

OVERVIEW

In December 2014, the State Workforce Development Board, under the direction of Governor Paul R. LePage, convened the core programs authorized under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)—Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth; Wagner-Peyser; Adult and Basic Education; and Vocational Rehabilitation programs—to assess the challenges confronting Maine’s workforce development system (WDS) and identify measurable ways to align programs and activities to better serve residents and employers. Months later, the State Board convened a broader group of stakeholders for a three day workshop to create a vision for the WDS. In the months that followed, the core programs and other stakeholders forged a plan that will foster greater economic prosperity for job seekers, employers and residents.

The plan begins and ends with the following premise: the success of Maine’s economy will ultimately be determined by the strength and quality of its workforce and the ability of employers to fill their need for skilled labor.

Human capital drives productivity, innovation and economic competitiveness. Skilled and productive workers are more likely to find and remain in jobs, earn higher wages and incomes, and require reduced levels of public assistance. A high quality workforce will enable Maine to better retain existing businesses, draw new ones that bring good jobs, and attract new families and residents. Given the far-reaching benefits, the continuing development of Maine’s workforce to meet the needs of employers is this plan’s top priority, and this reflects Governor Paul R. LePage’s mission to ensure that all Mainers have the skills necessary for quality jobs and to make Maine more business friendly.

To compete regionally—and globally—Maine will develop a world-class talent pool and lead in technology and innovation. The state’s workforce and economy will be fueled by an education and training system that is inclusive and meets the needs of diverse learners. Maine will build its workforce through a multi-faceted approach that includes developing career pathways that lead to in-demand jobs. To mitigate barriers to employment, the workforce development system will coordinate and align activities that build the foundational skills of workers and individuals, improve the transitions between education and employment, foster greater occupational awareness, define certifications and industry recognized credentials, and develop a systematic means for the state to measure, gather and aggregate data on credential attainment.

Maine will also enhance and align its workforce development system to be more responsive to the needs of businesses. The plan focuses on the development and implementation of a systematic approach to engaging and responding to the workforce and business service needs of employers. The establishment of broader and deeper sector partnerships will enable the development of a pipeline of workers in high growth, high demand fields, thereby reducing apparent skill-gaps and the time needed to fill positions. Developing a workforce development system that is more responsive to the needs of businesses will be essential to creating a more business friendly environment and developing a more competitive economy.

To accomplish these goals Maine will—

- Increase the relevance of the workforce development system to employers. Developing better alignment between the supply and demand for labor will result in fewer ‘difficult to fill’ positions, more efficient use of resources and a greater number of Maine residents with quality jobs.
- Produce an educated and skilled workforce through the development of a comprehensive Career Pathways system. Maine’s Career Pathways approach will focus on building the educational, employability and occupational skills of the population and developing pathways that lead to in-demand credentials and jobs.
- Align the state’s commitment and investment in its workforce. Developing a workforce that is globally competitive and continuously well prepared to succeed in current and future careers will require the commitment and alignment of resources that extend beyond the public workforce system; employers, policy makers, legislators and administrators must be invested in the process and outcome.
- Increase the operational effectiveness of the workforce development system. Aligning and integrating systems, services and operations to enhance customer services will result in critical efficiencies.
- Grow and diversify the workforce through the development of innovative strategies that result in more Mainers with jobs and a larger workforce.

These actions will result in quality jobs for Maine residents; employers matched with skilled workers; and a more efficient workforce development system.

This plan will also be essential in navigating the economic and workforce challenges that threaten the state’s economic vitality. A shrinking population and workforce, shortages of workers with the right qualifications and relatively low levels of educational attainment inhibit business expansion, constrain economic growth and result in median wages and incomes that are the lowest in New England.

While the economic and educational challenges are significant, they are not insurmountable. Throughout this planning process the core partner agencies, business and industry, postsecondary institutions, one-stop partners, and a myriad of other stakeholders have demonstrated a willingness to engage in the development of solutions and strategies that lay the foundation for continued growth and economic prosperity for all Mainers. These strategies, detailed in the ensuing pages, will result in a workforce, education and training system that is responsive to the needs of both employers and consumers. Most important, all who participated in the creation of this State Unified Plan believe the time to address Maine’s challenges is now.