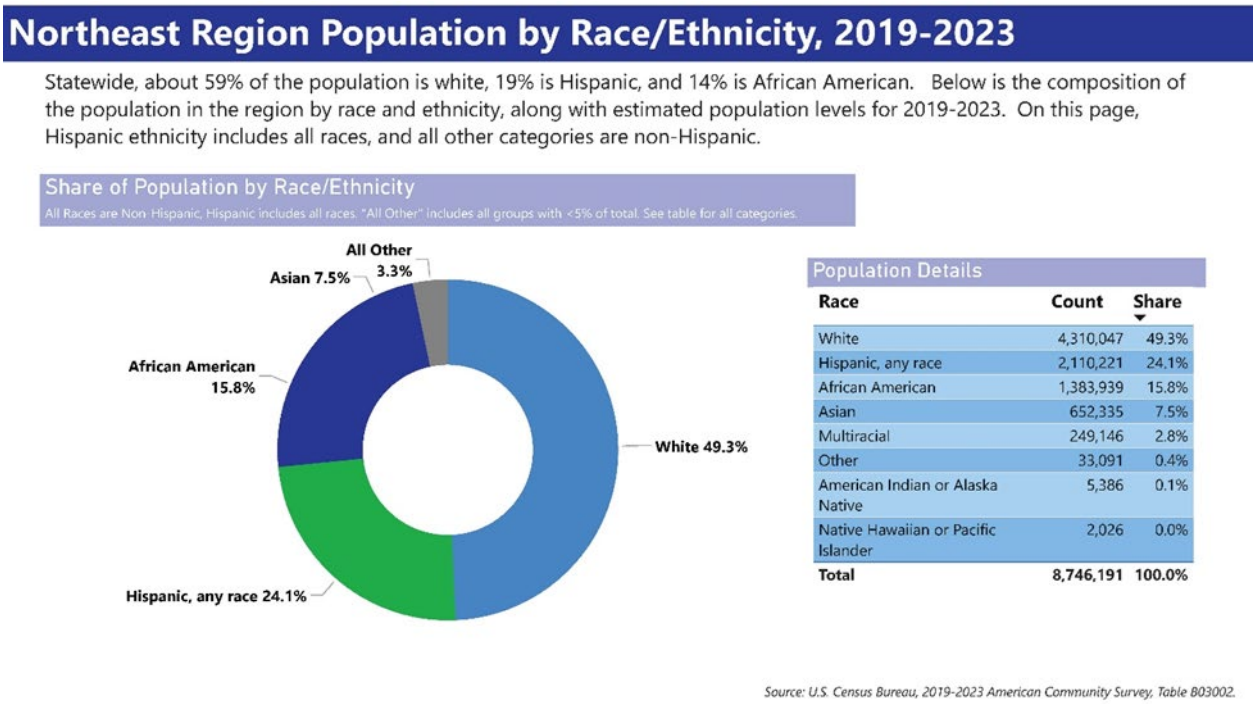
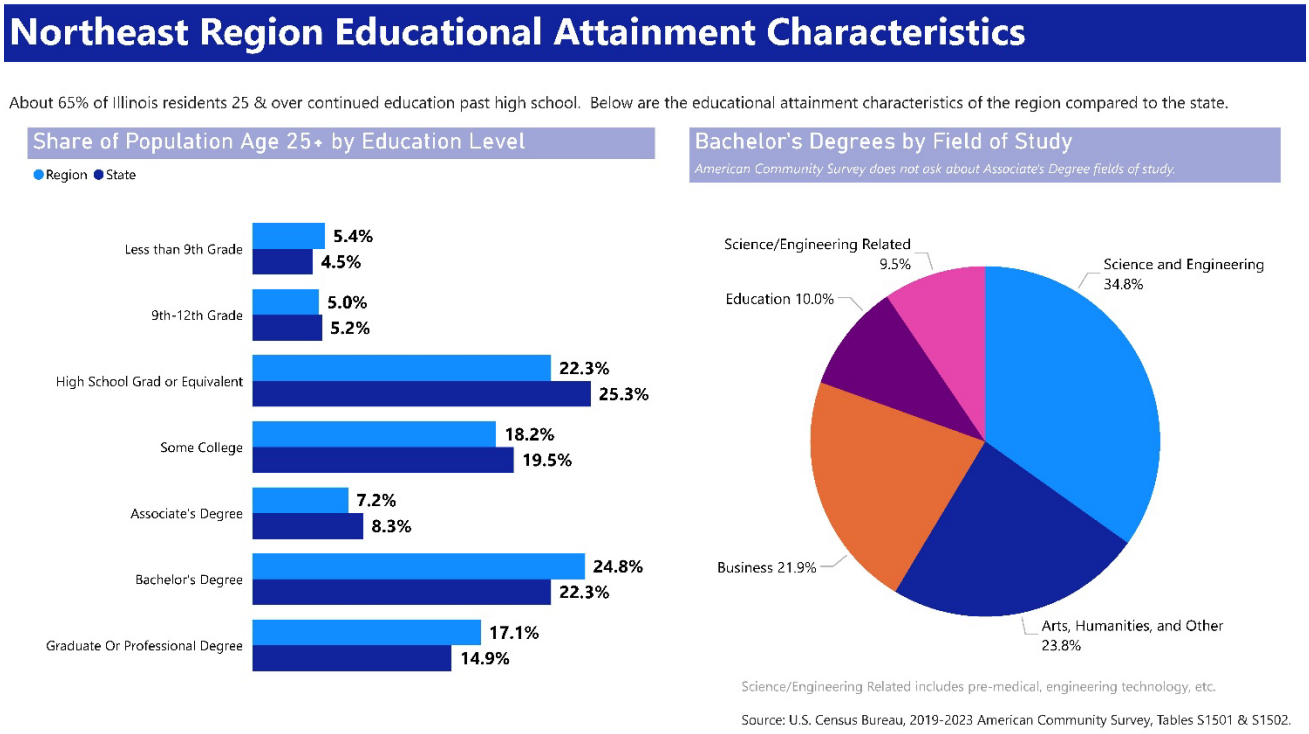


Figure 3: Population by Race/Ethnicity



NEEDR reports a more educated population of 25 and over, reporting 67.38% continued education past high school compared to Illinois reporting with 65%. The NEEDR has a higher educational attainment of those with a four-year degree or higher than the state. Nearly a quarter of the Region's population has a bachelor's degree (24.8%) and 17.1% have a Graduate of Professional Degree. In a recent report from the Greater Chicago Economic Partnership (GCEP) it was noted that Chicagoland is third largest talent producer in the U.S. with over 147,000 students completing post-secondary programs across all disciplines in 2021. Moreover, the region is the fourth largest producer of STEM talent, with 34.8% of those earning Bachelor's degrees in Science & Engineering and 9.5% of Bachelor's degrees are in Science/Engineering Related programs.

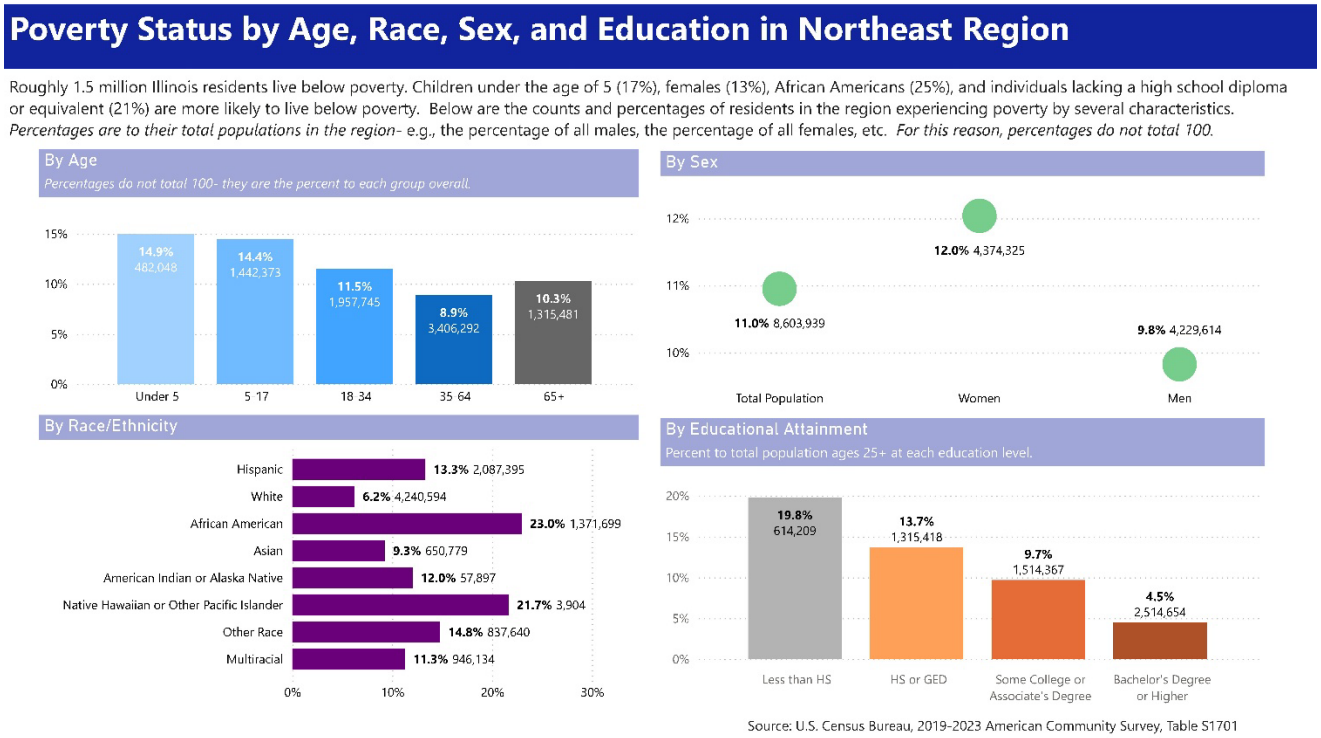
Figure 4: Educational Attainment of Population 25 & Over, NEEDR Updated 2026



Labor Market Trends and Education and Skill Levels Including Individuals with Barriers to Employment

The NEEDR's labor market is characterized by high educational attainment and a large labor force. The labor force participation decline in 2019 and 2020 has seen a reversal. The education and skill levels of individuals with barriers to employment are an ever-present challenge in the NEEDR. Approximately 11% of households in the NEEDR are below poverty level compared to 11.6% of Illinois households below the poverty level. The poverty level hits hardest to those residents who are lacking a High School Diploma (19.8% of NEEDR residents) and are non-white race/ethnicity. The NEEDR has focused significant efforts on targeting the hardest to serve, including those job seekers who are dealing with poverty in addition to other barriers to employment. Figure 3 details the population living below poverty in the NEEDR.

Figure 5: 2026 Poverty Status (Age, Sex, Race/Ethnicity, and Education)



The NEEDR has 909,770people with disabilities in the region. Over one-third of individuals presenting with a disability are of working age between the ages of 35-64 and an additional 13.6% between the ages of 18-34. Only 15.9% of the individuals with a disability in the NEEDR are reported as self-cared. The NEEDR implemented developed and implemented an initiative designed to assist employers in recruiting and hiring employees with disabilities. A pilot with 7 employers from across the NEEDR provided hands-on training and assistance in recruiting and hiring employees with disabilities. In addition, the Business Service Representatives in the region received training and a toolkit to work with additional employers on this focus. It is important to note that many employers are strategically targeting the expansion in the diversity of their workforce. Because the NEEDR reflects such a diverse population base, employers can implement strong recruiting initiatives to the broad populations in the region.

The NEEDR has approximately 263,143 veterans in the region. Nearly 53% of the veterans are aged 65 and older. Overall, almost 67% of the veteran population in the region has some college or post- secondary degree. Services to veterans and their families is a strategic focus at the local, regional, and state level.

Table 12 provides a snapshot of additional target population statistics in the NEEDR, as provided by the state.

Table 12: Target Population Statistics (Updated 2026)

Low-Income Indicators	
SNAP Cases, July 2025	366,665
SNAP Households, July 2025	188,920
TANF Persons, June 2025	36,604
TANF Cases	13,592
Foster Care Indicators	
Total Foster Youth, July 31, 2025	6,697
Foster Youth- Relative Care (2023)	3,995
Foster Youth- Foster Care (2023)	3,485
Foster Youth- Institution or Group Home (2023)	387
Other Foster Youth (2023)	293
DOC Indicators	
Adult Prison Population by Sentencing Region, June 30, 2025	16,083
Adult Parolee Population by Region of Residence, June 30, 2025	7,192
Average Daily Juvenile Detention Population, May 2025	110
Other Indicators	
Single Parents (2019-2023)	
Female Single Parent	200,887
Male Single Parent	66,945
Adult Population at Risk (2019-2023)	
Foreign Born Population	1,672,747
Age 18+ without high school diploma	711,788

Source: NEEDR 4 Northeast 2023 and 2025 Data Packet

Subpopulations with barriers to employment in the Region which are targeted by the regional system include:

- Basic skills deficient. Title II entities throughout the Region work directly with individuals to raise basic skill levels as well as English language acquisition. Title II adult basic education plans align with WIOA Regional and Local plans. There is a concerted effort to engage individuals with Title II entities to encourage enrollment in Bridge/ICAPS programs to address basic skill and English language deficiencies.
- Individuals with Disabilities. The Illinois Department of Human Services Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) works to ensure that individuals with a disability have access to assistive technology throughout the One-Stop system, access to Employer Networks/Ticket-To-Work programs, and a coordinated regional network of organizations. Vocational Rehabilitation is an active, vibrant partner in the Region providing professional services to this population, including job readiness for youth, Pre-employment training services, comprehensives evaluations, vocational counseling and access to assistive technology, and staff that serves customers at various sites such as, local high schools, and community-based organizations. The Bureau of Blind Services offers individualized services for the blind and visually impaired individuals and businesses that hire these individuals throughout the Region.

- Returning citizens. There is an effort across the Region to prepare returning citizens for reentry into the workforce. The One-Stop system across the Region partners with local court, health and mental health groups, county jails, the Department of Corrections and a network of organizations and providers to deliver work-readiness training and make connections to employers hiring. Several programs that target returning citizens are in place in the NEEDR and discussed later in this plan.
- New Arrivals/English Language Learners: There is also an effort across the region to prepare for the growing New Arrival population of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants with Temporary Protective Status and work authorization. The network of One-Stop system partners and organizations are connecting this population with basic career services, English as a Second Language classes and connections to employer hiring. This will be a coordination of services between Title 1B and Title 2 services.

Service/policy implications of these targeted population groups include the need for more intensive career services including more intensive upfront job readiness/essential skills services prior to employment and training. Making it imperative that the system partners implement service integration to ensure the right mixture of career services are being delivered to the priority populations throughout the one-stop system. The One-Stop service integration action plans provide the framework for partners to leverage programs and services to increase service strategies when working with individuals with barriers to employment.

Local Workforce Innovation Boards set priority of services policies. These local policies include priority of service for veterans and qualified spouses, persons receiving public assistance, and low income and/or basic skills deficient individuals as well as individuals with a disability. Local areas take steps to promote awareness in the employer community about the benefits of hiring special populations, particularly Veterans, Individuals with Disabilities, and others prioritized for workforce services by the State of Illinois. As noted in Chapter II, local areas invest in a variety of strategies to serve individuals with barriers to employment across partnering agencies including TANF, Title II, CDBG, Title V, IDES, the Department of Corrections, Veterans Affairs, community-based organizations, and Small Business Development Centers among others.

B. Describe how the Local Workforce Innovation Board and WIOA partners support the development and implementation of sector partnerships (employer collaboratives) using the US Chamber of Commerce Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) framework for initiatives for in-demand industry sectors or occupations for the planning region (§ 679.510(a)(1)(iii)). Plans must answer the following questions:

1. How will the workforce partners use the TPM framework to convene or support the convening of regional employers, foundations, institutions and other stakeholders to create or maintain sector partnerships?
2. Identify the established and active sector partnerships in the region (as defined above). If any regional sector partnerships , including the TPM collaboratives exist, identify
    - The sector
    - The neutral convening organization
    - the geographic area
    - If they are authentically business-led
    - The LWIBs role in the partnership
    - And what is their role in WIOA planning?
3. What public-private partnerships exist in the region that could support sector strategies, and what is their role in planning?
4. What neutral conveners with the capacity to help establish sector partnerships exist in the region, and what is their role in planning?

The NEEDR region is committed to advancing sector partnerships and employer collaborative through the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) framework. The Local Workforce Innovation Boards (LWIBs) and WIOA core partners actively support the development, implementation, and expansion of sector partnerships for in-demand industries across the planning region. Each Local Workforce Innovation Area (LWIA) has or will seek training for staff to be certified in TPM, ensuring the region has the technical capacity to apply the TPM model consistently and effectively.

Prior to adopting TPM, the region had a strong history of successful sector strategy work. As TPM implementation continues, the region will integrate TPM principles into existing and emerging sector initiatives and will support TPM-aligned activities at the state, regional, and local levels.

Workforce partners—including LWIBs, WIOA core partners, economic development organizations, and education and training providers—will use the TPM framework to:

- Convene or support the convening of regional employers by leveraging TPM-certified staff to facilitate employer collaboratives and guide employers through the six TPM strategies.
- Engage foundations, educational institutions, and community partners by using TPM's structured process to align talent supply with employer demand.
- Use employer-validated data to identify critical workforce needs, skill gaps, and priority occupations within in-demand sectors.
- Support employers in building sustainable partnerships by providing labor market information, coordinating meetings, and offering staff support for facilitation and project management.
- Ensure alignment with WIOA planning and service delivery, including training investments, career pathway development, and supportive service strategies.

- Promote business leadership by positioning employers as the decision-makers in defining demand, competencies, and performance metrics.

At this time, the NEEDR region has one sector partnership that meet the TPM definition of an employer-led collaborative.

In McHenry County, the LWIA is an active partner in the Manufacturing Pathways Consortium (MPC), which includes over 100 manufacturing employers. The Consortium is convened by McHenry County College and is led by local manufacturing organizations providing strategic guidance to help develop career pathways within this industry. The MPC is designed to increase awareness about manufacturing career pathways, create a systematic approach to collaborative hiring, and identify non-traditional talent.

To build further sector partnerships during this planning cycle, the region will:
- Research whether any TPM-aligned sector partnerships currently exist.
- Assess whether any existing sector initiatives can be strengthened or restructured to meet TPM's employer-led criteria.
- Identify priority industry sectors where new TPM collaboratives should be launched.
- Determine the appropriate neutral convener for each potential partnership.
- Engage employers to ensure any new or existing partnerships are authentically business-led.

If TPM sector partnerships are identified or created, the region will document:
- The sector
- The neutral convening organization
- The geographic area served
- Whether the partnership is authentically business-led
- The LWIB's role in the partnership and how the workforce system can partner with the sector strategy
- The partnership's role in WIOA planning, including training investments, career pathway alignment, and employer engagement strategies.

As new TPM sector partnerships are created, the region will rely on TPM sector strategy experts—such as the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO)—for technical assistance to ensure alignment with the TPM model. This support will help the region establish strong, employer-led collaboratives and implement the TPM approach consistently across the region.

Public Private Partnerships and neutral conveners that exist in the region to support sector strategies include: Local economic development organizations in each LWIA (Lake County Partners, McHenry County Economic Development Corporation, Choose DuPage, World Business Chicago, Cook County Bureau of Economic Development, Will County Center for Economic Development, Kankakee Economic Development Association, Grundy Area Economic Development Council; Chambers of Commerce; industry sector associations (Illinois Manufacturing Association, Illinois Manufacturing Extension Council, American Hospital Association, Three Rivers Manufacturing Association, Technology Manufacturing Association, Calument Area Industrial Council); Greater Chicago Economic Partnership through World Business Chicago, Chicagoland Chamber, Chicagoland Workforce Funders Alliance.

The role of public private partnerships in the planning process in addition to filling the role of neutral conveners is to engage with local workforce boards, participate in planning and reviewing strategies, plan future training activities, identify and replicate best practices, coordinate industry sector events, provide contacts and relationships with local employers, engage local employers to participate in sector strategies, assist in collecting and analyzing industry intelligence and data, conduct data analysis, and leverage data and expertise to develop, expand, and improve sector partnerships.

C. Describe any broad economic development opportunities in the region within the context of the workforce, education and economic development plans.

Some important opportunities have been defined by the Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership (GCEP). They are: Human Capital, Industry Base and Supply Chain, Innovation/ Knowledge/R&D, Natural Assets, Infrastructure, Global Reach, Business Environment, and Financial Capital. GCEP has developed a "value proposition" for the Chicago metro region that focuses on the characteristics below which highlight the economic development opportunities for the NEEDR. The partnership between the WPMC and GCEP will further strengthen regional sector initiatives around these opportunities.

- Size – Chicagoland is the nation's third largest economy and is among the top 20 global economies, larger than most nations.
- Diversity – Unlike other metro areas with strong industry dominance, Chicagoland offers the most diverse economy in the US which provides a cushion against economic shocks as businesses and workers can transition more readily to alternative sectors during challenging times.
- Industry – The region is the most diverse manufacturing ecosystem in the US – of the 21 manufacturing subsectors, Chicagoland is ranked among the top five of 13 and is among the top 10 of 16.

- Innovation – The tech ecosystem is characterized by a blend of established industries, startups, and research institutions that contribute to its unique identity.
- Resilience – The Chicagoland region has the right combination of diversification, adaptability, environmental policy, and supportive social service systems that contribute to an economy's resilience.
- Cost – More affordable real estate and cost of living when compared to the coasts and similarly-sized, globally-connected metro areas.

D. Describe any broad economic development challenges in the region's workforce, education, and economic development plans.

- A recent economic challenge that the NEEDR has been working to address is the recent increase in immigrants and migrants and the challenges to provide workforce services to that population. Several LWIAs have earmarked supplemental funds to developing programming and services to assist in preparing this population for employment. Working with DHS Welcome Centers has been a successful collaboration to assist these future job

seekers. Nearly all of the LWIAs in the region will be able to tap into additional funds through the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) to serve this population and are discussing possible regional strategies for these initiatives.

- Ongoing challenges include availability of reliable childcare, efficient transportation (outside of Cook County), and in the more rural areas of the NEEDR, access to affordable internet.
- A long-standing economic development challenge that has recently become the focus of discussion and exploratory studies is workforce housing and affordable housing in general. CMAP and local workforce area are partnering to address this challenge within the region.

E. Describe how a responsiveness, inclusivity, and accessibility are incorporated into collecting and analyzing labor market information for this plan.

Responsiveness, inclusivity, and accessibility will be taken into account by collecting and analyzing data about demographics, race, ethnicity, among other characteristics of participants in the workforce system. The region will ensure inclusion of Census data and other credible data sources to understand the diverse workforce and how to best serve them. As will be discussed further in the document, the region has created a responsiveness, inclusivity, and accessibility statement that will provide guidance about representative data.

CHAPTER 2: STRATEGIES FOR SERVICE INTEGRATION

A. Provide an analysis of workforce development activities, including education and training, in the region. This analysis must include 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 (Sec. 679.560(a)(4)). The plan must address the following areas:

1. Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the workforce development activities in the region.
2. Analyze the capacity of the regional partners to provide workforce development activities to address the education and skill needs of the workforce including individuals with barriers to employment.
3. Analyze the capacity of the regional partners to provide activities to address the needs of employers.
4. How well do existing training programs in the region and local areas prepare job seekers to enter and retain employment with regional businesses?
5. Summarize the commitments of each program partner to implement the selected strategies described in the "Action Plan for Improving Service Integration in the Region."

Title I is operated through the Local Workforce Innovation (LWIAs) There are seven LWIAs in the Northeast Economic Development Region and ten counties: Cook, DeKalb, DuPage, Grundy, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will. Residents are served through a range of comprehensive One-Stop Centers, affiliate organizations, and training providers. Title II (Adult Education) is administered through community colleges and providers throughout the Region. Title III (Wagner-Peyser) is administered through the Illinois Department of Employment Security. Title IV (Vocational Rehabilitation) is administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services Vocational Rehabilitation. Each partner delivers services and activities at partner sites as well as through co-location in the comprehensive One-Stop Centers. There are 17 community college districts in the NEEDR which work closely with the WIOA core partners for both employer and job seeker services.

The Region has developed important points of coordination that provide ongoing opportunities to deploy integrated strategies in the Region. As described in Chapter 1, the Workforce Partners of Metropolitan Chicago is the coalition of Local Workforce Boards and WIOA Title 1 Directors developed more than 20 years ago and is the platform for developing many of the NEEDR's sector strategies. The Workforce Partners of Metropolitan Chicago undertakes join grant applications, project coordination and information sharing. In addition, the Northern Illinois Workforce Coalition that convenes quarterly meetings of the Community College Presidents and Local Workforce Board Directors is a strong partner in developing and implementing regional strategies. The coalition was originally formed as a result of the CSSI sector work; the partnership was formalized 6 years ago. The coalition has joined together for grant applications, shared information and coordinated individual and business services throughout the Region. Due to the

large geographic size of the NEEDR and the diversity of its economy, level of development, and needs of residents and businesses, the types of workforce development services offered vary. Each local area has different strategies, toolboxes and areas of focus for best servicing the needs of its residents and employers. There are, however, many commonalities of workforce development activities and types of services with promising return-on-investment (ROI) that have been provided through regional initiatives and that warrant continued focus and development.

- Work-Based Learning Opportunities: Several of the Local Workforce Boards use On-the-Job-Training (OJT), Apprenticeships, internships and work-experiences to provide the skills needed for job- seekers to be successful in the workplace. In addition, all of the community colleges coordinate internships, on-the-job-training, apprenticeships, and incumbent worker training within the Region. Efforts have begun to better connect adult education students to these opportunities. Overall, these types of programs are an opportunity for growth under WIOA.
    - An example is WorkNet DuPage provides young adults paid internships through WIOA, College of DuPage Project Hire-Ed and the DuPage WBL Consortium, which is a partnership between Regional Office of Education, GPS Education, and WorkNet. Additionally, Choose DuPage brings work experience to high school students; similar to a pre-apprenticeship and students can continue post-secondary at College of DuPage's Project Hire Ed Apprenticeship programs. The Technology and Manufacturing Association and IMEC both offer apprenticeship programs that DuPage supports through IWT grants. DuPage also has an Apprenticeship Expansion grant currently that is strengthening efforts of the integrated business services team to increase adoption of apprenticeship models.
    - The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership has developed a partnership with the Chicago Lighthouse for the Blind for Call Center work. Additionally, the Partnership has developed HVAC training at Four Seasons Heating and Air conditioning.
    - Lake County recently was awarded the Apprenticeship Expansion Grant. We are working with youth serving organizations to launch a cohort of incumbents (20) to participate in the Youth Development Practitioner's Apprenticeship Program. We work with manufacturers to identify apprenticeship opportunities. Additionally, College of Lake County has been successful with increasing registered apprenticeships across multiple industries.
    - In Will County, the workforce area has developed a partnership with the Joliet Junior College apprenticeship program in information technology. Apprentices can work in a variety of careers, including AutoCAD Technician, Computer Programmer, Computer Support Specialist and several others. Additionally, Will County has developed partnerships with the Illinois Food Bank SEED Apprenticeship and Women in the Trades.
    - Regionally, two workforce areas (10 and 11) worked together on serving an employer through the IWT project. While the company is located in local area 11 but reached out to Will County for services and the two worked together to serve the employer.

- Career Pathways: Workforce development and education partners in the NEEDR are increasingly developing Career Pathway programs to prepare individuals to be successful in secondary and post-secondary education as well as help individuals enter or advance

within a specific occupational cluster. Community colleges offer stackable credentials in many sectors, providing a pathway approach for adult learners, who can complete one credential and advance to the next credential.

- For example, several training programs at McHenry County College have programs with stackable credentials, including, Accounting, Administrative Office Management, Automotive Technology, Business Management, IT Help Desk, Manufacturing Management, Marketing, Graphic Arts, and Health Information Management.
- In DuPage, the workforce area will work with the College of DuPage to integrate their short-term stackable HVAC credential with future energy efficiency workforce development. ICAPS programs, bridge programs, transition coordinators, faculty (through specialist job-skills courses), and career development service areas provide goal setting, academic advising, and enrollment assistance. This type of coordination/advising will be necessary within the One-Stop centers in order to meet the needs of clients/students.
- In Lake County, Workforce Development developed the Work, Earn, & Learn program to provide an opportunity in a career pathway. Participants enroll in a career pathway program developed in cooperation with an industry partner. The industry partner provides a subsidized work-experience for the participant while delivering training and classroom training, leading to an industry credential with skills training reinforced from industry professionals.

- Sector Strategies: As detailed in Chapter 1, the NEEDR provides an extensive array of sector-based workforce development services for residents and businesses including comprehensive sector centers and multiple business-driven, multi-area partnerships, many funded through competitive grants the region has secured.

Many promising cooperative service delivery strategies are currently present within the Region. Additionally, the Regional plan will provide opportunities for new Regional cooperative agreements.

NEEDR Strengths and Weaknesses of Workforce Development Activities
The strengths and weaknesses of regional workforce development activities are highlighted below.

Strengths of the Region's workforce system:

Demographic/Location Strengths

- Access to large quantities of diverse talent
- Access to transportation and transportation routes (i.e., highways, roads, etc.)
- Overall, a highly educated workforce with sub-regional differences
- Diverse industry and employer base
- Wage and employment growth, acting as the economic driver for the State

Relationship and Partner Advantages

- Long history of partnership and collaboration through the Workforce Partners of Metropolitan Chicago
- WIOA system partnerships are strong across all the mandatory partners of the WIOA system and beyond.
- Partners are committed greater service integration and beginning to work on service

integration action plans (see Service Integration section)
- Existing local partnerships across the WIOA system
- Strong employer partnerships
- Commitment to work-based learning opportunities
- Strong partnership with regional education systems (high schools/K-12, community colleges, and other training institutions)
- Economic development partnerships with shared goals
- Customer-centric

Existing Training Programs That Meet the Needs of Employers
- Apprenticeship – There are many apprenticeship efforts happening in the Region and these are well coordinate among many partners
- Organized work-based learning (on-the-job training, incumbent worker, work experience, internships)
- Strong training programs in multiple career paths, especially in transportation and logistics, building trades, manufacturing, and healthcare
- Quality workforce
- Funding – The Region and the local areas are able to leverage many sources of funding including competitive grants in addition to WIOA formula funds
- Strong partnership with training and educational providers

Policy and Advocacy Capacity: The Workforce Partners of Metropolitan Chicago are skilled at analyzing the current state of the workforce system and advocating for policies that can support improved systems and services.

Challenges of the Region's workforce system:

Resource Challenges
- Federal funding inconsistencies and aggressive timelines which affect planning and implementation of programs over time
- Lack of awareness of all the resources available to jobseekers
- Lack of sufficient and flexible resources to serve jobseekers that present in the WIOA system with multiple barriers to employment, including basic-skills deficient, criminal records, and undocumented workers.

Geographic Challenges
- Lack of consistent public transportation throughout the NEEDR
- Minimal access to services to rural communities in the NEEDR, especially internet access
- Deteriorating infrastructure in rural communities
- Lack of transportation access and options to less urban areas

Demographic Challenges
- Large number of non-English speaking individuals
- Cultural barriers to employment of diverse population
- Lack of technical skills
- Aging population
- Decline in overall population numbers with sub-regional differences

Systems-level Challenges

- Shared responsibility among partners and expectations of collaboration. In terms of governance and service integration, Title I shares most responsibility for the success of the MOU, coordination and core service delivery while other partners may not receive consistent levels of guidance from national and state agencies.
- Silos among Titles (opportunities for coordination under WIOA) remain at the Federal and State level.
- Lack of an integrated, shared data system across the core partners for job seeker and business customer data and case management.

While there are many sector partnerships in the Northeast Economic Development Region as evidenced in Chapter 1, the current TPM sector collaboratives are in Will and Lake County. These collaboratives are detailed in the previous section. Both relatively new initiatives and at the time this plan was initially developed there were no employer collaboratives engaged in the U.S. Chamber's Talent Pipeline Management Initiative, however, one employer in Will County, National Tube Supply Company had been through the Talent Pipeline Management training program.

As mentioned earlier, LWIA staff have participated in TPM training and are working to develop programs to engage employers in using the TPM framework. Moving forward, it is planned that additional staff will be trained in TPM management and will incorporate those strategies into current and future sector partnerships.

Economic development partners are engaged with regional planning activities through local collaborations as well as their participation on Workforce Boards. In addition, several Directors and Board chairs of LWIAs in the NEEDR have seats on the local economic development organizations.

Future efforts to expand participation in the planning process will include continued service integration activities with core partners, engagement with industry associations/chambers of commerce/economic development organizations, and expanded business service team outreach activities.

Capacity to provide workforce development activities to individuals with barriers to employment and preparing job seekers to enter and retain employment

Due to the large geographic area and the differences in population throughout the Region, as well as access to different funding sources, each local area focuses on individuals with different barriers to employment but as a collective they share best practices, replicate innovative programs, and coordinate projects when appropriate. Examples are provided in the sub-sections below related to key populations. In addition to the activities identified below that are targeted to specific populations with barriers to employment, many of the services also include details on how the region prepares job seekers for employment generally.

Each LWIA provides a wide range of services to job seekers to assist in entering employment and supports to ensure that they retain employment. Some of these services are listed below but this is not a comprehensive list of services because new services are continually being developed to meet the specific needs of job-seeking customers.

- Resume writing workshops and reviews
- Career Services workshops
- Interviewing assistance, practice, and support, including mock interviews
- Job Fairs and recruitment events
- Career exploration activities
- Computer and digital literacy workshops and training
- Internet job search workshops
- Financial Literacy workshops
- Job Boards and access to job opportunities
- Job Clubs
- Off-site career services (libraries, CBOs, partner locations)
- Development of IEPs to identify specific job seeker needs
- Identification of barriers to employment and referral to partner services (GED/Food/Housing/mental health services, etc.)
- Work-based learning opportunities
- Provision of labor market information
- LinkedIn training and assistance

- Low-Skilled Adults: The Region's education partners including the community college partners of each local workforce area are also focusing on delivery of the Integrated Career & Academic Preparation System (ICAPS). ICAPS aims to provide an integrated pathway in Career and Technical Education (CTE) for college credit and program certificate opportunities for Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) students that lack basic skills. Through ICAPS programs students

  work to complete their high school equivalency and are co-enrolled in credit CTE courses/certificates through an integrated instructional model including contextualized and industry-focused basic skills education. The model provides career pathway/employment opportunities for students while enabling their transition into additional postsecondary certificate/degree programs. The adult education programs at many of the region's colleges are working to incorporate workforce development activities into programming for low-skilled adults.
    - The Partnership's One Stop Operator developed a referral tracking system using Airtable to better connect job seekers to services. Title 2 partners are connecting participants to Title 1 services and vice versa.
    - Many adult education providers in the Region include career readiness activities within the ABE/ASE/ESL curriculum. For example, at South Suburban, it is mandatory for students to complete a resume with a transitions coach, and this is a classroom activity, along with attending an on-site job fair as a field trip once per year.
    - College of Lake County delivers ABE, Bridge and ICAPS programs. Workforce Development provides workshops on job readiness, career awareness and connections to employers and hiring opportunities. After the Bridge program students can enroll in the Step Up to the Integrated Academic Preparation System (ICAPS) program. ICAPS are certificate programs in career and technical education fields. Current programs include: Certified Nurse Assisting, Healthcare Office Assistance, Phlebotomy Technician, Automotive Technology, HVAC/Refrigeration Engineering Technology, Administrative Management and Technology, and Computer Information Technology.
    - In local area 5, Basic Certificate programs require between 1 and 29 credit hours

and take less time to complete than vocational certificates. Many of the technical

certificates are "stackable," which means as you finish more classes and earn more certificates, those certificates "stack up" to get you closer to completing an Associate of Applied Science degree. Although the ICAPS program is available to any student it primarily supports those who are underprepared for college classes, adult education students, and second language learners. Services include, job search assistance, clear schedule of courses leading to your Basic Vocational Certificate in less than a year, free loaner textbooks, free academic support classes and workshops to advance your career, a dedicated student support specialist to help ensure success, and classes with the same group of peers (cohorts) throughout the program. Courses in our local area are: Arc Welding Automotive Electrical Specialist, Basic Nurse Assistant Training, Bookkeeping, Break and Suspension Specialist, Clinical Laboratory Assistant, Computer Integrated Manufacturing, and Computer Network Specialist.

- In DuPage County, College of DuPage's ICAPS programs include Central Sterile Processing Distribution Technician, Office Technology Specialist, PC Technician (A+, Net+.) In addition, DuPage has a strong partnership with World Relief to serve English Language Learners, and they have recently started a bridge program for immigrants and refugees. We offer the NorthStar digital literacy platform and a monthly workshop to assist those with low-level basic computer skills.
- In Will County, workshops are offered to support clients with basic computer programs as well as a referral program with Title 2 partners, which offer GED and adult literacy programming in a hybrid model and at the one-stop location.

- Individuals with Disabilities: Local Title I providers coordinate with Vocational Rehabilitation staff and other WIOA system partners in delivery of services for people with disabilities. Local areas have Disability Navigators embedded within the One-Stops or within the system to target and serve people with disabilities.
  - The Regional DEI initiative –has four components: 1) Staff training on working with employers to assist hiring people with disabilities, justice impacted individuals, limited English speakers, etc., 2) Employer training on hiring, onboarding, and coaching these individuals, 3) Cohort of employers received intensive training, recruitment and hiring assistance, onboarding services, and ongoing technical assistance, 4) Toolkit to continue work with employers. This work was funded through a DCEO grant. In addition, at a regional level, DHR - VR staff engaged with regional business services team to provide assistance with disability hiring fairs in several areas.
  - McHenry County has a contract with Parents Alliance to conduct the Project Search Program at Northwestern Huntley Hospital. This program works with individuals with disabilities to learn job skills within the hospital setting and gain permanent employment. McHenry County holds two disability focused job fairs a year.
  - In Will County the Department of Rehabilitative services offers services from the one-stop on a weekly basis to support individuals with disabilities. Will County also hosts job fairs two to three times a year for this population. Additionally, Will County partners with DRS to host informational webinars to businesses on how to provide accessible and inclusive support in the workplace.

- DuPage County assists young adults with internship development and placement that takes into account their specific skill sets and limitations in the workplace. DuPage also partners with job coaches through Parents Alliance Employment

  Project as needed. Our business services team includes the concept of disability-inclusive hiring into their initial cold contacts and/or ongoing business communications with employer contacts. We have a close relationship with organizations that serve job seekers with disabilities, including Donka and Turning Pointe. The One Stop Operator also hosted a series of meetings with Ray Graham at our Center for Disability Employment Awareness month to increase knowledge of participating businesses.
- Lake County hosts onsite hiring events and partners to host the Disability Job Fair. Lake County is also expanding apprenticeship programs with a focus on individuals with a disability.
- The Cook County Bureau of Economic Development award The Partnership funding to support Navigators to conduct outreach and connect individuals, including people with disabilities to the One-Stop system network. The Partnership continues to fund the LaGrange Area Department of Special Education, AERO, Bridges to Work, and Main Township High School with WIOA youth funds. These programs specialize in serving youth with disabilities.

- Returning Citizens: The NEEDR includes a number of communities that are major points of re-entry for those being released from the Corrections system. The WBMC and local areas collaborate closely with the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) and key providers of re-entry and other services for returning citizens (formerly incarcerated individuals) and in particular those recently released. Several areas (Lake County, Kane DeKalb Kendall, and Will County) provide mini-One-Stop services on-site at local prisons and jails, in order to deliver services prior to an individual's release.
  - Lake County Workforce Development and College of Lake County participate in the Lake County Coalition to Reduce Recidivism providing community-based reentry services and assisting returning individuals in becoming productive members of the community through programs and supportive services. This includes Revive Lake County, a five-week program that is delivered at two locations – the Lake County Adult Corrections Facility and the Job Center of Lake County – to provide accessibility to individuals throughout all stages of the rehabilitation process. Training topics include career awareness, employability skills, communication pointers, and transferable skills. The program is also delivered in the Lake County Jail in partnership with the Sheriff's office, State's Attorney, and College of Lake County. Workforce Development also partners with several organizations that have the mission to work directly with returning citizens, including Waukegan Township and the Coalition to Reduce Recidivism. Lake County also has a Transitional Jobs program delivered in conjunction with area adult transition centers and other partners.
  - The Partnership continues its work with the Cook County justice Advisory Council on its Road Home program to align systems and policies to more effectively support successful reentry. With ARPA funding from the Cook County Bureau of Economic Development, the program expanded to support 3 agencies: Phalanx, Safer Foundation and SERCO. These agencies are tasked with connecting

individuals' exiting facilities with employment assistance and other resources. The Partnership also continues to fund the Safer Foundation under its WIOA program which specializes in serving returning citizens. The Partnership works closely with the Chicago Mayor's office on Reentry Services and the welcoming centers in the City of Chicago.

- McHenry County has a program called Step Forward that is designed to work with individuals coming out of the justice system to prepare them to be work ready. They partner with the Stateline Society for Human Resource Managers (SHRM) to offer modules in the program. McHenry also works with organizations to understand the re-entry population to help reduce barriers for them to access quality employment opportunities.
- Kankakee County provides re-entry services at Pontiac Correctional Center. Re-entry summits are biannual events that are onsite for prisoners who are being released within 6 months. In addition, Kankakee has a close partnership with the local reentry office and justice-involved youth providers that refer individuals for workforce services.
- Will County has two grant funded programs that serve justice impacted individuals to obtain credentials through our scholarship program or offer on-the-job training for this targeted population.
- DuPage County works closely with the Department of Probation and is assisting them with setting up career planning services at two planned Recovery Community centers (for those in recovery from substance use disorders who participated in Drug Court.) In addition, DuPage County recently developed a policy for Transitional Jobs and hopes to implement these specifically for recently released inmates of the County Jail. This is in partnership with the Sheriff's Office and an organization called Just DuPage. Some of these individuals are also attending online courses through College of DuPage while incarcerated and will be able to either continue those programs after release or find employment or transitional jobs with assistance.

- Out of School Youth: All areas report that this population is by definition difficult to reach because they are often not engaged with public entities and traditional community recruiting partners. Also, in a low unemployment economy, many young adults successfully secure some employment and do not always see the value of participation in a workforce program or education or have the ability to balance their employment with training or education. However, the regional partners know that this population's employment is too often at a low wage, often even at the minimum wage, and without further training and support, is too often precarious and lacking in career pathways.
  - The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership issued a WIOA Youth delegate agency RFP in 2023 and selected 24 agencies to provide Out of School youth services and 7 In-School Youth agencies. The Partnership received ARPA funding from the Cook County Bureau of Economic Development to expand its Opportunity Works Program which provides paid work experience/internships for suburban youth.
  - In Will County, the Connect to Your Future youth program provides occupational training and work-based learning opportunities.
  - McHenry County Workforce Center offers GED on site through McHenry County College for needed individuals as well as career pathway programs in healthcare

and manufacturing which focus on classroom and work-based learning opportunities.

- In local area 5, there is a YouthBuild program in Elgin with the Housing Authority of Elgin and in Aurora with the QUAD County Urban League.
- In Lake County, in response to challenges youth and young adults faced in accessing education, employment and training services during the pandemic, The Workforce Development Board hired a consulting firm to complete a

  thorough assessment of the youth service network in Lake County with a focus on the WIOA Youth Funded programs and services. The scope of work included the following and the report was published in March 2022: Community Assessment and Profile; Interview Target Populations; Stakeholder Interviews/Roundtables; Service Delivery/Gap Analysis. To develop and guide the actions recommended by the report, The Workforce Board has a Youth Task Force led by a 22-year-old young man of color. The Board created an action plan around how best to address recruitment and service gaps and is collaborating with a larger network of youth serving organizations and high schools, focusing on key sectors of the population including youth aging out of foster care, youth with a disability, youth tied to the justice system, and homeless youth.
- Lake County Workforce Development was also part of the DOL Youth System Building Academy in 2023 with a team from Lake County including Workforce Development, CLC, Regional Office of Education, Operators Local 150, and Youth Build providers. An action plan was developed and accepted by DOL to co-create a system with youth and for youth.
- Several areas have added Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) for Youth to their WIOA service strategy, enhancing the ability to deliver skills training for out-of-school Youth specifically and to more seamlessly weave together adult service strategies with the youth program.

- Veterans: Veterans receive priority of service, as required by WIOA. IDES provides veteran representatives and WIOA managers in each workforce area who coordinate job fairs and host quarterly meetings with veterans' representatives from community colleges and other veteran entities. In addition, the IDES staff host workshops and do presentations to veteran groups. IDES hosts workshops for veterans and performs intakes of all veterans with priority of service. Other targeted veterans' programs in the Region include:
  - The Chicago Federation of Labor, with support from the Partnership, has a specialized training program with Peoples Gas to train veterans for jobs with opportunities for advancement and family-supporting wages. WIOA Individual Training ITA) account funds support these efforts.
  - Will County has a Disabled Veteran representative located full-time in their One-Stop Center and the Will County Veteran's Assistance Commission is located across the hall from the One-Stop Center for ease of client referral.

- English Language Learners: One-Stop centers provide referrals to the ESL programs at community colleges.
  - The College of DuPage offers transition courses in ESL, including workforce prep and/or college prep at the WorkNet DuPage Career Center, ESL is offered through the McHenry County College's Adult Education program with potential plans for

the ESL programming to return to the One-Stop Center.

- In Lake County, 18.7% of residents were born outside the US. Lake County works with the ABE providers and multiple agencies to provide services and programs. Through Job Center on the Move, Lake County has worked at community sites and libraries to meet the individuals in their communities. Bridge programs are offered through the College of Lake County. Lake County has a list of agencies we work with, including Catholic Charities and Goodwill.

- With ARPA funding from the Cook County Bureau of Economic Development, The Partnership was able to fund additional Program navigators to connecting individuals with limited English deficiencies to ESL and workforce services. The One Stop Operator, Scale Lit, designed a referrals system using Air table that is used to automate the referral process among WIOA partners. The Partnership continues to fund delegate agencies that work with large populations of English Language Learners, including the Chinese American Service League, Polish American Institute, and Central State Ser. In addition, The Partnership is currently working with the State and City on connecting the thousands of New Arrivals to workforce services. The AJCs provide information to immigrants who have completed the work authorization application. Basic career services and placement assistance is provided.

- Homeless Individuals: Homeless services strategies are incorporated into local areas service.
  - In DuPage County workforce development participates in the County's Continuum of Care, making referrals to a host of organizations that serve homeless individuals.
  - McHenry County Workforce Network has actively worked with local community organizations to provide workforce services to individuals experiencing homelessness by providing workshops to build awareness behind available workforce services. Past projects included developing a welding training that targeted youth in need, including homeless youth. This program was an intense bootcamp that established welding skills to break into the welding industry and produced success in seeing youth transition from homeless services into permanent housing.
  - In Cook County, through the National Dislocated Workers QUEST grant, The Partnership forged a relationship with BEDS PLUS CARE, an organization that provides shelter and care to individuals who are homeless. The Partnership funds a work crew at BEDS PLUS Care to provide food and other assistance to those in the shelter. As mentioned above, The Partnership is working to provide employment services to the New Arrival population, many who are homeless and living in temporary shelters.
  - In Lake County there are two housing authorities that are part of the Job Center and the Unify Referral System. PADS is an active partner with the Job Center.
  - In Kane, Kendall and DeKalb Counties, Title I staff coordinate with the local Continuum of Care system and have attended meetings to convey information regarding employment and training services and opportunities to homeless providers in the area. Staff will continue to incorporate homeless service strategies related to employment and training in collaborating with the Continuum of Care boards.

- Will County participates in a Community Risk Reduction program and partners with the Will County Center for Community Concerns.

- **Older Workers:** The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) program sponsored by the Illinois Department on Aging and designed to assist the mature worker (at least 55 years old) in re-entering the job market is an active partner in the region's Illinois workNet Centers. SCSEP places eligible individuals, usually for 20 hours a week at minimum wages, in nonprofit agencies or community service agencies community assignments. Mature workers will also be assisted in skill enhancement opportunities and assistance in the transition to unsubsidized employment.
  - The workNet Center in DeKalb coordinates with Experience Works to serve the population 55 years of age and older. McHenry County will hold seminars on job search for older workers as part of our Network to Success Job Club. DuPage County recently hosted AARP to provide a workshop for older adults.
  - The "Back to Work 50+ Cook County" grant from AARP serves Cook County jobseekers through workshops, career coaching, and vocational training services (including computer training) in order to help them obtain employment. Through this grant, The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership will link older workers to the Region's high demand sectors: Business & Professional Services, Healthcare, Retail, Culinary and Hospitality, Information Technology, Manufacturing and Transportation Distribution & Logistics. Job Seekers will be connected to training that prepares them for one of 40 occupations that have strong projected growth, including health information technician, retail supervisor, and computer support specialist. Joliet Junior College received a Plus 50 Grant to assist older workers in returning to the workforce. They work collaboratively with the WIOA system to offer training and workshops to job seekers over 50 who are re-entering the workforce.

Capacity to Address the Needs of Employers

Employer services include occupational and labor market information to inform economic forecasting, no-cost human resource services for recruiting, retaining, and hiring qualified employees and accelerated and a range of customized employer-based training initiatives for increasing skills of existing and new employees. The NEEDR is focused on supporting employers' DEI strategies by increasing access to a diverse pool of job seekers.

Each local area's WIOA system includes a business services team made up of staff from all partners who are business-facing and focused on job development and business services. As noted above in Chapter 1, the NEEDR convenes a Regional Integrated Business Service Team with the focus of bringing together WIOA Title 1 Business Services Representative, IDES Business Service and Employer Service Representatives, and DHS-VR Business Service Representatives and coordinating and streamlining services to employers, and in particular those larger employers with sites in multiple areas or with a workforce drawn from across the Region. A goal is to reduce the employer's work in engaging with the public workforce system and ensure they can access workers, training, and other services from any of the workforce areas in the Region. The regional team is designed to provide the ability to serve employers across the region and to conduct joint initiatives among the LWIAs in the region.

The local and regional teams:

- Engage the business community to identify industry-hiring trends and industry-recognized credentials.
- Support industry-specific sector strategies designed to facilitate in-depth focus on particular industries with business partnerships in these areas.
- Analyze and disseminate labor market information to project job growth, wages, and training requirements.
- Provide comprehensive analysis of our regional labor market.
- Provide Area wage and benefits analysis for targeted positions.
- Create custom recruitment plans.
- Post jobs online.

- Conduct targeted recruitment through email and social marketing tools.
- Provide an application collection center.
- Conduct applicant screening using business' key criteria and assessment tools.
- Organize job fairs and special employer events.
- Provide interview scheduling service and facilities.
- Provide pre-hire training for eligible applicants.
- Provide On-the-job training program funds.
- Facilitate employed worker training for industry certifications and credentials.
- Respond to WARN notices, facilitating workshops on behalf of the State, City, and County by providing information on rights, responsibilities, and resources for the workforce.

The NEEDR is committed to ensuring training programs in the region and local areas prepare job seekers to enter and retain employment with regional businesses. It will continue to work with the IWIB and the Business Integration Team to meet the goals set out by the Illinois Integrated Business Services Team. Representatives from the region serve on the business services teams and share information with local boards and partners as each local area works towards more integrated business services.

Each local area in the NEEDR conducts formal and ongoing efforts to ensure the existing skills of job seekers match the demands of local businesses. Each area reviews training programs and meets with industry advisory groups and board members who are business representatives to review their list of programs on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) to ensure that training and curriculum is aligned with the needs of industry and that training programs prepare workers for specific positions that are in-demand and provide industry-recognized credentials for these in-demand opportunities. An annual analysis of labor market information is conducted to ensure training programs meet the needs of the regional economy.

Illinois Department of Employment Security provide the following services to employers throughout the Region:

- Assists employers with creating an Illinois Job Link registration, posting job orders and searching for resumes in illinoisjoblink.com.
- Assists employers with their recruitment events, either at the One-Stop centers or at their assigned location.
- Facilitate quality job matches, conforming to State labor laws.
- Create customized Phone Notifications and e-mail blasts to job seekers to inform them to attend events in an effort to assist employers with their workforce needs.
- Conduct outreach efforts to assist the business community.

- Provide employer seminars to keep employers informed on new laws and regulations in Unemployment Insurance and employment services.
- Provide Labor Market Information to employers.
- Provide mass notification of local hiring events.
- Provide assistance with Work Opportunity Tax Credits (WOTC), Fidelity Bonding, Apprenticeship Information, On-Job-Training (OJT), Veteran Programs and Federal Contractor Regulations.

Commitments of each program partner to implement the selected strategies described in the Action Plan for Improving Service Integration in the Region.

The Workforce Partners of Metro Chicago, which represent the 7 LWIAs in the NEEDR, have been focused on service integration through their regional initiatives for over 20 years. They have several regional teams that have committed to continuous improvement in service integration through the sharing of best practices and the development of ongoing regional coordinated initiatives. The Regional Business Services Team has had joint training on service integration and has shared best practices to assist others in ensuring strong service integration strategies. The Regional One-Stop Operator team has been collaborating on best practices designed to enhance service integration.

After completing a local Service Integration Self-Assessment each local area has developed an action plan for service integration and has developed specific activities individually and collectively to raise service integration activities to a higher level. The action plans include goals for the following service integration components:

- Customer Centered Design
- Partner Staff Goals
- Intake and Assessment
- Service Goals
- Career Pathways Goals
- Information
- Evaluation Goals

The core partners have been integral participants in service integration discussion and have had significant engagement in regional teams. Core partners across each local area are committed to focusing on service integration areas such as enhanced cross-training, customer-centered design improvements, professional development efforts, and responsive service delivery strategies.

The NEEDR was also represented on the state Service Integration workgroup and was involved in the development of the Illinois Service Integration Policy which informed the development of the Service Integration Self-Assessment Tool

B. Describe how transportation and other supportive services are coordinated within the Region (Sec. 679.510(a)(1)(vi)). The plan must respond to the following questions:
   1. What regional organizations currently provide or could provide supportive services?
   2. What policies and procedures will be established to promote coordination of supportive services delivery?

The NEEDR is fortunate to have an extensive transportation system in the urban portions of the

region, including public transit, although, as mentioned above, outside of the core, transit can be a challenge. The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) provides more than two million rides each weekday on bus and rail services in Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will Counties. The Region's transportation system includes the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Metra and Pace bus and (ADA) Paratransit Service. The RTA's system covers approximately 3,700 square miles and serves approximately 8.4 million residents. The RTA also provides rider services, including online and telephone travel planning assistance and travel training for seniors and people with disabilities. Public transportation is less available in the lower-density, outlying areas of the Region. The RTA does not cover Kendall, Kankakee, Grundy or DeKalb counties, which have smaller, local bus services and paratransit services. Some of the local areas provide gas cards to

clients in training in areas with less public transportation options and some will work with suburban bus lines to provide easy to understand information for job seekers on transportation services. Although there is an extensive transportation system in the Region – there are areas underserved including rural, last miles, off-hours and weekend services, service off main routes and across county lines.

One-Stop clients are referred to entities or organizations that are not available at the One-Stop center for supportive services. Examples include housing, health, transportation, services for individuals with disabilities and financial counseling. Veterans have assistance available to them for transportation needs and expediting referral to housing and medical services. In addition, supportive services are available for IDHS customers receiving TANF and/or SNAP benefits that agree to participate in any approved program with the partners. In some local areas, youth receive incentive payments and gas cards for training and work experience transportation.

Some adult education providers are able to collaborate and deliver childcare services. Many adult education programs have a transitions coordinator to assist underprepared adults with the transition to college. Some colleges offer special services for all students on campus, such as a women’s center providing support in the case of emergency. Many colleges provide credit waivers of differing amounts for high school equivalency (HSE) graduates and/or ESL completers, and many have a scholarship fund for high scoring HSE graduates. Foundations on campus are often able to provide various types of support to students, such as funding the cost of the GED test.

Resource guides from IDES are available in all areas to serve individuals with barriers to employment. These resource guides provide a list of supportive services available in the community and are updated regularly. Statewide IDES offices and staff have access to these resource guides. In several areas these are supplemented by content gathered by the other partners. In a number of counties in the region, the 2-1-1 non-emergency telephone line is available. 2-1-1 connects people with essential community information and services. Callers can receive live assistance with needs such as food and shelter, counseling and mental health services, income and employment support, help for the elderly and people with disabilities, and resources for children and families.

Due to the size of the region, supportive services are not easily coordinated throughout the region, however, the WPMC leadership and staff have regular meetings that are designed to share best practices and program strategies including those related to supportive services. Not only do regional meetings allow sharing of program strategies, but it has also encouraged replication of successful initiatives such as the implementation of kiosks for broader job seeker

engagement. The region developed and implemented a regional Incumbent Worker Training Policy to ensure consistency across the region with respect to IWT initiatives. In an effort to ensure that best practices were shared, the region reviewed each area's self-sufficiency and supportive services policies to allow for replication and possible expansion in some areas. There is an ongoing effort to share, coordinate, and enhance existing local policies throughout the region. The region will also utilize the policy templates being created through the collaboration between IWP and KEB to develop some baseline verbiage that can be modified to address local needs.

C. Describe the coordination of services with regional economic development services and WIOA service providers (Sec. 679.510(a)(1)(vii)). The plan must answer the following questions:
   1. What economic development organizations, WIOA service providers, or businesses are actively engaged in regional planning?
   2. What economic development organizations, WIOA service providers, or businesses were invited to participate but declined?

Due to the large population and geographic size of the Region, and the smaller scope of many economic development entities at the county level, much of the coordination with economic development services and providers happens at the local level rather than region wide. For example, in many of the local areas, the local economic development department or authority has a seat on the Local Workforce Board and is included in policy making decisions and a range of activities. Local Workforce Boards across the Region work with county and municipal economic development offices to address workforce issues associated with companies relocating to the Region.

- For example, The Partnership works closely with the City of Chicago Department of Planning Development and the Mayor's economic development team as well as the Cook County Bureau of Economic Development. In this capacity, the Partnership has assisted with supporting the expansion of local companies and participated in "pitch" meetings whereby the City, World Business Chicago, and The Partnership have met with companies considering locating to Chicago.
- Choose DuPage is represented on our LWIB, and we sit on the Choose DuPage Board. Workforce Development representatives are part of the Workforce Development committee of the Choose DuPage Board, participated in the Choose DuPage strategic planning, and will integrate that with our local WIOA plan. We have always worked side by side on company visits as needed, as well as data gathering.
- Lake County Workforce has partnered with the local economic development group, Lake County Partners (LCP), to provide Business Service Outreach. LCP partners with Lake County Workforce Development in meeting with employers as part of the business outreach visit related to expansion, retention and attraction. LCP provides referrals back to Lake County Workforce as appropriate from interactions/conversations. These services include additional partners and stakeholders including the local community college, College of Lake County. In Lake County, the Workforce Ecosystem was formed to ensure that local businesses have access to talent, training, and development resources for retention and expansion purposes. The Ecosystem consists of a partnership between Lake County Workforce Development, College of Lake County, Lake County Partners, and Lake County High Schools Technology Campus, local high schools, and the Lake County University Center. A major element of this collaboration is the use of a shared CRM system

to manage the business outreach visits and relationships.

- In Will County, the Local Workforce Board conducts joint planning with the Will County Center for Economic Development (CED) and all Local Workforce Board staff are located at the CED. This partnership enhances coordination with economic development and provides additional services to employers.
- In Cook County, The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership is a member of the County's Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC). EDAC is the forum where certain tax credit and loan applications are reviewed and approved. Additionally, the Committee also provides advisement on the allocation of Community Development Block Grants, HOME Investment Partnership, Emergency Solutions Grants, and other eligible projects. As part

  of EDAC, The Partnership connects with the entities receiving these grants to promote the business services of the workforce system. The Partnership provides workforce development advisement on capital planning projects with diversity goals and manages the workforce recruitment activities associated with these projects. In 2022, The Partnership and the Cook County Bureau of Economic Development launched Career Connector Hiring events throughout Suburban Cook County. These events are designed to connect employers with immediate job openings to job ready candidates. Six to seven events are planned during the year in different suburban locations.

  The Partnership also engages any of the more than 100 Cook County municipalities around their workforce development needs by supporting their economic development interests and presenting to companies that are expanding and/or considering location within the municipality. The Partnership supports strategy development in the City of Chicago's master planning initiative to accelerate growth in priority growth sectors (Tourism and Hospitality, Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics; Technology, and Healthcare and Life Sciences). These working groups are facilitated by World Business Chicago. The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership participates in various forums created by the Mayor's Office to address underserved communities throughout Chicago at mini town hall meetings and provides support in the planning and implementation of the City of Chicago's resource fairs for residents and for business owners.
  - In McHenry County, representatives from the Department of Commerce Economic Development unit and local economic development agencies participate on the business services team. McHenry County partners with economic development groups in the Northern Stateline EDR for grant applications, business outreach activities, and the implementation of a comprehensive economic development strategy. In addition, McHenry County facilitates a Business Resource Team that is comprised of Economic Development Stakeholders from around McHenry County that meets on a Bi-Monthly basis to provide updates from each area. This team is comprised of city economic development entities in McHenry County, a local DCEO representative, McHenry County College, high school, and workforce development business services. This team provides an avenue to coordinate efforts and understand what grant opportunities may be available through the state. The workforce also partners with the McHenry County Economic Development Corporation to aid in company recruiting.
- In Grundy, Livingston, Kankakee, local economic development entities are Workforce Board members. In addition, the workforce board office is co-located with economic development which has created a strong partnership. A good example of this is Economic Development brought Workforce Board staff into the early meetings with Gotion during

the recruitment of the company to the area. After the announcement, Board staff is working with company on creating a recruitment plan, which will be a regional effort in order to fil the 2,600 jobs.

- Local economic development departments participate in the Greater Chicagoland Economic Partnership, which allows workforce development to tap into regional economic development activities. Additionally, at least one Local Workforce Board Director is a member of the Chicagoland Metropolitan Agency for Planning's (CMAP) Economic Development Committee and regularly provides input on the regional planning efforts that CMAP is responsible for.

The WPMC Directors hosted a virtual session with stakeholders from across the workforce system including education, economic development, employers, and other partners provide an overview and gather additional content for the Plan.

There were not any economic development organizations, WIOA services providers, or businesses that were invited to participate but declined.

D. Describe the coordination of administrative cost arrangements, including the pooling of funds for administrative costs, as appropriate (Sec. 679.510(a)(1)(v)).

Local Workforce Boards have engaged the WIOA partners in discussion around costs and are currently negotiating based on their fair share use of the workforce development system. Additionally, partners have identified cost contributions based on available funds and system use. The partners will work together towards continuous system improvements through shared costs, leveraging of resources and a foundation of cooperation.

The NEEDR pools a significant portion of WIOA funds toward collaboration. For more than 20 years, the Workforce Partners of Metropolitan Chicago (formerly Workforce Boards of Metropolitan Chicago) have agreed to pool funds to execute regional projects identified through strategic planning. Activities include:

- A half day Workforce Board Strategic Planning event
- Customer Service/Cross-Training Series with Core Partners
- Common Customer Tracking System
- Common Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Systems
- Shared Labor Market Information data

The convener of these activities, the Regional Coordinator, is responsible for:

- Convening meeting of WPMC partner staff
- Assisting with the development and management of an annual regional cost share agreement and budget
- Assisting with the development and execution of activities to support the strategic Regional plan
- Assisting in fostering regional partnerships with stakeholder and employers to support Regional workforce development and economic development initiatives
- Planning and convening events designed to advance regional initiatives, address capacity building needs of One-Stop system staff, and actively engage workforce development stakeholders and employers
- Facilitating ongoing communication among WPMC

- Performing tasks that support regional communication strategies
- Maximizing the Region's benefit from each of the local workforce area's initiatives by fostering the sharing of information
- Managing procurement processes related to regional initiatives, in accordance with applicable competitive and small purchase procurement requirements
- Preparing progress reports and materials on regional initiatives
- Adapting Regional reports and project deliverables for use at the local level

The local Title I staff will negotiate with partners to include Regional Planning costs in the MOU. The MOU, which is to include administrative cost sharing arrangements among the partners, is still pending. The MOU under WIOA will be finalized July 1, 2024.

E. Describe how a responsiveness, inclusivity, and accessibility are or will be incorporated into the regional service integration strategies.

The region has created a responsiveness, inclusivity, and accessibility statement: "We actively work to expand access and eliminate disparities people experience, especially those from marginalized communities, by providing a customized service approach to all clients." The region will use this when it comes to thinking through regional integration strategies. The workforce development system can share this definition or information about this definition when interacting with partner programs and employers. Partners and employers should be addressing various populations for recruitment and retention that should be in line with areas that the workforce system would like to address. The region can continue to work towards initiatives and discussions about inclusive practices. The region strives to work with employers who offer quality jobs and share the quality jobs principles with those who do not currently meet that threshold.. Regional workforce leaders and partners can be mindful of a customer centered approach and how it could be applied in coordination of services. Lastly, training staff on how to work with diverse populations will be important to ensure responsiveness, inclusivity, and accessibility

CHAPTER 3: VISION, GOALS, AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

A. Describe the local strategic vision to support state and regional economic growth (§ 679.560(a)(5)). Describe how this aligns with the State of Illinois' vision and principles (page 1). Include a description of how the region and local areas will accomplish the local strategic vision and support state and regional economic growth.

Vision: The Northeast Economic Development Region WIOA partners will work collaboratively to deliver a workforce development system that provides opportunities for career growth for the Region's jobseekers and workers as well as ensures a skilled workforce to meet the needs of businesses.

This vision will ensure that the Region's workforce development system will be responsive to changes in the economy, including changes in dominant industry sectors, as well as changes in the skills and education needed for jobs. The workforce development system will assist the Region's workers and jobseekers to advance along career pathways and will effectively collaborate with educators and economic development agencies to provide an aligned system for the Region's stakeholders. This vision focuses on the One-Stop delivery system and reinforces that the region shall provide a true "One-Stop" experience, at which any employer, worker, or jobseeker can access the programs and resources they need, whether in-person or electronically. The Northeast Economic Development region is committed to utilize ongoing evaluations to assess programmatic success, providing for continuous system improvement.

The region also will engage in analyzing best practices in WDB coordination from other similar metro urban regions in other states to better understand how to best serve employer and jobseeker needs. Analyzing these other metro region comparable plans provides opportunities for operational optimization and alignment within the local boards. Our regional WDB leadership will commence a process designed to improve our alignment in serving the needs of our jobseekers, educators, and corporate partners.

Increasingly, our companies, educators, and strategies are multi-regional and require coordinated action. We understand that our workforce system must be more aligned with this trend and better support multi-regional planning and service delivery. Regional workforce leaders will engage in efforts to shape the local workforce system to include a review of policies and procedures to ensure they are effective, flexible and to identify gaps and possible solutions to any service gaps that exist.

State of Illinois' Vision Statement: Illinois' workforce system will meet employers, jobseekers, and community members where they are, centering the customer experience in an interoperable, equitable, and accessible manner to ensure all customers achieve their goals. We will support employers by building diverse, quality career pathways and provide effective training, education, and economic opportunities for jobseekers and communities to thrive.

In addition to having strong alignment with the Illinois' Workforce System Vision, the NEEDR has been actively engaged in customer centered service delivery activities. Several areas have had staff trained in human centered service design and delivery training provided by DCEO. Cross LWIA teams were involved in the training and worked jointly to develop service design projects which incorporated the training

knowledge with local service delivery activities. The One-Stop Operator staff from Cook County also were provided with additional training on human centered service design and used a "train the trainer" model to facilitate knowledge and technique transfer to a wide variety of direct service staff. The NEEDR has a Regional One- Stop Operator group dedicated to sharing best practices and learnings. This group focused a recent meeting on presentations by local area teams on their experiences and uses of the customer centered design approach.

B. Describe the local goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce (including youth and individuals with barriers to employment) and goals relating to the performance accountability measures based on performance indicators (Sec. 677.155(a)(1)). Include a description of how the region and local areas will accomplish local goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce and goals relating to performance.

Local goals include:

- Improved and expanded regional sector partnerships which increase the focus on critical in- demand occupations in key industry sectors;
- Expanded career pathway opportunities, including work-based training models and integrated programs of study, which lead to industry-recognized credentials and improved employment and earnings;
- Expanded workforce opportunities for populations facing multiple barriers to career advancement through improved career services, career pathway programs and expanded bridge programs.

The Region recognizes and accepts the rapid technological change and workforce shortage local businesses are faced with. The Regional leaders are all engaged in technology-based services as part of their service delivery models of not only WIOA services, but their partner providers such as approved training providers and partner programs. Many of the regional training providers implemented online learning platforms, hybrid programs of study and virtual training simulators for some occupational training opportunities. As new technology advancements are introduced into the workforce development industry, the region is committed to exploration and adoption as it may apply and enhance program services. Some recent examples that have come to light are virtual work-based learning opportunities, digital media rich career exploration, and oculus virtual occupational training programs.

Even with these new technology advancements, not all are affordable or available to regional partners, businesses, and participants. The regional workforce leaders will continue to explore funding resource opportunities to engage collectively for digital equity implementation and support.

The region has been nimble to ensure the public workforce system's performance is maximized and serves in the best interest of the client by meeting them at their point of need. It is noteworthy to add, as regional workforce leaders, we have learned the other side of the technology coin – that is the need to have a balance with all the service delivery models available – not all clients want or can even use technology-based service models – some want and need face to face service delivery models. There was significant emphasis to achieve a balance to meet the diverse clients the region serves. Further monitoring, evaluation and exploration will continue.

Lake County Workforce Development was accepted and is a participant in Jobs for the Future's Workforce Community of Action Group. The Group is designed to facilitate a process for collaboratively thinking about and solving problems through a critical lens. The process and lessons learned will be shared with the other LWIAs in the NEEDR to provide assistance in addressing community workforce issues in a collaborative way.

The three goals identified above provide the basis for service delivery strategies, however, the NEEDR is committed to continuing to evaluate and explore additional strategies that will improve the services provided to both employers and job seekers. These goals will be evaluated annually to review the service delivery strategies that were undertaken, examine the process used for service delivery, and benchmark outcomes from the strategies. A continuous improvement process will be the foundation for the evaluation and improvements or changes will be based on both the evaluation and feedback from staff, partners, employers, and participants.

C. Provide a description of the regional and local strategies that will achieve the vision and principles. This section must include a description of the strategies and services that will be used in the local areas:
   1. To facilitate engagement of employers in workforce development programs, including small employers and employers in in-demand industry sectors and occupations (§679.560(b)(3)(i));
   2. To support a local workforce development system that meets the needs of businesses in the local area (§ 679.560(b)(3)(ii));
   3. To better coordinate workforce development programs and economic development (§ 679.560(b)(3)(iii));
   4. To strengthen linkages between the one-stop delivery system and unemployment insurance programs (§ 679.560(b)(3)(iv));
   5. To promote entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services (§ 679.560(b)(4)); and
   6. To implement initiatives such as incumbent worker training programs, on-the-job training programs, customized training programs, industry and sector strategies, career pathways initiatives, utilization of effective business intermediaries, and other business services and strategies designed to meet the needs of regional employers (§679.560(b)(3)(v)).

NEEDR is committed to collaborate across partners and services to develop strategies to address the skills gaps across the Region, through the workNet Centers and led by the core partners. The partners will engage in a regional planning process that explores career pathways, bridge programs, further development of ICAPPs, and workNet Centers tracking unemployed and underemployed individuals that lack a high school diploma, basic skills deficient, and post-secondary credentials. The NEEDR will develop additional strategies on how identified individuals will have access to the services and employment and training activities including providing access through the workNet Center, job readiness training integrated into classrooms, and working with training and service providers around stackable credentials.

The vision and principles of the NEEDR will be implemented through the following seven (7) policy strategies that together are necessary to reach the NEEDR plan goals. The NEEDR has incorporated the following strategies, including several that align directly with strategies from the Illinois Unified State Plan and solutions addressing the bullets above within multiple strategies as well as specific strategies as appropriate.

The strategies continue to serve the region and its business and industry needs. The pandemic did provide opportunities in how these strategies can be further supported through the use of advanced technology-based platforms. We have learned now more than ever; the region is experiencing a lack of skilled workforce to these now technology based enhanced occupations. We recognize the importance of an expanded focus on improving technological skills of participants through services provided at the Centers and in occupational training.

Strategy 1: Strengthen relationships with local industry and enhance the ability to meet the needs of businesses

The NEEDR has been working to increase partnerships with businesses to better serve their needs through cooperative strategies with partners. Some specific examples include:

- Disability job fairs and employer education workshops. Through a partnership with DHS-VR and training from a grant from DCEO, local areas developed and implemented employer workshops that focused on strategies for hiring people with disabilities. The training was followed-up with job fairs targeted to persons with a disability. These population specific job fairs have been replicated throughout the region and are offered multiple times throughout each year.
- Local Business Service team members are drawn from all partners and the Regional Business Services team also includes all partners. The expansion of business service teams beyond WIOA Title I has limited the duplication of services and has provided employers with a much broader array of services to meet their needs.

Each local area also has engaged in activities designed to strengthen relationships with local industry. For example, Will County developed a Business Service Team that identified the key employer services provided by the following entities: Joliet Junior College Career Services,

Joliet Junior College Workforce Development, Joliet Junior College Corporate and Community Education, Illinois Department of Employment Security, Employer and Employment Services,Workforce Services Division of Will County, Will County Center for Economic Development, and the Workforce Board of Will County. Through this expanded team the area identified and implemented a Customer Relationship Management system to share employer connections and activities.

Lake County Workforce Development is also expanding and enhancing business services. As part of the work developing their local plan, workforce development staff have had opportunities to engage employers in surveys and focus groups to solicit new input into programming. Lake County Workforce Development will also review training programs and classes with employers to verify the relevancy of training programs to the skills needed in the workplace. Lake County Workforce Development is also developing solutions around the hiring needs of employers with a greater focus on the hard-to-fill jobs and positions that struggle with retention, as well as working with staffing firms and growing internship programs. In addition,

Lake County Workforce Development is utilizing an on-the-job training strategy to assist small businesses that want to help employees move up the career ladder and create opening in entry-level positions.

In Kane, Kendall and DeKalb Counties, the Business Services Team has established contacts with small businesses that have participated or expressed interest in the on-the-job training and incumbent worker programs. Partnerships have also been established with the Aurora Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Elgin Development Group. Kane, Kendall, and DeKalb counties are expanding the business services team to include two additional Business Service Representatives to strengthen the outreach to local businesses and to form mutually beneficial partnerships with employers. Existing relationships with the business centers at the Elgin, Kishwaukee, and Waubonsee Community Colleges will also be vital to maintaining open channels of communication with employers across all three counties in the local area. Kane County is currently developing web content to market and promote services to businesses on its website.

The McHenry County Workforce Network has expanded its business service focus to help organizations meet workforce demands by targeting alternative talent pools. This includes holding job fairs for individuals with disabilities twice a year, going on 4 years and running a program called Step Forward to working with returning citizens to become job ready within the workplace. These efforts not only help to bring quality positions for individuals with barriers to employment but gives talent solutions for the local organizations.

DuPage County continues to enhance and refine its business services offerings, with a renewed focus on work-based learning. A county-wide Business Services Team has been assembled to coordinate and synergize outreach to businesses. The team includes representatives from DuPage County Workforce Development Division, Illinois Department of Commerce, Choose DuPage (Economic Development), College of DuPage Business Solutions, and College of DuPage Center for Entrepreneurship. In addition to expanded outreach, the team conducts information sessions at which businesses can learn of the grants, tax credits, and other services available to help them become more competitive. The team is conducting a campaign to recruit additional business leaders to the DuPage Workforce Board in order to capitalize on the industry expertise that they would bring to the Board and that would inform and guide local workforce development initiatives. A recent addition to these services is a program called Career Conversations targeted to a variety of populations (parents returning to work, re-entry and recovery communities, etc.) designed to allow employers to connect with job seekers in a conversational and informative platform culminating in traditional recruiting activities at the conclusion of the conversations.

The Workforce Partners of Metro Chicago have convened the Regional Integrated Business Services Team. The Regional BST meets regularly to discuss how each of the local areas have their business services structured and how different job functions are managed and delivered in each area. Incumbent worker training, on-the-job training projects, internships, adult work experience, files and monitoring, Rapid Response, and business services strategies are discussed, and promising practices are shared. The Regional BST provides an opportunity for building relationships among business service teams across the Region, exchanging ideas, and sharing job openings and company closures. This team has explored and tested ways to market Regional on-the-job training and incumbent worker opportunities to employers with multiple

locations throughout the metro Region through coordinated efforts across local areas. The NEEDR is working to coordinate with IDES to provide system-wide services to employers and leverage employer relationships across funding streams. Local Business service team members hold regional meetings to discuss best practices and Regional collaboration.

2024 Plan:

- For 2024 the regional BST was recalibrated to be relevant to the current environment. The Team will be re-engaged and because of staff turnover, re-introduced. In addition to sharing and updating on current and future activities, the group will identify joint regional initiatives to target for the next 2 years. Some options include third party training, opportunities for peer discussion and learning, and the opportunity to work together and replicate local projects. The energy in this group and the interactions were fantastic. It bodes well for future regional business services work.

- Engagement of Small Business and Promotion of entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services. The NEEDR and the local areas continue to target small business in addition to larger employers in recognition that small businesses employ nearly half of workers according to Forbes Magazine (46.4% of all US employees are working for firms with under 500 workers-the Federal threshold for “small business”). The NEEDR, however, focuses small businesses efforts on those employers with less than 20 employees. Local WDB's coordinate with their Chambers of Commerce and Small Business Development Centers on entrepreneurship and a range of activities for small businesses and entrepreneurs, including hosting informational and networking events and workshops for small businesses. Some specific examples include incumbent worker training targeted to small businesses, workshops for targeted small businesses (women, minority, veteran, disabled, etc.) on certification, and ARPA funds targeted to entrepreneurial training. The NEEDR has had discussions about the closure of Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) in several areas and is exploring avenues to address the gap in services to small businesses created by these closures.

Strategy 2: Support employer-driven Regional sector initiatives

The NEEDR continues to gather information on promising practices throughout the Region and leverage these practices to support high-quality, customized, regional, and local initiatives in all the targeted industry sectors. The many sector initiatives listed above in Chapter 1, provide further detail about how this strategy is being implemented in the Region and provide a sample of the type of initiatives that will be pursued in the coming years.

Sector strategies have long been a focus of programming and services in the NEEDR going back to the Critical Skill Shortages (CSSI) Initiatives in the early 2000’s. The region recognized the importance of focusing on specific sectors to develop strategies that can meet a broad array of employer needs and have economies of scale in program development and implementation. CSSI focused on Manufacturing, Healthcare, and Transportation/ Distribution/Logistics (TDL). The knowledge acquired through the implementation of strategies in those three sectors lead to additional regional sector initiatives in Healthcare (Health Professions Opportunities Grant – HPOG – funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), Manufacturing (Accelerated Training in Manufacturing – ATIM – funded through the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity), and TDL (Technical Assistance Grant from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity).

The lessons learned and best practices identified in these previous regional sector initiatives provide the groundwork for future activity in the sectors identified in Chapter 1 (Healthcare, Manufacturing, TDL, Information Technology, and Clean Energy).

Strategy 3: Provide economic advancement for all populations through career pathways and a strong focus on work-based learning activities

The NEEDR pursues several strategies focused on supporting economic advancement for all populations, with a specific focus on supporting entry into the workforce and movement along career pathways for our targeted populations as outlined above. The Region will pursue customized programs and work to build career pathways as outlined in Chapter 2 for populations including:

- Low-skilled adults
- Individuals with disabilities
- Returning Citizens (formerly incarcerated individuals)
- Out of School Youth
- Veterans
- English Language Learners
- Homeless individuals
- Older individuals

Several projects are being pursued Region-wide. In all cases, the WPMC will work to disseminate information about the project and support peer-to-peer learning so when an initiative is successful in one local area it can be replicated or adapted to succeed in another Region.

In past years, the Region developed and implemented industry guides and manuals, industry and occupational focused PowerPoint templates, industry sector information sheets, and demand occupation information sheets. The guides and manuals incorporate career pathway materials and information to help individuals, workforce career counseling staff, other staff and business customers in developing pathway-focused training and worker preparation activities. Work-based learning activities are outlined specifically in Chapter 3, immediately below. The Region is strongly focused on delivering a broad array of work-based training initiatives in conjunction with Regional and local businesses.

Strategy 4: Expand service integration

This strategy integrates and enhances the career services now received through education and workforce funding streams and programs especially for populations facing multiple barriers to employment. The NEEDR has a history of successfully conducting referrals among counties, especially for customers who are located near the county border. Rapid response activities have required the LWIAs to work collectively as one Region to serve those affected. The LWIAs are committed to serving customers across the Region in a seamless manner and have developed the awareness of who to contact in neighboring counties for referrals. A common Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool has been explored across the NEEDR, but costs and security concerns have sidelined those activities. However, individual LWIAs in the NEEDR have implemented cross-partner CRM like tools to ensure seamless service delivery that has been identified as important to the region.

As part of overall service integration across the Region, priority activities will include:

- Regional Business Service Team – As mentioned earlier in this plan, the NEEDR will build on the work done already by the Regional Business Team and the Region's wider Service Integration goals. The Region will continue to develop the Regional BST through activities both in terms of breadth (inclusion of more partners) and depth (more integrated activities). The Region has piloted several innovative activities that will be continued and expanded in coming years. The Regional BST has worked together on numerous rapid response activities as well as demand-side projects where a regional employer has a major hiring need that demands the efforts of the entire Region to identify, prepare and refer large numbers of workers to fill a critical need.
- Front-Line Staff: Career Planner/Career Coach development and training: The Region provided a forum to more formally bring together Career Planners to share best practices, identify innovative ways to encourage and support partner integration, and to conduct cross training and program information/resources across all programs provided in the One-Stop Centers. Several region-wide training sessions were held for Career Planners and Career Coaches including Assisting Customers in Utilizing Technology, Recruitment and Enrollment of Job Seekers, Communicating with Difficult Customers, and Safety and Security.
- One-Stop Operator Development and Training – Similarly, we have begun to bring together the One-Stop Operators from all seven LWIAs to give them a larger context for the work they do and provide them with an avenue to share information and receive exposure to Regional activities. The discussions from this group have resulted in the replication of service strategies around customer referrals, workforce system kiosks, customer outreach, and partner service integration.
- The workforce system kiosks (titled Job Center on the Move by the Lake County Workforce Development system) have been implemented in Lake County, DuPage County, Cook County, and Will County. These kiosks have been used for outreach and expanded community access to WIOA services.
- Northeastern Illinois Workforce Coalition (NIWC) – Seven Local Workforce Development Areas and twelve community colleges in Northeast Illinois have long partnered to provide career guidance and career skills classes to its customers. They have collaborated on special grants, such as the Health Professions Opportunity Grant (HPOG), and the Accelerated Training for Illinois Manufacturing (ATIM). These training grant-funded program administrators and the community colleges agreed to in-district tuition for the WIOA grant- supported students. NIWC has continued to expand this in-district tuition model for WIOA customers receiving tuition vouchers. This integrated model streamlines the class selection and enrollment process for WIOA customers and reduces the administrative burden for the local areas and community colleges within the Region.

As noted elsewhere in the Plan and immediately below, the Region would benefit from a common customer relationship management (CRM) system to better support the work of service integration system-wide for both jobseeker and business customer case management, across all partners. Some local areas have their own systems using proprietary or off-the-shelf systems (Salesforce, others), but all seek a more comprehensive solution across partners and hope for such a solution at the state level.

The regional workforce leaders will continue to explore WIOA program and partner program

policies in collecting data on referrals made among the programs to identify gaps that need to be addressed as well as further establish inclusive access to all programs. This will apply to follow-up services back to the referral program for appropriate case management actions to be taken. The Regional One-Stop Operator team has focused several meetings on the referral systems used by local areas to share best practices and to identify possible commonalities in selecting systems. Some referral systems shared were:

Job Center of Lake County's UNIFY Referral System – An internal partner Unify webpage was designed and launched in July 2021. The Unify webpage includes an overview of each of the 14 Job Center partners and an electronic referral system. This internal partner webpage increased understanding about partner programs among frontline staff members of each organization and facilitated referrals. Unify also created a seamless process for customers to receive a broader array of services in a more all-in-one manner.

Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership – Airtable Referral System – The Partnership developed a referral tracking system using Airtable to better connect job seekers to services. Airtable is a dynamic tool for referrals, outcome tracking, collaboration, and transparency between partners. This system allows partners to send and receive referrals through a single referral form, filter real-time referral data, receive automated messages about referrals, and track referral outcomes.

McHenry County Workforce Development Partners Referral System – The McHenry County Workforce Development Partners developed a referral system that allows workforce partners to have a simple process to contact customers between partner agencies. This process has been in effect for several years and has positively impacted the service integration efforts for the McHenry County area. Additionally, as part of the referral process, referrals are tracked and followed up to 'close the loop' within the process to make sure all customers are receiving the services they require.

Partners in the NEEDR have been working collaboratively for many years both on a local and regional basis. Partners regularly identify professional development and skill training needs for staff and the training is provided to all partner staff in the region. Examples of recent cross-partner training includes:

- One-Stop Center Safety and Security
- Assisting Customers in Utilizing Technology
- Recruitment and Enrollment of Job Seekers
- Prospecting for New Business Customers
- Overcoming Employer Objections
- Employer Outreach and Relationship Nurturing
- Developing Reporting Processes for Tracking Customers and Services
- Communicating with Difficult Customers
- How Workforce Partners can Support Inclusive Employment

Strategy 5: Promote improved data driven decision making

The Northeast Economic Development Region seeks to use data (workforce intelligence) more aggressively from a range of sources and at the qualitative and quantitative levels to better drive decision-making and support the state and regional commitment to workforce development and job creation. The Region is identifying ways to better capture labor market

information that will allow employers and jobseekers to promote and access job openings, review changing labor market trends and opportunities, identify funding opportunities and find education, training, and support services.

This strategy supports employers by establishing and managing regional sector partnerships using talent pipeline management tools and resources. The region will provide easier access to career guidance and planning information for the delivery of enhanced career services, including information on career pathways within critical sectors of in-demand industries. It also will provide better information to employers on how to promote career opportunities and job openings and access business services, education, training resources and services.

All LWIAs in the Region have access to and purchase a variety of privately developed labor market information systems. These include: EMSI, Chmura (JobsEQ), Help Wanted online, and Burning Glass among others. The region approaches each labor market system to obtain a joint presentation and cost proposal to ensure common questions are addressed and pricing proposals are often discounted based on multi-area purchases. The utilization of a combination of secondary data and real-time data for both employers and jobseekers has ensured a much richer perspective on the labor market, labor force needs, and future skill requirements.

The Region regularly collects and publishes key workforce intelligence by sector and posts it on the Regional website. Data mirrors the types of data that were gathered in preparation for this Plan development and included in Chapter 1. More extensive detailed data is gathered and shared among the Regional Business Services Team and used by the LWIAs in identifying new initiatives, re-focusing the targeting of industries and in-demand occupations, and making other data-informed decisions. Data is shared with economic development partners and those entities also share their data with the local areas and the WPMC. As mentioned earlier, data sharing and analysis is one of the possible collaborations between the WPMC and the GCEP economic development group.

By sharing and expanding access to workforce intelligence of various types and levels, the NEEDR was able several years ago to successfully identify the TDL sector as a critically in-demand sector and request grant funds that supported career pathways in the industry. These career pathways have placed an emphasis on incumbent worker training, upskilling the talent in TDL.

The Region is data rich and will place emphasis on how to use the data, identify where the data gaps are and address those gaps with actionable strategies. Regional leaders will learn from partner programs data reporting and analysis to see if there are opportunities to further collaborate to improve upon policies and referral processes.

Strategy 6: Increase coordination between workforce development and economic development

Each of the Region's local areas will work closely with their respective economic development organizations, as outlined above in Chapter 2, in a variety of activities. The region will increase their work with economic development to identify the value add of specific employer driven programs, such as on-the-job training and incumbent worker training. The local WDBs will work to create expanded relationships with Chambers of Commerce on a range of activities around partnering with businesses, supporting employment at firms moving into the Region or expanding, and growing small businesses as noted above.

Workforce development business service teams have sponsored round tables with economic development partners and the Region plans to expand this practice to include additional core partners and to span across local areas. Some specific examples are:

- Lake County, the public/private economic development organization, Lake County Partners, and the Lake County Workforce Development Board engage in formal quarterly meetings and other communication with the economic development departments in each municipality and local chambers of commerce to share information about new and growing businesses, technology incubators, and small business start-ups.
- McHenry County facilitates a bi-monthly Business Resource Team comprised of Economic Development stakeholders. The team coordinates economic development efforts, identifies grant opportunities, and provides a forum to discuss future economic development plans.
- DuPage County Workforce Development has a seat on the Choose DuPage Board and is a member of their Workforce Development Committee. They participated in Choose DuPage Strategic planning and will integrate that with their local WIOA plan.

In September 2020, the seven county board chairs and the mayor of Chicago called on the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) and Choose Chicago to assemble the Regional Economic Recovery Task Force and pursue robust economic growth that reduces inequity. This task force has morphed into a group called the Greater Chicagoland Economic

Partnership (GCEP). Over the past several years, this group helped the region focus on priorities, collaborate on solutions, and speak as one collective voice. The NEEDR has been in conversation with this group to identify joint initiatives to focus on. Some initial thoughts are around sharing of labor market information and data reports, targeting specific industry sectors with high growth and recruitment difficulties, and developing an on-going agenda for regular joint meetings between the Workforce Partners of Metro Chicago (WPMC) and GCEP.

Strategy 7: Strengthen linkages between the One-Stop delivery system and unemployment programs

Wagner-Peyser staff are co-located in the One-Stop centers providing employment services to all job seekers. Title I and Wagner-Peyser (Title III) staff work together on joint business service committees, coordinating outreach to businesses at the policy level as well as participating together on individual business service teams and the regional BST. Efforts to further coordinate business services will be expanded. The NEEDR will work with partners to implement strategies and practices noted by the IWIB Integrated Business Services Team. IDES staff are active participants in the Regional Business Services team which has expanded coordination and information sharing within the system.

When Illinois rolled out the “Workshare” program, the NEEDR reached out to IDES and arranged a focused information session about the program. This gave the region the opportunity to ask detailed questions about how the program worked, the process for employers to participate, and to explore how they can assist in providing information to employers about Workshare.

The Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) has integrated the UI system’s

Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) initiative into the One-Stops in the region. The RESEA program provides access to reemployment services through formula-based funding and a series of requirements intended to increase the use and availability of evidence-based reemployment interventions and strategies. The permanent RESEA program has four purposes:

1. Reduce UI duration through improved employment outcomes;
2. Strengthen UI program integrity;
3. Promote alignment with the vision of WIOA; and
4. Establish RESEA as an entry point to other workforce system partners.

Through the RESEA profiling process, UI claimants most likely to exhaust benefits are targeted and required to receive assistance with their reemployment efforts. IDES RESEA Workshops which are delivered at the start of services to each RESEA participant include Workforce Services-Title 1B staff presenting the WIOA Application and program eligibility information and orientations to other partner programs and services. Completing a WIOA Application is part of the RESEA Workshops in the region.

D. Describe Regional strategies that will increase apprenticeship and other work-based learning opportunities.

Apprenticeship

A number of competitive Apprenticeship grants have been secured by Regional partners that continue to expand access to apprenticeship and expand the scope and diversity of industries in which apprenticeship is delivered. Apprenticeship projects in the area include multiple DCEO Apprenticeship Intermediary and Expansion grants and the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership's ConstructionWorks project in conjunction with the Illinois Tollway.

The NEEDR has been engaged in apprenticeship activities for several years. Activities range from formal participation in apprenticeship grants to support of apprenticeships through ITAs and Incumbent Worker Training. Some specific examples include:

- workNet DuPage supports manufacturing apprenticeships offered through TMA and IMEC with Incumbent Worker grants.
- Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership is working with People Gas on Utility Workers Training Program and has developed an Arborist apprenticeship with Openlands.
- Lake County Workforce Development is utilizing funds from an Apprenticeship Expansion grant to support a Youth Development Practitioner Apprenticeship.
- Workforce Services Division of Will County is working with Joliet Junior College on their IT Apprenticeship and with Chicago Women in Trades on construction apprenticeships.

Other Work-Based Learning

The Region's broad array of work-based learning activities are built in conjunction with employers and industry organizations and as partnerships between WIOA Title I and local community colleges and in particular their CTE programs. The Region has a long history of providing work-based learning opportunities to youth and adults as part of a training program or stand-alone to ensure that customers obtain valuable work experiences.

Some examples include:

- Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership is working with Unite Here to conduct hospitality training with a work-based learning component.
- Lake County Workforce Development is implementing the "Give me 10" program. This work-based learning program is designed to bridge the gap between classroom and hands-on training. Employers commit to providing 10 hours on-site experience for youth in their field of interest. Based on the success in those two areas, Kankakee County is in the process of implementing the program with youth in their area.
- workNet DuPage is in the process of implementing a transitional jobs program for recently released inmates from the DuPage County jail.
- Two new work-based learning projects are underway through the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership. One is Call Center opportunities at Chicago Lighthouse for the Blind and the other is HVAC training at Four Seasons Heating and Air Conditioning.
- The McHenry County Workforce Network has established programs to build customer's experience through work-based learning for both young adults with disabilities and returning citizens. The Project SEARCH program focuses on working with young adults transitioning out of high school into the workplace that have barriers to employment by

  providing them critical soft skills and having the customers go through 3 internships within the hospital setting. The Step Forward program prepares returning citizens for work and the McHenry County Workforce Network takes this program a step further by working with these individuals to gain work experience in their desired field.
- Several areas have made a shift in focus from mainly ITA training to more OJT and subsidized work experience, especially with small businesses.
- LWIAs in the NEEDR also have partnered to provide incumbent worker training to companies that have connections in multiple areas.
- The WEL (Work, Earn, and Learn) Program delivered by Lake County Workforce Development provides an opportunity to complete curriculum-based work experience with a local employer. The participants learn new skills from industry professionals. The work experience provides the opportunity for participants to earn industry-based credentials during or after the work experience. The purpose of the WEL Program is to improve an employer's strategy for hiring a skilled workforce and create a talent pipeline into hard-to-fill positions. Some of the most recent WEL programs include Transportation (Flagger, CDL, Forklift Operator, OSHA, CPR, and First Aid), Diesel Mechanics, WarehouseManagement, and Graphic Design.
- Edward-Elmhurst Health and Northwestern Medicine, who sit on the DuPage WIB, have discussed critical hiring needs, and identified Medical Assistant (MA) and Patient Care Technicians (PCT) as most in-demand positions. Together with the Board, a Healthcare Talent Pipeline was developed to steer clients from the local workforce system towards these occupations. Edward-Elmhurst Health utilized Incumbent Worker Training funds to further upskill current employees.
- DuPage County partnered with the College of DuPage to provide CNA training to existing Edward Elmhurst employees to address the shortage of patient care technicians (PCT) across the region. The County utilized IWT dollars to fund the training.

E. Describe initiatives to shorten the time from credential to employment and address how the area will work with the education system to begin putting training opportunities in place to meet this strategy.

Education partners in NEEDR realize the value and significance of shortening the time from credential to employment. A range of activities are in place region-wide to continue to focus on this effort. All work-based learning activities (OJT, pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, and incumbent worker training) are geared toward moving workers into employment more quickly and effectively.

The Regional and Local Business Service teams, which include the community colleges, listen to employer needs and work to better understand employer training needs. Insights from these dialogues are shared to the local high schools to identify CTE and other programs focusing on short-term credentials that be built into dual-credit programs.

Community colleges across the Region have partnered with high schools to offer dual credit programs, which help students quickly complete their degree and enter the workforce, while saving money along the way. The community colleges in the Region are also working with four-year universities to ensure credits are recognized and accepted.

Community colleges are exploring a range of non-credit programs in conjunction with businesses, which often facilitate industry-recognized credentials more quickly than traditional course timelines, especially when these are interim credentials that would normally be part of a longer college course or program. Workers retain the value from these interim steps in themselves and should more easily be able to later take additional credentials that can be stacked toward college degrees.

Workforce areas in the NEEDR have implemented several activities designed to shorten the time from credential to employment and to engage the education system in these initiatives.

Examples include:

- workNet DuPage had expanded local policies to encourage participants into short-term training which has provided an incentive to educational institutions to develop and expand short-term training to meet the increased demand.
- In Kane/DeKalb/Kendall Counties, the LWIA has worked with the 3 local community colleges to develop a joint cohort program for welding occupations. They worked with the colleges to develop a brief application process that is applicable to all 3 institutions and also braided in college readiness training into the programs. They also have developed short-term training programs with IMEC as the training partner and they are working with Elgin Community College to incorporate short-term existing Comptia training which includes credentials into their non-credit courses.
- The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership is continuing their earn and learn initiative focusing on preparing community health workers.
- Lake County Workforce Development is working with the College of Lake County in nursing occupations to segment the program in smaller pieces (initially for CNA) to provide customers with a credential in a short time frame and then provide the opportunity to continue on to an associate or bachelor's degree.

F. Describe the steps that will be taken to support the state's efforts to align and integrate education, workforce and economic development, including:
   1. Fostering the improvement and expansion of employer-driven regional sector partnerships to increase the focus on critical in-demand occupations in key sectors that are the engine of economic growth for the state and its regions.
   2. Expanding career pathway opportunities through more accelerated and work-based training, and align and integrate programs of study leading to industry-recognized credentials and improved employment and earnings.
   3. Expanding career services and opportunities for populations facing multiple barriers to close the gap in educational attainment and economic advancement through career pathways and improved career services.

Sector Partnerships

LWIAs in the NEEDR have worked in recent years to expand its sector initiatives throughout the Region and sector-based career pathway programs at community colleges.

Regional initiatives will be guided by the statewide policy framework that defines the goals and guiding principles of employer-driven partnerships and how state and regional resources can be used to launch, expand and support them. The state has developed a statewide guide for business and industry associations to work with education, workforce, and economic development in establishing and managing these partnerships to achieve and promote economic growth and economic advancement. This Region will work to align and integrate business services among the core programs along with Regional economic development partners. The Region will explore how to integrate funding and resources from core programs and economic development to support employer-driven sector initiatives, including leveraging rapid response and layoff aversion for business retention. Additionally, the NEEDR will work to share demand occupation information and develop common marketing and outreach materials around key industry sectors and demand occupations.

The Region will continue to promote opportunities that lead to career and economic advancement in critical and in-demand industries. There have been several successful programs in the region that will be expanded, replicated, or implemented to target employer in-demand occupational needs.

- The Region is exploring replicating the Accelerated Training in Manufacturing (ATIM) program in other sectors. This model was not only very successful in addressing employer needs for targeted in-demand occupations, but it provided an opportunity for training institutions to focus on those occupations that were best suited to their equipment, staff, and space capacities.
- Several College in the NEEDR offer apprenticeships in manufacturing, including Industrial Maintenance Technician, Computer Numeric Control Operator and Supply Chain Assistant. Apprentices are paid employees who pursue formal coursework at Harper College focused on the Applied Associate of Science degree in Manufacturing. Apprentices follow the traditional earn and learn model where they apply the concepts learned in the classroom to on-the-job experiences. The course pathway includes several industry recognized credentials. Tuition and fees are paid by the employer and apprentices receive pay increases regularly, as they progress through the program. Employers provide input into

curriculum design.

Career Pathways

The Region has been expanding career pathway offerings throughout the workforce development system through the ICAPS program. ICAPS includes comprehensive academic and social student supports (e.g., tutoring, childcare, transportation, access to public benefits, subsidized jobs), making the program ideal for many populations with barriers to employment. In the NEEDR, the following ICAPS offerings are available through the Adult Education system:

Adult Education Program	ICAPS run in FY23
A Safe Haven	Culinary
Asian Human Services	Early Childhood and Education Professionals
Chinese Mutual Aide	Culinary Training Program
Chinese Mutual Aide – Elgin	Office Technology
City Colleges of Chicago	Manufacturing
College of DuPage	CompTiaA+/Network +, Office Technology - Office Technology Specialist/Central Sterile Processing Distribution Technician
College of Lake County	Automotive/IT/HVAC CAN/Medical Office Asst.
Elgin Community College	CNC/Welding/HVAC/Dental Assisting/Sterile Processing/BNAT
Greater West Town	Shipping and Receiving Vocational Skills Woodworking Vocational Skills
Howard Area Community Center	ICAPS Culinary Support Course
Joliet Junior College	Supply Chain Management Child Development Professional
Kankakee Community College	Manufacturing
McHenry County College	Administrative Office Skills Basic Nursing Assistant (CNA) Computer Numerical Control (CNC) Machining Entrepreneurship Welding Technician
Moraine Valley Community College	Supplemental Healthcare BNAT Caregivers
Morton College	Credit Connect
Oakton Community College	IT/CDL/BNAT
Polish American Association	can
Prairie State college	Forklift
South Suburban College	Welding
Township HS District #211	Medical Assistant
Triton Community College	Pharmacy Technicians
Waubonsee Community College	Phlebotomy and Medical Terminology
YWCA Elgin	HealthCare ICAPS

The NEEDR continually seeks to strengthen efforts to align and integrate education, workforce, and economic development as evidenced in the wide range of projects and initiatives that have coordinated partnerships between organizations in the three areas. One relatively recent effort is around the emerging CEJA initiatives that include strong participation between the local community colleges, the LWIAs, and economic development organizations. Several new employers in the clean energy sector have located or announced they will be locating to the region and efforts are currently

occurring to ensure that there is a coordinated response to address their hiring, training, and ongoing workforce needs. Several LWIAs are either a CEJA HUB grantee or are working with their local CEJA HUB Grantee to establish services for local employers in the clean energy space.

In addition, the region has been working with community colleges and community-based organizations on the development of pre-apprenticeship programs in an effort to expand future registered apprenticeships using the Chicago Apprenticeship Network framework model such as the one lead by the AON Corporation.

Efforts are underway to develop and expand other career pathway initiatives in the Region to serve populations with barriers. For example, McHenry County is coordinating with Vocational Rehab for an on-the-job training and evaluation program for people with disabilities and is also working on plans to coordinate career pathways and career service delivery with McHenry Community College.

The Region's providers will advocate that the ICAPS model be expanded to include non-credit programs, which are currently not allowable under the model. Improved coordination between core partners through the MOU negotiation process, co-location of services within One-Stops, and adult education's involvement on the Local Workforce Boards make a strong referral system into these programs. Additionally, local programs will explore ways to better leverage TANF, SNAP, CSBG and CGBG for support services for participants facing multiple barriers.

There are many other career pathway initiatives underway in the NEEDR. The Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership provides Career Pathway Training grants to Jane Adams Resource Center and Symbol Training Institute for CNC training. Under the Apprenticeship Expansion Grant, Lake County Workforce Development is expanding career pathway opportunities to additional high schools' students through a partnership with AON Corporation. An extensive career pathway project was undertaken in Will County last year called "Pathways to Professions." It was designed to give job seekers an opportunity to explore a wide range of career paths and then to engage with the WIOA system to enter into a training pathway. The program is being offered again in the Spring of 2024.

Bridge Programs

Bridge programs prepare adults with limited academic or limited English skills to enter and succeed in post-secondary education and training that leads to career path employment in skilled jobs. While there is not a dedicated federal or state level source for bridge funding, the Illinois Community College Board and Commerce have expanded and continue to expand these programs within their existing workforce and education programs.

The Career Foundations curriculum is a tool to educate low-skilled adults on career pathways and support transitions to sector-focused bridge programs and post-secondary education and training at community colleges or community-based providers. The curriculum exposes

students and job seekers to local career pathways programming options, assists with creating a plan to transition to advance to post-secondary education or training, and encourages job seekers to not only focus on the immediate job, but plan for how they could advance along a career pathway. Currently, Career Foundations is being implemented across the seven City Colleges of Chicago within the Adult Education department. Additionally, there are a number

of community-based adult education and workforce providers (including WIOA Affiliate sites) in LWIA 7 that are implementing the curriculum within their workforce or adult education programs.

As with the ICAPS program, the LWIAs in the NEEDR are committed to making referrals to these critical bridge programs. Below is a list of the current bridge programs offered by Adult Education providers in the region.

Adult Education Program	**Bridges run in FY23**
Asian Human Services	Healthcare ESL Bridge; Tech for Employment Empowerment Bridge
Centro Romero	ECE Bridge; Bridge to Health Careers
Chinese Mutual Aide – Elgin	Healthcare Bridge
City Colleges of Chicago	Early Childhood
College of DuPage	Information and Technology Bridge
College of Lake County	Intro to Admin Technology Management Bridge; Intro to Computer Technology Bridge; Healthcare Bridge Workforce Preparation & Career Development IELCE Bridge; Intro to Manufacturing as a Career; Job Readiness Health Care Bridge; Workforce Preparation & Career Development IELCE Bridge
Elgin Community College	Industrial Arts Bridge; Heathcare Bridge; Early Childhood Education Bridge
Greater West Town	Shipping and Receiving; Computational Skills; WW Blueprint Reading; Woodworking Career Development
Howard Area Community Center	Hospitality Bridge
Joliet Junior College	Transportation Distribution and Logistics Bridge Early Child Education Bridge
Kankakee Community College	Career Awareness Health Careers Bridge
Kishwaukee Community College	Bridge to Careers (IELCE) Bridge to Information Technology; Bridge to Healthcare
Literacy Chicago	Carpentry Bridge
McHenry County College	Int Nursing Asst (NAE) Transition
Moraine Valley Community College	Bridge to Healthcare; Bridge to Career Pathways; Bridge to Data Entry
Morton College	Bridge to Health Careers
Mundelein Consolidated HS	Bridge to Career Pathways
Oakton Community College	TDL Bridge; Healthcare Bridge
Polish American Association	Health Bridge
Prairie State college	Bridge to Careers
Pui Tak Center	Bridge/Healthcare
Safer Foundation/PACE institute	TDL; WRC
St. Augustine – Chicago	ASE Bridge Program English and Spanish
The Literacy Council (YWCA NWIL)	IT Careers Blast Off! IT Bridge Course
Township HS District #113	IELCE bridge to Careers
Township HS District #211	Bridge to Healthcare/Medical Terminology
Triton Community College	Introduction to Medical Careers; Introduction to Medical Terminology; Introduction to Office Administration; Introduction to Office Management; Introduction to Early Childhood Education
Waubonsee Community College	Information Technology Bridge
World Relief – Aurora	Healthcare Career Preparation
World Relief – DuPage	Healthcare Career Preparation
World Relief – Chicago	Emerging Careers Bridge
YWCA Elgin	IELCE Bridge

G. Describe how the goals established in this plan will be monitored and evaluated.

Regional workforce leaders at the local board level will continue to engage with community and program partners to further explore ways they can collaborate to better the public workforce system and meet the high demand for skilled workers. This includes exploring current policies, partnerships and funding opportunities to aid community leaders to better serve their businesses, and eligible program participants.

Continuous improvement has been at the forefront of all programs and initiatives developed and implemented by the workforce areas in the NEEDR. The Workforce Partners of Metropolitan Chicago (WPMC) have monthly meetings that include a regular review of regional goals and partner engagement. In each local area, the One-Stop Operator is required to report progress and activity to the Workforce Boards on service integration activities, partner referrals, staff cross training, and customer outcomes.

The WPMC have strived to ensure that the system that is in place in the NEEDR is both responsive to employer and job seeker needs yet is also nimble enough to make swift changes to programming and services to address rapidly changing needs.

H. Describe how a responsiveness, inclusivity, and accessibility are or will be incorporated in the implementation of regional workforce, education, and economic development strategies.

As noted in an earlier chapter of this plan, regional workforce leaders have and continue to work together in building consensus for a regional responsiveness, inclusivity, and accessibility statement in order for each local board to support and collectively operate from: *We actively work to expand access and eliminate disparities people experience, especially those from marginalized communities, by providing a customized service approach to all clients.* Through the modified strategies stated and the sharing of partner aggregate program data, regional leaders will begin to identify the gaps that require attention and action. Regional workforce leader's support sharing of data in order to make data informed decisions to better serve and increase access for all populations within the region.

To further this strategy the WPMC used funds received from a DCEO grant to support training of staff and employers in methods and best practices in hiring people from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. In addition, seven companies participated in a pilot project that provided hands-on assistance in hiring, onboarding, and retaining persons with disabilities. A toolkit was developed for use by staff to provide assistance to employers in the future.