

The logo consists of two interlocking ovals, one teal and one blue, positioned to the left of the text.

# SONOMA COUNTY WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD

## **Sonoma County Workforce Investment Board Local Workforce Development Plan 2025 -2028**

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## Appendix – Workforce Service Needs Thematic Analysis

The Sonoma County Workforce Investment Board (WIB) is pleased to share our 2025-2028 Local Workforce Development Plan.

## Local Overview

Sonoma County, an urban-rural region located 30 miles north of San Francisco, has a population of 479,964. As of December 2024, the county's labor force totaled 247,819, with 237,992 individuals employed and 9,827 unemployed, resulting in an unemployment rate of roughly 3.9%. The cost-of-living index for Sonoma County stands at 138.5, indicating that the region is 38.5% more expensive than the U.S. average (Lightcast.io). The county is also becoming increasingly diverse, with the Asian population rising from approximately 4.5% in 2022 to 5.1% in 2024, and the Latino community expanding from 27.9% to 30.7% over the same period.

The 2017 wildfires and the subsequent COVID-19 pandemic contributed to a 2.5% population decline since 2019, a loss of 12,355 residents, and a 1.9% drop in job growth. These events also accelerated the county's aging demographic trends, with the median age rising from 42.1 to 42.7 years. However, the near-term outlook for Sonoma County appears stable. While job growth is expected to slow in the coming quarters, the county has fully regained the jobs lost due to the fires and pandemic, and recent Equifax data indicates a decline in out-migration over the past year (Moody's Annual Forecast, 2025). Additionally, a strong 2024 harvest—driven by favorable weather conditions—and new financial investments, such as the first regional venture capital fund for Marin and Sonoma County startups, led by Marin-Sonoma Impact Ventures, signal positive economic momentum for the year ahead (Moody's, 2025).

## Data Collection Methodology

To gather these data, Sonoma County's Workforce Investment Board (WIB) relies on various sources that identify local economic trends and workforce needs. Through the support of our partner agency, the Sonoma County Economic Development Collaborative, the Sonoma County WIB has access to several reputable data sources. Three key tools used in this report include Lightcast Economic Modeling, which provides labor market analytics and workforce insights for data-driven decision-making; Esri Business Analyst, a location intelligence tool integrating GIS technology with demographic, economic, and consumer data for market analysis; and JobsEQ+, a platform offering detailed employment data, industry trends, and workforce insights to support economic and workforce development strategies.

## Sonoma County Top 5 Industries

These three sources reveal that Sonoma County is home to diverse and growing industries. In 2024, the industry that hosted the most jobs was Healthcare & Social Assistance. Between 2024 to 2029, it is estimated that this field will add 8% more jobs to the local workforce and continue to be a staple of the County's economy. In more granular detail, the fastest growing occupation within Healthcare & Social Assistance is Home Health and Personal Care Aides. This occupation is expected to grow 15% between 2024-2029. However, the industry with the highest average earnings per job in 2024 was Utilities (\$223,229/year).

Below are additional data that help capture Sonoma's current and forecasted workforce.

Over 56% of Sonoma County's employed workforce are employed in the county's top five industries:

1. Healthcare & Social Assistance (15%)
2. Government (12.5%)
3. Retail Trade (9.9%)
4. Manufacturing (9.6%)
5. Accommodation & Food Services (9.2%)

The top five industries that have grown over the last five years (2019-2024) in Sonoma County captures the diverse array of opportunities available in Sonoma County:

1. Government
2. Administrative & Support & Waste Management & Remediation Services
3. Healthcare & Social Assistance
4. Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation
5. Utilities

The top five industries that have grown over the last five years (2019-2024) in Sonoma County are as follows:

1. Management
2. Healthcare Support
3. Business & Financial Operations
4. Healthcare Practitioners & Technical
5. Food Preparation & Serving Related

## Sonoma County WIB

The Sonoma County WIB is a group of key stakeholders appointed by the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors to address workforce challenges throughout Sonoma County. The WIB members are leaders in the community who represent business, industry, labor, education, and economic development. The WIB serves as a strategic leader and convener of employers, workforce development professionals, education providers, economic development agencies and other stakeholders to drive innovation and to align education, workforce and business. The WIB is dedicated to identifying and promoting workforce development strategies that positively impact regional and local economic growth and enable upward mobility for all Sonoma County residents.

## Sonoma County WIB Vision:

A robust local workforce with the skills needed for today and for tomorrow.

## Sonoma County WIB Mission:

The Sonoma County Workforce Investment Board (WIB) leads an integrated workforce development system to ensure the County's economic vitality and quality of life.

## America's Job Center of California

Much of the work the WIB does is through its America's Job Center of California (AJCC), Sonoma County Job Link. Job Link provides career services to individuals looking for employment and assists local businesses in finding a qualified workforce. The guiding principles of the WIB are:

- Vital partnerships are strengthened between business, economic development, education, labor, and community;
- Employers are valued as the pivotal link in our workforce development system; and
- Sonoma County Job Link is our One Stop Center for education, training and job readiness programs to meet the ever-changing needs of area job seekers and employers.

## Principles defined by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

In the 2025-2028 Local Workforce Plan, the WIB has developed strategic activities to support the principles defined by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and California's State Workforce Development Board (CWDB). These principles include:

- Supporting a High Road Workforce System that includes job quality, worker voice, equity and environmental sustainability
- Fostering "demand-driven skills attainment" by aligning program content between workforce and education with local industry needs to provide Sonoma County employers and businesses with a skilled workforce.
- Enabling upward mobility for all Sonoma County residents, including members of the "hardest to serve" population with barriers to employment. Making workforce and education programs accessible ensures that Sonoma County residents have marketable skills and a level of education that will lead to economic security.
- Aligning, coordinating, and integrating programs and services to use resources to achieve scale and impact while providing the needed services to clients based on their needs.

## Regional Planning

The Sonoma County WIB is one of three local workforce areas that make up the North Bay Planning Unit, known as the North Bay Economic Connection (NBEC), which includes the Solano Workforce Development Board and the Workforce Alliance of the North Bay (Marin,

Napa, Mendocino, Lake). NBEC has developed a complementary 2025-2028 Regional Plan with regional goals of:

- Fostering Demand-Driven Skills Attainment
- Enabling Upward Mobility
- Aligning, Integrating, and Coordinating Programs and Services

The Sonoma County Local Workforce Plan intends to operationalize and bridge into the NBEC Regional Plan by:

- Driving and improving policy and service coordination with local partners.
- Focusing on improving how to access those services through AJCC, including in remote areas.
- Implementing effective service delivery models including co-enrollment, coordinated referral system, shared case management, and using supportive services to thread workforce and education activities.
- Preparing WIOA Title I (Adult/DW/Youth) frontline staff to deliver services aligned with state goals.

## Priorities, Recovery and Transition

As we continue to confront the effects of multiple disasters and pressures it has continued to place on the local economy and workforce, Sonoma County is committed to providing career and business services, as well as relative occupational data to various groups. This plan will focus on how to improve these services in Sonoma County and specifically, how the WIB, AJCC and local partners can continue to strengthen workforce supports for our community and transition back to a healthy economy.

In October of 2024, the WIB used a portion of its High Performing Workforce Board monies to hold a board retreat with the general purposes of better understanding trends and the needs of industry, as well as elevating the board's impact, and partnerships. A presentation from the Economic Development Collaborative's Economic Research and Workforce Initiative's Fellow titled, "Workforce Snapshot & Gaps in Sonoma County". This body of information covered the macro-level trends impacting Sonoma County's workforce, which include:

- Job Decline: From 2018-2023, jobs declined by 1.9% in Sonoma County. During that same period, jobs grew nationally by 4.3%, making Sonoma County fall behind by 6.2% (Lightcast.io).
- Retirement Risk: For its area and population size, Sonoma County has a higher-than-average % of the population 55+. The national average for a county the size of Sonoma is 144,642, but as of 2024, Sonoma County's estimate is 171,859 (36% of population) (Lightcast.io).
- Continuous Outward Migration: Current projections suggest the county's population is

24,000+ lower than in 2016 (EsriBAO).

- Housing Affordability Index (HAI): Sonoma County ranks in the bottom 10 decile nationally in housing affordability. The HAI for Q2 2024 is 16% (the lowest it has ever been), creating significant financial burdens for employers (who have to pay more) and employees (who need to earn a high wage) (BAREIS).

Other bodies of information to help inform the recovery includes the Economic Development Collaborative's 2023 Workforce Development Survey which yielded some of the following highlights from over 168 business respondents:

- Specific skills needed over the next year:
  - Interpersonal skills (e.g. communication, teamwork, leadership)
  - Knowledge skills (e.g. literacy, numeracy, industry specific)
  - Organizational (e.g. time management, organization, punctuality)
- Top workforce needs that responding businesses are worried about:
  - Housing and living costs for employees
  - Increased cost of labor
  - Lack of qualified applicants in Sonoma County
- What resources does your organization use to meet training needs?
  - Recruiting / hiring assistance
  - Staff development and training
  - Networking opportunities with industry professionals

Equity, in its many forms, but particularly economic and racially, has continued to be a priority for the WIB, with commitment to defining what such efforts looks like on a board. Additionally, the WIB supports the North Bay Job Quality framework which defines the five areas for improving the quality of a job: self-sufficient wages, benefits, working conditions, positive culture, and skills development within the region. The WIB seeks to provide economic opportunities through well-developed strategies to ensure it is braided into both workforce policies and service models.

The County of Sonoma's Board of Supervisors (BOS) adopted a five-year strategic plan in 2020, which included a Racial Equity and Social Justice Pillar. On May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024, the BOS voted to approve the Racial Equity Action Plan (REAP). The plan states, "Sonoma County's collective well-being and prosperity are impacted by significant inequities, and data shows that the greatest disparities occur along racial and socio-economic lines (Measure of America, 2021). Because racial inequities have been deeply rooted into government systems, policies, and

practices, the County has a unique opportunity and responsibility to address these inequities by improving outcomes for County staff and community members who have experienced generational marginalization.”

The Human Services Department HSD acknowledges that addressing disparate outcomes that have resulted from centuries of systemic racism requires a long-term commitment. Therefore, as of 2021, a department-wide Racial Equity Committee was established.

The WIB has had several iterations of a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (DEIB) Ad-Hoc committee. The mission is, “To co-design and maintain a local workforce system that cultivates accessibility and success for historically underserved, under-sourced, and marginalized individuals to foster belonging.”

The DEIB Ad-Hoc has representatives from both the Executive and general membership. This group ensures that progress is made around outreach, learning opportunities, and data-related requests being reflected on the WIB’s quarterly dashboard.

## Challenges

Other challenges for Sonoma County coming out of multiple disasters:

- Data Intelligence: Identifying local trends and projections is difficult when the data being used to make decisions regarding demand-driven metrics is in arrears.
- Prevalence of low-wage jobs: While wage increases benefit job seekers, market economics are such that wages need to be economically viable in that sector for businesses to survive. This is a critical investment and highlights the importance of working closely with businesses and policymakers to understand how a variety of factors can impact both employers and job seekers.
- Market failure dilemma: Hospitality is a priority industry and had some of the biggest losses due to the pandemic, the prospects for career pathways for job seekers with livable wages, specifically in a high-cost living area such as Sonoma is limited. There is a plethora of low-skill jobs that are more easily accessible to job seekers but they are low wage and lack options for pathways to upskill workers into living wage employment opportunities. This presents a structural challenge for Sonoma County, as the hospitality sector is a local economic anchor and a principal industry in our community, but is a mismatch to the High Road Workforce System ideals. The WIB will be working with the Economic Development Collaborative (EDC) and other partners on attracting other sectors into Sonoma County.

## Sonoma County 2025 - 2028 Local Workforce Plan Goals

The following are the local workforce plan goals for 2025-2028:

- Focus on the needs of Business: In alignment with the North Bay Regional Plan and in coordination across the North Bay Region, actively engage industries that provide good

jobs with career pathways in in-demand priority sectors, while keeping up with emerging industries.

- Sample Strategy: Business Services will be implemented across Job Link and SonomaWORKS (CalWORKS) programs to better serve job seekers across Employment and Training programs.
- Sample Strategy: Partner with employer(s) operating in one or more priority industries, identified by the WIB Industry Sectors Ad Hoc to provide in-demand occupational pathways and the skills required to move up the career ladder. Business Services will facilitate connection and networking opportunities between education and training providers, job seekers and employers. Job Link seeks commitment from the employer to hire and support job seekers in targeted, priority populations to utilize paid on-the-job-training funding.
- Spearhead System Alignment, Integration and Coordination: Lead efforts to align and integrate all WIOA partners within the America's Job System of California (AJCC) system to allow for a robust menu of services for shared customers delivered in a true one-stop model.
  - Sample Strategy: The Job Link Steering Committee (JLSC) will meet bi-monthly with Job Link partners to share information, promote cross-training, align system resources, increase co-location, conduct partner presentations, and create simple referral and warm handoff processes among partners.
  - Sample Strategy: Job Link staff will assess and implement strategies to decrease paperwork and wait times through for WIOA enrollments.
- Expand Earn & Learn: Lead strategic partnerships with industry, education and the core WIOA partners to expand opportunities for individuals to earn wages while they learn on the job, thus enhancing their ability to secure unsubsidized jobs that pay competitive, sustainable wages.
  - Sample Strategy: Research and develop training partnerships in public, private, non-profit sectors. Explore establishing pre-apprenticeship opportunities for non-traditional and in-demand industries according to the WIB's criteria and areas of focus identified by their Industry Sectors Ad Hoc.
  - Sample Strategy: Job Link will work to increase programs offered and retained on its Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL)
- Focus on WIOA Priority Populations: Expand workforce's involvement in existing community groups and partner meetings to strengthen authentic collaboration, and raise awareness about Job Link programs with various populations served in WIOA. Increase the number of those in identified priority populations, such as Veterans, justice-involved, low-income, English learners, people with disabilities, unhoused, foster youth and others who obtain marketable and industry-recognized skills and credentials to support their middle-income employment goals.

- Sample Strategy: Provide opportunities for at-risk youth to interact with local industry, and within different occupations. This may be through apprenticeships, job shadowing, temporary work experience, or other hands on activities that provide youth the opportunity to learn about possible careers.
- Sample Strategy: Research resources and plan events for senior citizen job seekers, highlighting One-Stop offerings that are available
- Focus on Equity: Create System Inclusivity & Accessibility. Expand access to WIOA programs and services for individuals who have historically been excluded from economic and social prosperity.
  - Sample Strategy: Deepen staff and board member's capacities by offering access to trainings from the Human Services Department on topics such as the Office of Equity's foundational training and Trauma Informed Care (TIC).
  - Sample Strategy: Increase and improve services to the Limited English Proficient
- Continuous System Improvement and High-Performance Board Standard: Establish high performance standards that ensure premium workforce services to job seekers, workers and businesses that exceed state-required performance.
  - Sample Strategy: WIB and E&T staff are currently being trained on concepts around Human-Centered Design, etc.
  - Sample Strategy: Data reports and dashboards aligned to the Human Services Department Road Map will be produced monthly and quarterly.
  - Sample Strategy: Job Link and WIB staff will regularly revisit their WIOA Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP)

## Strategies Moving Forward

The following are strategies for the WIB to address moving forward:

- On a quarterly basis Job Link and WIB staff will meet to prioritize relevant grant opportunities they wish to pursue to strengthen workforce development offerings
- Research and create a Youth Committee to help bolster programs for youth such as the My Pathways, Sonoma County Youth Ecology Corps, and the STEP (Student Training and Employment Program)
- Plan co-located Job Link services in county regions outside of Santa Rosa (e.g., Human Services office location in: West County, Sonoma Valley, North County, South County, and at other community-based organizations)
- Identify ways to help people in the hospitality industry identify sustainable career paths and/or utilize their applicable skill sets and transition into other in-demand industries with better outcomes.
- Identify emerging industries and occupations that show growth with wage increases and determine what paths and which opportunities will be available in the future

- Utilize the North Bay Workforce Job Quality Framework for WIB initiatives and within the delivery of Job Link services. This will assist job seekers into emerging occupations.
- Ensure WIB, AJCC and partner staff are offered relevant informational sessions and trainings.
- Prioritizing digital fluency and technical literacy as a supportive service; influence the categorization of access to technology (such as internet access) as a basic need, similar to a utility like water and electricity, especially in regards to telework demand.
- Provide data to the Workforce Investment Board and to Job Link vocational counselors in order to ensure that fiscal and programmatic policies and procedures reflect current workforce needs.

Sonoma County is fortunate to have strong partnerships with education, community-based organizations, labor, economic development, professional associations, leadership groups, and business. These partnerships allow the WIB and Job Link to work towards recovering our workforce post-COVID and transition to a healthy economy while providing a high level of service that contributes to the county's and its resident's economic wellness.

## WIOA Core and Required Partner Coordination

**How Local Boards and AJCC partners will coordinate the services and resources identified in their MOU, as outlined in WSD18-12 (PDF), *WIOA Memorandums of Understanding*.**

The WIB and Job Link are embedded in the Sonoma County Human Services Department's Employment & Training (E&T) Division. The E&T Division administers the CalWORKs, housing assistance, General Assistance, and WIOA programs. In order to establish a high quality AJCC delivery system and enhance collaboration among partner programs, the WIB and our AJCC partners are working together to create a unified service delivery system that best meets the needs of our shared customers and provides universal access to the full range of employment services, training and education and employer assistance available. The role of the AJCC One Stop-Operator, currently a dedicated Employment & Training Program Coordinator, is to ensure the implementation of partner responsibilities and contributions agreed upon in the MOU and coordinating the service delivery of the required AJCC partners and service providers.

The WIB regularly engages with WIOA Title II programs through participation in community initiatives and a monthly coordination meeting with WIB staff. Information on current and upcoming projects is shared, and multiple efforts exist to cross promote and collaborate on projects where customers would benefit from services on both sides. To carry out the WIOA core programs, Title I- Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth and Rapid Response; Title II- Adult Education, Title III- Wagner-Peyser and Title IV- Vocational Rehabilitation, core partners are represented as members on the WIB as well as serve on the Job Link Steering Committee to discuss how the core programs are being used, exploring what new service delivery or programs could be developed.

Job Link continues to work closely with the Employment Development Department (EDD) Workforce Services Branch staff on how to best support customers through the process of applying for Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits and offering additional resources and referrals. Through regular JLSC meetings, a discussion around each partner's customers and services help to inform the discussion of how best to serve our customers through effective partnerships, referrals, and cross-training staff.

The WIB's goals in the area of aligning and coordinating services include:

- Meeting regularly with partners to identify areas of collaboration to develop or enhance services and to leverage resources.
- Creating and sharing tool kits (career pathways, hiring incentives, training funding).
- Exploring ways to share the latest in labor market data, career pathways, and workforce trend information with customers and partners.
- Working in partnership with the Adult Education Consortium, the Career Technical Education Foundation, Santa Rosa Junior College, the WIOA Youth program, and CalWORKs to share information, promote trainings, and align resources wherever possible.
- Using evidence-based practices to develop quality training programs that respond to current workforce issues while placing individuals in employment or on a career pathway.
- Implement the Prison to Employment (P2E) grant for Justice Involved Individuals looking for assistance with job search.
- Applying for additional funding relevant to the priorities of the WIB.
- Promote regional work with North Bay RPU and other regional partners (North Bay Trades Introduction Program (TIP), Bay Area Community College Consortium, North Bay Apprenticeship Coordinators Association, etc.).

### WIB's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

The WIB's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with our partners define goals, roles, and identify specific services to be provided to customers, including those individuals with barriers to employment, whether on-site at the AJCC, virtually or by referral to and from the partner's primary office. All core partners are also invited to participate in several cross-agency committees on staff development, marketing, and business services. These agreements reflect service coordination and collaboration between the WIB and AJCC partners:

- Sonoma County Human Services Department  
Provides WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker Career Services including intake, orientation, registration assistance, workshops, individualized career services, training

services, follow-up services and business services. Provides a disability program navigator for additional assistance.

- Sonoma County Job Link

In addition to overseeing the AJCC, Job Link's Employment and Training Counselors (ETCs) staff the resource center to help provide navigation to clients. ETCs also conduct workshops, support clients in the computer lab, and help clients register themselves in CalJOBS.

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

CalWORKs staff provide intake, orientation, and case management for Public Assistance benefits and Welfare to Work services. AJCC staff assist CalWORKs customers in developing their career and education plans. This includes providing information on career pathways and education and training opportunities. Beginning in 2025, HSD's Employment and Training (E&T) Division has launched a cross-division Business Services Team (BST), expanding the work previously handled by Job Link. This will allow better collaboration across the division and expand services for clients.

- Employment Development Department (EDD)

Provides intake, orientation, registration assistance, workshops, UI assistance, Veteran's services (including services for disabled veterans), Migrant Seasonal Farmworker program, Trade Adjustment Act. Two EDD staff members work on-site at the AJCC.

- Department of Rehabilitation (DOR)

Provides intake, orientation and registration assistance and workshops, can provide onsite orientations on DOR services for individuals with disabilities. DOR is onsite at the AJCC twice a month to serve clients and conduct workshops. DOR and Job Link creating ways to expand opportunities for DOR consumers, which will increase enrollment in workshops conducted onsite at the AJCC, as well as expand opportunities to serve clients collaboratively.

- California Human Development (CHD)

Provides basic career services, as determined by specific needs of participants, including but not limited to intake; initial assessment; labor exchange services; labor market information; information regarding filing unemployment claims, referrals to job search, placement, recruitment, and CalJOBS. Also provides vocational training programs, paid work experience, on the job training, job search services, job placement assistance and resume building available to the farmworker community both in English and Spanish.

- Adult Education Consortium (Santa Rosa Junior College, Sonoma State University, Petaluma Adult School, Catholic Charities and Sonoma County Library)

Each participates through regular partner meetings to share information on trainings and make referrals to assist individuals who need to find jobs, build basic educational or occupational skills, earn a postsecondary education certificate or degree, or obtain

guidance on how to make career choices, or are businesses and employers seeking skilled workers.

- Sonoma CAN (formerly Community Action Partnership of Sonoma County)  
Does not provide on-site services, offers employment and training services under the Community Services Block Grant to support low-income and/or disadvantaged individuals and families in the Sonoma County area.
- Sonoma County Community Development Commission (CDC)  
Does not provide on-site services, customers are participants in the Sonoma County Housing Authority's Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSS). These individuals proactively sign up for the program with the goal of becoming independent of government assistance through gainful employment.
- Job Corps  
Provides employment and training activities for youth ages 16 to 24 to support responsible citizenship and to assist eligible youth to connect to the labor force by providing them with intensive social, academic, career and technical education, and service-learning opportunities in order for such youth to obtain secondary school diplomas or recognized postsecondary credentials.
- SER – Jobs For Progress, Inc  
Co-located at the AJCC Affiliate site managed by the Employment Development Department (EDD), helps older adults obtain the training needed to find good jobs in the community, designed to assist low-income older adults to reenter the workforce, secure more challenging positions, move into new career areas, or supplement their incomes.
- Southern California American Indian Resource Center, Inc.  
Provides employment and training activities for Indigenous and Native Americans in order to develop the tools to become contributing members of their communities; and to improve educational opportunities and resources for Indigenous and Native American people who live in the service area. They do not provide on-site services.
- Department of Child Support Services (DCSS)  
DCSS is an on-site partner at HSD's Employment & Training Division. The Non-Custodial Parent (NCP) Program is an employment opportunity program developed by DCSS in partnership with Job Link. The goal is to provide job services so that the non-custodial parents can obtain employment and provide financial support to their children.
- Economic Development Collaborative (EDC)  
Provides bi-monthly onsite services, offers employer-based services. EDC produces occupational and industry reports, as well as Labor Market Information.

## Co-Enrollment and Common Case Management

**How the Local Board and AJCC partners will work towards co-enrollment and/or common case management as a service delivery strategy, as outlined in WSD19-09 (PDF), *Strategic***

### ***CoEnrollment – Unified Plan Partners.***

Aligning and merging publicly funded education and training programs, such as Integrated Education and Training (IET) and other Title II programs, Title I workforce development resources with concrete employment opportunities is good for job seekers and leads to a stronger local workforce. Solidifying partnerships with employers who offer advancement opportunities in a high growth industry will help elevate vulnerable community members out of poverty.

By working with the partners and programs who routinely serve the target populations and are already established partner agencies within the AJCC system, Title I staff and partners can coordinate with each other and educational institutions to support customers through various activities, provide additional workforce assistance and co-enroll as appropriate into existing county leveraged programs. To support this effort, the Job Link Steering Committee has conducted partner presentations starting in 2022 and scheduled into 2024, which includes an overview of their agencies and the services they provide to cross-train each other. JLSC also allocate time currently to partners being able to highlight relevant programs and opportunities.

Common intake involves the AJCC having staff that are cross-trained and knowledgeable in the functions and basic eligibility requirements of multiple programs. When customers present themselves at an AJCC center, either directly or by referral, they are registered into the CalJOBS system for intake and case management purposes. All staff providing assistance, regardless of their specific agency, are trained on how to use the system for this common intake process. To ensure all customers receive the benefit and services they are eligible for across all programs, the core partners established a universal intake form and referral process. The process focuses on reducing duplicative paperwork or intake procedures so that individuals can immediately receive the benefit of services. This process also streamlines data sharing and supports the tracking of referrals, co-enrollments, and outcomes to help people with multiple barriers access coordinated services. Customers can request or staff can recommend, referrals to partner agencies when there is a need for a more nuanced or specific service not available with the AJCC. Commonly these referrals are to other WIOA core programs. In these cases, referral processes outline steps to ensure a smooth customer transition. All incoming and outgoing referrals are documented in the CalJOBS system by AJCC staff.

Co-enrolling customers in multiple workforce development programs makes it easier on customers to experience the full impact of WIOA without having to navigate multiple and siloed systems. It also serves to maximize funding and enriches the training environment by bringing in services to address barriers. There are two specific areas of focus for the WIB with WIOA Title I and Title II co-enrollment in order for participants to have access to the entire system of resources that is available. The first is through the Prison to Employment (P2E) regional effort and the second is through the implementation of the Regional Equity and

Recovery Partnership Grant (RERP) funding which is done jointly with the WIB and Santa Rosa Junior College.

Through the Prison to Employment (P2E) EDD grant funding, the WIB is working with the EDC on a process map for justice-involved individuals to identify potential opportunities to better serve this population. This includes an inventory of in-custody workforce training programs and determining gaps in pathways from in-custody training to job opportunities. Key stakeholders were identified at the jail and the Probation Department and meetings have been held to identify ways to promote discussion and decision-making related to increasing WIOA, AJCC and community partners presence and improving employment pathways for the justice-involved population.

In 2024, WIB, Sonoma County Sheriff's Office, and Probation Department collaborated to conduct the first "Second Chance Job and Resource Fair" within the Main Adult Detention Center, bringing together nearly 30 employers, training providers, and community resources. This has led to planning two similar events, one partnering with juvenile hall to conduct an Opportunity Fair for Youth and another to expanding employment preparation activities at the Main Adult Detention Center. The latter includes expanded workshops and resume creation for incarcerated individuals, as they prepare for release and integration into our community.

**2025 – 2028 Strategies towards increasing co-enrollment and/or common case management as a service delivery strategy for P2E population:**

- Develop an inventory of existing training needs for Job Link, AJCC staff, and business partners that will improve their ability to work with and serve individuals with justice involvement.
- Job Link staff will provide job coaching and peer support services for individuals who have been linked to employment or are job ready and seeking employment.
- Market Job Link services to both the incarcerated individuals and the staff of the jail to encourage access to resources.
- Create a program around P2E activities. Continue the resume creation from the 2024 Second Chance Fair, create ways to make activities sustainable. Identify existing and create new workshops for incarcerated individuals; Job Link to conduct workshops and engaging with AJCC partners to conduct them, as well.
- Continue to co-locate Job Link staff at the Day Reporting Center (Probation) to meet and engage with released individuals, assessing and providing workforce support services. Provide resumes for individuals who had them created while incarcerated.
- As part of the expanded E&T Business Services Unit, expand business outreach efforts to build and formalize partnerships that can lead to employment opportunities for individuals with justice involvement.
- Update internal second-chance employer inventories.

RERP funding specifies that the regional Workforce Boards will co-enroll participants in WIOA, where feasible to maximize resources and supports for students during training and to improve job placement post-training. Target populations include underrepresented groups for advanced manufacturing such as women and BIPOC; as well as CalFresh recipients, English Language Learners (ELL) and the unhoused for Child Development. Colleges will also target low income individuals (including food and housing insecure). These populations are being prioritized because they are over-represented in the low-wage jobs that have been disproportionately impacted by events such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

**2025 – 2028 Strategies towards increasing co-enrollment and/or common case management as a service delivery strategy for RERP populations:**

- Continue following outreach plan for certificate programs in Child Development and Advanced Manufacturing. This includes flyers, special orientation sessions, workshops, and outreach in collaboration with community partners, especially Santa Rosa Junior College.
- Actively leverage supportive services/wrap around services as well as a completion strategy to help reduce barriers and increase retention for those who would otherwise find it difficult to participate in training.
- Identify and partner with five community pre-schools to help support underrepresented populations.
- Screen for program eligibility and suitability with Job Link Title I Employment and Training Counselors (ETCs).
- Job Link staff and individuals will collaboratively develop an Individualized Services Strategy (ISS).
- Job Link Business Services staff will connect co-enrolled students about job development and job placement.
- Job Link Title I ETCs will provide comprehensive, intensive case management to enrolled participants.
- Further advance an equitable high road agenda in accordance with California's Strategic Plan by creating a blueprint for a strong network and support system for education and training access that can be institutionalized in our collective service models for ongoing implementation.

In addition to P2E and RERP populations, there are also efforts underway to work with Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) on co-enrollment, specifically with OJT opportunities and to provide more options for accelerated co-enrollment in order to maximize available supports. Because the WIB was awarded the STEP (Student Training and Employment Program) grant to serve DOR/WIOA co-enrolled youth, Job Link and DOR will be expanding this work for adults,

beginning with a streamlined referral process. DOR staff is on-site at the AJCC twice each month to support clients and co-enroll, when possible.

## One-Stop Delivery System

**How the Local Board and AJCC partners will facilitate access to services provided through the one-stop delivery system, including in remote areas, through the use of technology and other means.**

Program staff from each partner agency are either physically present at the AJCC or virtually available. They are trained to provide information about all programs, services, and activities that may be available to the customer through other partners. Job Link and its community partners have worked tirelessly to convert in-person services to remote services to reach different areas of the county that are not as easily accessible.

All partners have been committed to providing online service options such as virtual one-on-one interviews, job fairs, workshops and hiring events. Targeted populations for this increased outreach include community members who are designated as priority populations for Job Link, with enhanced outreach to communities who have traditionally been underserved due to access barriers. For example, individuals without convenient transportation, very low-income individuals and underemployed individuals who cannot get to Job Link due to distance and hours of operations will be served more effectively. Customers need basic career and supportive services as they navigate the unemployment system and consider next steps for employment. For those customers in need of training services, enrollment in more intensive individualized career services will be facilitated.

Job Link also shares a license for an online, virtual job fair hosting platform called Premier Virtual. This allows for both the business community and job seekers from anywhere to attend virtual events. This also makes it easy to track interactions, and conveniently do follow-up with a particular company.

**2025 – 2028 Strategies to facilitate access to services provided through the one-stop delivery system, including in remote areas, through the use of technology and other means:**

- Ensure Job Link presence at various job fairs and career-related events throughout the county.
- Explore options around co-location opportunities for AJCC staff and partners.
- If resources become available, consider using for staffing navigators in-person and remotely throughout locations at community-based organizations and libraries in more isolated areas such as Guerneville, Cloverdale, Boyes Hot Springs and Petaluma.
- Increase the number of on-line workshops/services that clients could participate in via-remote by creating the following (including but not limited to):

1. Job Search 101

2. Self-assessment
  3. Networking in a virtual world
  4. How do to an informational interview
- Utilize the AJCC Tracking Spreadsheet to track how many clients have been served.
  - Create effective local safety nets that would reduce the need for clients to travel to Santa Rosa for employment/social services needed by them.

## Workforce and Education Activities

### **How the Local Board and AJCC partners will coordinate workforce and education activities with the provision of appropriate supportive services.**

The WIB and Job Link have excellent relationships with numerous educational partners and employers throughout the community. Aligning and merging publicly funded education and training programs, such as Title II programs and Title I workforce development resources with concrete employment opportunities leads to a stronger local workforce. The WIB has a longstanding partnership with the SRJC Adult Education Department who is represented as a member of the WIB, participates in the Job Link Steering Committee and provides WIOA Title II services to job seekers also receiving Title I services.

Petaluma Adult School and Catholic Charities are also longtime educational partners and are WIOA Title II recipients. Workforce development resources are also available at our other partner local educational institutions including Sonoma County Office of Education, Sonoma County Library Sonoma State University, and the Career Technical Education (CTE) Foundation in their work expanding and enhancing career technical education programs throughout the county to align with the economic and workforce development needs of local employers and industries. Work with SRJC continues with grant collaboration to train new teachers and aides in Early Childhood Education, providing education and apprenticeship opportunities to help meet demand for childcare support in Sonoma County.

Additionally, a connection to apprenticeships and training certificate programs help job seekers secure employment. For instance, WIB partners the Lime Foundation and North Bay Trades Introduction Program (NB TIP). Work-based training programs are designed entirely around skill building to meet industry needs and provides job training and work placement. Sonoma County has a diverse range of employers along with substantial resources to help connect customers with high-quality jobs. Communication and alignment between workforce development programs, training providers, employers and educational institutions leads to more streamlined talent pipelines, reducing difficulties with recruitment and retention. The Economic Development Collaborative provides linkages to businesses and the Employment and Training Business Services Team, which connects customers to employment with job development and placement.

Along with strong partnerships with employers, ongoing case management services with individualized career coaching and needed supportive services from the partnership organizations assist in successfully removing barriers for customers. The WIB provides customers with supportive services through the Adult, Dislocated and Youth programs. These services include assistance with securing childcare, transportation, association dues, books, interview clothing, access to technology and equipment to successfully participate in online learning environments, career coaching and tools and uniforms for individuals who are receiving training or career development services. In the event customers need additional supportive services not available through the WIOA programs, referrals are made to partner programs to help reduce barriers. Utilizing additional partnerships provide further wrap-around social services such as Housing Counseling, Public Benefit Education and Enrollment, Immigration Legal Services and Financial Literacy and Civics and Citizenship Education. Job Link and SonomaWORKS are actively working to provide seamless support to common clients and Job Link is teaming with peers in HSD's Economic Assistance Division to support clients who are CalFresh recipients. Both of these partnerships are growing and allow for unified support for community members.

**2025 – 2028 Strategies to coordinate workforce and education activities with the provision of appropriate supportive services:**

- Research and conduct staff training on best practices for demand-driven job seeker services in which education and training programs lead to tangible employment opportunities. Coordinate with partners to provide supportive services.
- Coordinate with Business Services Team and EDC on connecting employers and training providers to ensure workforce supports are matching employer's needs.
- Request presentations from training providers and other community-based organizations for staff and clients about available educational resources and supportive services.
- Invite more partners to be located on-site including Title II Adult Education Providers (SRJC, Petaluma Adult School, Sonoma County Library, Catholic Charities).
- Partner with SRJC Experience Works program (or similar program or training) which promotes the development of soft skills or life skills.
- Expand collaboration with Sonoma County Jail, Probation, and local nonprofits to support individuals with justice involved histories. Continue to conduct Second Chance Job and Resource Fairs within the jail, expanding resume development, and begin to take workshops into the jail to prepare incarcerated individuals for integration and employment.
- Identify best practices with programs in other regional, statewide, and national workforce areas and convene discussions on service design. Determine if strategies are relevant locally and coordinate service delivery.

## ADA Accessibility

**How the Local Board and AJCC partners will comply with WIOA Section 188 and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 regarding the physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs and services, technology, and materials for individuals with disabilities, as outlined in WSD17-01 (PDF), *Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity Procedures*.**

AJCC staff and partners follow procedures and policies that promote inclusion, choice and accessibility in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). All service providers and contractors are required to enter into a contract with the County of Sonoma. All contracts include a nondiscrimination clause that requires contractors to provide a copy of their Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action policies upon request. AJCC staff are provided training on cultural sensitivity and disability awareness and can request additional training in order to best meet the needs of their customers.

The local Equal Opportunity Officer (EOO) periodically reviews the AJCC's policies, procedures, and the facility for accessibility and equal opportunity. The EOO then provides recommendations and staff training, where needed.

The onsite Job Link staff provides individualized assistance to customers as requested to ensure they have access to the resources needed to be successful when navigating different service providers, training programs or employment services. They can provide technical assistance, resources and referrals to both customers and staff.

The AJCC also maintains assistive technology and provides interpreters services on site for customers accessing services within the AJCC. All website, marketing and recruitment materials go through a review process to ensure compliance with ADA. Job Link brochures, pamphlets, flyers and other marketing materials include a condensed or extended version of the following equal opportunity employer tagline:

*This program or activity is an equal opportunity employer/program assisted financially by WIOA Title I. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities. Requests for accommodations may be made in advance by calling Job Link at (707)565-5550. For TTY, contact California Relay Service 711 or 1-800-735-2922.*

ADA compliant materials and language contain positive images and words regarding persons with disabilities and Equal Employment Opportunity posters are prominently displayed within the AJCC. The E&T Guide to Digital ADA Standards is also posted on the Human Services Department (HSD) Portal Intranet for staff to use as a resource.

All E&T employees and partner staff must attend the Human Services Department (HSD) "Learning Disability Sensitivity Training." The training is also being provided to new staff. This training focuses on recognizing and identifying potential learning issues so that working with clients is more effective, less frustrating, and leads to increased job success for clients. The first

session provides sensitivity training, using lecture, videos and experiential exercises to increase awareness. Individuals who will be screening clients for a possible learning disability also attend the “HSD - Learning Disability Training Tool Certification” Training.

## CalFresh State Strategic Partner Coordination

***How the Local Board will coordinate with County Health and Human Services Agencies and other local partners who serve individuals who access CalFresh Employment and Training services.***

As of October 2024, there were about 24,900 households with open CalFresh cases in Sonoma County – consisting of approximately 39,660 individuals. Job Link, Sonoma County’s comprehensive career center (America’s Job Center of California) provided individualized career services to 209 CalFresh recipients in 2024 through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), many of whom are referred as a condition of their eligibility for County General Assistance. Job Link is also an access point for the CalFresh Employment and Training program (CFET) which offers additional employment and training opportunities and serves up to 200 participants annually.

The Sonoma County Human Services Department administers the CalFresh Program. Sonoma County is currently included in a statewide waiver of work requirements for CalFresh participants and therefore does not require local CalFresh recipients to engage in job search or other career development services. However, active participants receiving federally funded CalFresh may volunteer to participate in Sonoma’s CalFresh Employment and Training Program (CFET) which connects participants to employment and training components and offers participants reimbursement for relevant and applicable costs associated with their participation. As previously mentioned, the CFET program is offered at Sonoma County’s Job Link America Job Center of California (AJCC) and in partnership with local Fresh Success providers.

Human Services is also the administrator of the County’s General Assistance Program which includes food assistance along with a small cash grant. Eligibility for General Assistance for people who are employable (people who are incapacitated do not have to work) is contingent upon meeting work requirements, which can be met in the following ways:

1. WIOA Activities: Referrals to and participation in Sonoma County Job Link activities such as the primary services which include: using the One Stop for employment services, access to the computer lab, job search assistance workshops, computer classes, ability to sign up for the weekly Hot Jobs e-mail and online course on SkillUp Sonoma. Intensive services include one on one career counseling services, support applying for potential scholarships, support with writing resumes, temporary work experience and on the job training.

2. CFET Activities: General Assistance recipients who receive federally funded CalFresh may volunteer to participate in CFET to meet GA work requirements with Supervised Job Search, On the Job Training, or work-based learning.

An average of 50 participants are enrolled in CFET per month. WIOA supportive services are available in the form of transportation assistance, work clothing and or uniforms, and haircuts, however the CFET budget is used for allowable expenses. As of the writing of this strategic plan, dependent care is currently not included in the CFET plan. However, dependent care can be included with the collaboration with CEFT if there is a need for this service. Federal 50% CFET funding Community colleges, community-based organizations, and other third-party providers are eligible for 50% federal reimbursement for CFET activities. This is something that Sonoma County can explore during this strategic plan by identifying and partnering with employers who offer services that align with CFET requirements. All other CFET expenses are supported with state and local funds.

### **2025 – 2028 Strategies to Increase Workforce Development Opportunities for CalFresh Participants:**

The Sonoma County Workforce Investment Board, in partnership with the Sonoma County Human Services Department and community-based organizations, will increase the number of CalFresh participants who benefit from WIOA services through the following strategies:

- Pursue federal 50% CFET funding, including “third party reimbursement” to extend the reach of employment services to more of the CalFresh population.
- HSD will develop and submit a plan to Food and Nutrition Services in order to access additional funding through the CFET 50% option to allow for more CalFresh individuals to be served.
- The WIB will convene CalFresh program managers and the community-based organizations that work directly with the CalFresh population in order to leverage resources to include in the CFET 50% funding plan.
- HSD will continue procedures to co-enroll individuals in CFET and WIOA.
- Increase outreach to CalFresh participants about Job Link and other employment related services available in the community. Job Link staff will provide written materials and do in-person and virtual presentations to CalFresh staff on WIOA services, including providing pop-up tables in CalFresh lobbies and other high-traffic locations in the community to interact directly with CalFresh participants.
- Re-design the General Assistance workforce program to include work and training activities that are likely to translate into a path to employment.
- Research and implement best practices, such as job development and job coaching, in serving this population and form additional partnerships and options for individuals required to complete work requirements in order to receive General Assistance.

- Begin coordination among CalFresh, Job Link and Department of Rehabilitation to explore cross referrals and to increase the number of disabled individuals receiving vocational rehabilitation.
- Explore additional community-based employment options well suited to CalFresh participants that can be provided via contract with the Workforce Investment Board. The Goodwill Industries of the Redwood Empire currently provides employment services to CalWORKs participants via contract with the Sonoma County Human Services Department. HSD will analyze and, if feasible, take steps to expand contracted employment services to serve CalFresh participants, especially those well suited to Goodwill's service design such as individuals with very high barriers to employment.

In addition to the array of employment services available to CalFresh participants via Job Link, CalWORKs funds intensive employment services via contract with Goodwill Industries of the Redwood Empire. Both Job Link and Goodwill ensure that those needing intensive services and support get the assistance they need to gain employment, with an emphasis on jobs that have career pathways in local in-demand sectors. WIOA and CalWORKs funds are used for an array of employment services that support initial job search all the way through job placement and follow up. Assistance with addressing barriers associated with poverty must be addressed through thoughtful social and emotional engagement that acknowledges that participants may often have multiple difficulties impacting their lives that require flexible and creative plans to ensure their success. Life skills workshops such as balancing work and family, decision-making, stress management, financial literacy, anger management, techniques for finding and retaining housing, and time management is also among the supports offered to CalFresh participants.

## Child Support Services State Strategic Partner Coordination

***How the Local Board will coordinate with Local Child Support Agencies and other local partners who serve individuals who are non-custodial parents.***

As of February 13, 2025, there are 9,185 open cases with the Department of Child Support Services in Sonoma County.

The WIB continues to partner with the Sonoma County Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) to implement the Non-Custodial Parent (NCP) Program with the goal of assisting noncustodial parents with finding employment in order to provide financial support to their children. The departments developed an assessment and referral system that established one point of contact in each agency. NCPs can receive both basic and individual career services, including access to Job Link's workforce services focused on career pathway opportunities that lead to progression into livable wage jobs and careers. NCPs are able to access the extensive menu of supportive services, training and education opportunities, and job support and retention services.

DCSS focuses on the whole family by working with them to find solutions that are in every family member's best interest. This includes releasing a driver's license when a member needs

to work and setting up payment plans. This whole family approach to support presents the opportunity to educate participants, as well as the DCSS caseworker, on what is available via Job Link to motivate participation, particularly when coupled with the flexibility DCSS has in issuing sanctions. Access to work-related uniforms, tools, and transportation assistance are often enough for DCSS participants to consider accessing individual career services. However, many NCPs face significant barriers to employment, most notably lack of transportation and concerns and misinformation regarding the garnishment of wages, which have precluded many NCPs from seeking services at Job Link.

**2025 – 2028 Strategies to coordinate with Local Child Support Agencies and other local partners who serve individuals who are non-custodial parents:**

- Increase outreach to DCSS participants about Job Link and other employment related services available in the community. Job Link staff will provide written materials and do in-person and virtual presentations to DCSS staff on WIOA services as well as explore holding office hours at DCSS to interact with potential participants directly. Outreach will highlight benefits of working with Job Link in terms of income mobility and positive impact to children.
- Additional outreach can include DCSS staff attending scheduled orientations at the Job Link office to discuss who they are and how NCPs can work with DCSS to meet their child support requirements while seeking sustainable employment.
- Explore, with intent to implement, court-ordered participation in Job Link services. Incentivized involvement in WIOA services
- Provide customized services based on the needs of the individual. Some NCPs face barriers common to underserved communities that extend beyond the inability to pay their Child Support, including levels of instability that adversely affect decision making. Case managers across multiple systems will work together to take a holistic approach to serving the population. They will meet customers where they are, both physically and emotionally.
- Provide work readiness support. The WIB will expand services to include the provision of work readiness and life skills coupled with community-based employment options as needed.

## Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities State Strategic Partner Coordination

***How the Local Board will coordinate with Local Partnership Agreement partners, established in alignment with the Competitive Integrated Employment Blueprint, and other local partners who serve individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities.***

Department of Rehabilitation staff are co-located at Job Link to assist in serving customers with disabilities. Job Link staff have received, and continue to receive, ongoing training from both

the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) and the Human Services Department on serving clients with disabilities and on referring to DOR, as appropriate.

In addition to a number of community partners and resources, DOR specifically brings the following local and regional core partners in service of people with ID/DD:

1. North Bay Regional Center (NBRC)
2. Redwood Empire District, California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR)
3. Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE)
4. Napa Valley Unified School District (NVUSD)
5. West Sonoma County Union High School District (WSCUHSD)
6. Lattice Educational Services

The WIB is a core partner in the Local Partnership Agreement (LPA) that has been developed to outline efforts to provide collaborative services that avoid duplication and provides optimal outcomes for individuals with ID/DD.

**2025-2028 Strategies to Increase Workforce Development Opportunities for Individuals with ID/DD:**

- As part of the LPA efforts, the Employment and Training Business Services Team will develop a business advisory board along with DOR, North Bay Regional Center and educational partners.
- Expand the capacity to provide job development specific to the needs of the population. Individuals with ID/DD need to be linked to employers. Job Link Business Services can create customized work opportunities that meet the needs of both.
- Strengthen coordination between DOR and Job Link to improve awareness of the needs of clients with ID/DD to improve access and utilization of the AJCC system.
- Train AJCC staff, and partnering Title I youth service providers, on how best to address the needs of these jobseekers in support of Competitive Integrated Employment. Staff cross training will also ensure DOR staff and AJCC staff understand each other's programs and corresponding services, and strengthening service coordination.
- Encourage adoption of a person-centered approach throughout planning and implementation.
- Formulate strategies for co-enrollment, specifically with OJT and other work and learn opportunities, and provide more options for accelerated co-enrollment, particularly as WIOA restricts the use of subminimum wages for individuals with disabilities.
- Convene planning to expand DOR staff co-located at Job Link and/or Job Link staff collocate at DOR.

- Increase coordination and development of strategies around business and employer outreach efforts, building on existing efforts.

## English Language Learners

***How the Local Board will coordinate with community-based organizations and other local partners who serve individuals who are English language learners, foreign born, and/or refugees.***

Many people with varying native languages in our community require additional support, including English language skills, to pursue employment. According to a review of intake data, the languages most frequently spoken by Job Link customers in recent years, aside from English, include Spanish, Vietnamese, and Haitian Creole. With approximately 124,100 individuals speaking a language other than English at home, and 10.6% of individuals in Sonoma County who speak a language other than English at home self-reported speaking English at a fluency level less than “very well”, providing services to English language learners is a priority. From January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024 until December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024, Job Link assisted 81 individuals who were English language learners, compared to 60 individuals the year before.

This is especially the case now in Sonoma County, within a context of recovery from successive natural disasters and a global health pandemic, which impact low-income and communities of color disproportionately. Gaps in education and employment services were illuminated as the stay at home orders caused schools and service providers to close their doors. Local English language Learners (ELL) had already been disproportionately underserved with WIOA dollars and this trend has continued into the pandemic. ELLs are a large portion of the County’s workforce along with those who are foreign born and/or refugees and are a priority group for the Sonoma WIB. They often have limited opportunities for career advancement, as English skills are often required for more advanced positions, regardless of technical skills meaning they face the dual challenge of language skills getting in the way of both promotions as well as further education to be able to promote.

Job Link has six bilingual case managers on staff, bilingual navigators in the Resource Center and all outreach materials are published in both English and Spanish. In addition, California Human Development (CHD) collaborates with the WIB in serving these populations. CHD provides services through four separate programs:

1. The 167 National Farmworker Jobs program provides career services, counseling, education, work experience, vocational and on-the-job training, English as a Second Language (ESL) and Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL) classes, and supportive services.
2. The Dislocated Agricultural Workers program issues emergency relief funding.
3. The WIOA 167 Temporary Housing Assistance Program provides needs-based payment.

4. Community Service Block Grants fund a rapid response network and mobile units to bolster outreach efforts. Petaluma Adult School (PAS) also serves the ELL population through several programs made possible by WIOA Adult Education funding, including:
  - ELL classes, along with work experience opportunities, a family resource center, a Spanish GED class.
  - Evening child care.
  - Training and certificate programs that do not require a minimum number of enrollments.

The WIB has strong relationships with community partners also focused on workforce development. Sonoma County has had an active and diverse workgroup focused on effectively serving the ELL community. We have several local partners and community-based organizations that we coordinate with to help serve the ELL, foreign born and refugee populations.

Connections to outside community services such as immigration and citizenship, childcare, basic needs, housing, etc. are made available through partners. These strategies can bridge system gaps and create both virtual and in-person solutions for those that face significant barriers to employment by providing appropriate technology and resources required to complete online courses and vocational training. Additional partnerships will provide further wrap-around social services such as Housing Counseling, Public Benefit Education and Enrollment, Immigration Legal Services and Financial Literacy and Civics and Citizenship Education.

#### **2025 – 2028 Strategies to Increase Workforce Development Opportunities for ELL, Foreign Born, and Refugees:**

- Expand the capacity to provide bilingual and culturally competent job development specifically serving the ELL community. Doing so will encourage trust by ELL participants that may be hesitant to engage with governmental institutions. Job Link Business Services is well positioned to create customized work opportunities for ELL job seekers.
- Explore co-location at California Human Development, Petaluma Adult School and other trusted institutions. Engaging with participants in their geographic location, and using already trusted institutions, will strengthen outreach and engagement efforts. The WIB will strive to alleviate fears by convening and being present at forums and events hosted by trusted institutions, such as La Luz and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.
- Develop a strategy to accelerate the enrollment process for ELL at Job Link. Streamlined enrollment means that participants can access needed services such as childcare, transportation, and work/training opportunities quickly.
- Co-enroll participants in multiple workforce programs, Title I and Title II services, including Adult Education, in order to maximize available supports.

- Continue the WIB's ELL Cohorts and IET model of braiding Title I and Title II funds for maximum leverage and identify pathways to employment by further building relationships with employers. Look for further development opportunities from private sources for those not eligible for federal programs.
- Convene Education and Community Based Organizations to streamline access to education and training. More nimble programs need to be available that include open entry and exit, the ability to wave pre-requisites based on prior work/education experience, and that take into consideration the needs of individuals to work and earn income while attending training. WIOA can also be used to support the creation of customized training opportunities that are not offered by traditional education institutions.
- Develop customized service plans. Taking a holistic approach to customizing and prioritizing services to meet the needs of the individual, including consideration of needs beyond just vocational. Assistance will also be provided with labor market research for those whose second language is English.

Building on the trust and success of past ELL cohorts, the WIB will continue to utilize its labor market data to keep up to date on local workforce needs and trends to ensure that its actions reflect the needs of the workforce community. This will in turn influence the supports given to this population.

## Environmental sustainability

***How the Local Board will collaborate with the Strategic Planning partners to address environmental sustainability.***

An important goal for the Sonoma County Local Strategic Plan is to stay in alignment and seek environmental sustainability in their workforce policies and practices. Some of the strategies that are in place in at the Sonoma County One Stop Center include the following:

- Participating in recycling of recyclable materials, including batteries.
- Participating in composting program to minimize waste material that would otherwise end in landfills.
- Use of light sensors in the building to conserve energy when a space is not in use.
- Electing paperless materials for training, communication and networking when possible.

While the practices for environmental sustainability that take place at the One-Stop of the Local Workforce are important to mention, the collaboration with Strategic Planning Partners is also essential. Ensuring our partners share the goal of obtaining environmental sustainability will increase the likelihood of achieving positive outcomes in this area for our community. The Local Board will collaborate with strategic planning partners by seeking to strengthen partnerships to support employment and training opportunities that:

- Protect wildlife and important ecosystems

- Minimize environmental impact
- Conserve and utilize responsible use of water
- Utilize clean energy sources to reduce carbon emissions.

Engaging in regular conversations and problem solving regarding environmental sustainability will be included in the assessment of services offered at our One-Stop as well as services offered by our partners. Data on sustainability reports will inform future program decision-making.

Additionally, the Local Workforce will seek sustainable grants to support environmental sustainability. Ongoing efforts include supporting training and employment opportunities that are dedicated to land and water preservation such as the Sonoma County Youth Ecology Corps fire fuel and flood mitigation.

Sonoma County's natural environments and ecosystems are one of our greatest commodities, which is why it is essential that our Work force Board and partners are intentional in how to conserve and use these natural resources. In mid-2024, Sonoma County received a Congressional Appropriation from Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In collaboration with the County Administrator's Office (CAO) and their Sustainability and Climate Resiliency division, the WIB identified partners to help explore how to expand environmentally-focused workforce training. This was also a Board of Supervisors', strategic plan pillar. The funding was used to purchase Electric Vehicle (EV) arch chargers that could be moved to different locations during emergencies. A small portion of the funding is dedicated to subsidize EV training costs.

## Local Veteran Affairs

***How the Local Board will coordinate with Local Veteran Affairs, community-based organizations, and other local partners who serve veterans.***

The WIB values the critical importance of collaboration with veteran organizations and is committed to ensuring that veterans receive priority of service and equitable access to employment, training and supportive services.

The WIB collaborates with Sonoma County's Veterans Service Office, community-based organizations, and other local partners. Through these partnerships, the WIB aims to enhance outreach efforts and strengthen support systems, empowering veterans to transition to stable, satisfying careers. In this pursuit, WIB and Job Link team to implement the following strategies:

- In accordance with EDD's Priority of Service for Veterans and Eligible Spouses, (WSD24-15), ensure veterans and eligible spouses receive priority access to WIOA services, specifically training, apprenticeships, supportive services, and subsidized employment opportunities.

- Partner with the Sonoma County Veterans Service Office (VSO) to provide specialized support, specifically learn how military roles translate into civilian roles and targeting those jobs.
- Partner with the Veterans Administration (VA) for mutual referrals and resources.
- Collaborate with CBOs, such as Nation's Finest, to support veterans who are experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness.
- In partnership with VSO, VA, EDD, and employers, participate and/or host hiring events or sessions that focus on veterans.
- Expand employment opportunities and funds available to veterans by seeking and applying for veteran service grants.

Through these strong partnerships and by prioritizing veterans and eligible spouses, WIB ensures that veterans can transition to quality careers, access needed supportive services and achieve economic success.

## WIOA Title I Coordination Expanding Digital Fluency

***Training and/or professional development that will be provided to frontline staff to gain and expand proficiency in digital fluency and distance learning.***

All WIB staff can attend several trainings on how to expand their proficiency in digital fluency and distance learning to offer continued support for meeting participant's needs. HSD offers courses on using technology to communicate, different e-communication tools that are available, client confidentiality, healthy communication and maintaining morale and engagement virtually. Staff can also participate in the following trainings: Applying Best Practices in Managing Remote Workers & Teams; Improving Communication, Meetings, and Engagement; E&T Teams and Accountability, and others. These courses provide methods to communicate effectively in one-on-ones, learning to have effective critical conversations on-line, coaching your staff in prioritizing, timeliness and self-management, increasing engagement and motivation on-line and inspiring individuals and teams to greatness. In addition, WIB staff attended trainings on how to utilize Zoom and Teams platforms in order to virtually engage with clients and attend meetings with other staff, community partners or other public forums.

**2025 – 2028 Strategies to increase training and/or professional development that will be provided to frontline staff to gain and expand proficiency in digital fluency, collaboration, and distance learning:**

- In September 2024, Sonoma County's Board of Supervisor approved a policy for the use of artificial intelligence by staff, acknowledging the rapidly developing technology can help make government more efficient while also weighing the ethical challenges that AI poses. The policy provides staff with guidelines to protect sensitive data and ensure

usage complies with legal standards. As newer technology, use of AI can be intimidating; however, any entry point using it can reap success. Some existing and planned use:

- Utilize AI for efficient resume creation
- Allowing for efficient idea generation for project planning activities
- Provide customized content and practice exercises to support learning
- Creating a workshop for clients to utilize AI technology
- Use SharePoint to maintain policy, grant, and program information.
- Begin migration to Microsoft Teams for program planning, coordination, and for meeting collaboration.
- Utilize trainings available in CalJOBS.
- Schedule basic computer skills courses taught by partners such as Sonoma County Library or Petaluma Adult School in the Job Link computer lab.
- Continue internal training on use of nationally recognized assessment tools such as the Myers Briggs Type Indicator test (MBTI)/ Strong Interest Inventory/Self-Directed Search/DISC/CPI, etc.
- Maintain memberships of professional organizations (Career Counseling) and attend professional conferences beyond CWA to bring in resources and information from both inside and outside of workforce organizations.
- Increase client, public, and partner knowledge of SkillUp Sonoma through a workshop offering at Job Link.
- Continue work developing an online follow-up system, which will allow for efficient, effective client follow-up.

## WIOA Title I Coordination Cultural Competency and Trauma-Exposed Populations

***Training and/or professional development that will be provided to frontline staff to ensure cultural competencies and an understanding of the experiences of trauma-exposed populations.***

The need to address trauma is increasingly viewed as an important component of effective Health and Human service delivery. With funding from the California Office of the Surgeon General and in support of the statewide Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) Aware Initiative, Health Action, a Department of Health Services initiative, offers a variety of free trainings designed to build knowledge and skills to identify, address and support healing from early adversity and trauma. These training activities are particularly valuable as the County continues to navigate the profound stress generated by the local recurring wildfire disasters, Shelter-in-Place (SIP), and reckon with legacies of racism and cultural oppression. Participants

learn about the impact of race-based trauma and white supremacy on our individual neurophysiology and our community health, and identify new ways to cultivate adaptive behaviors to promote social engagement and mitigate defensive behaviors.

HSD also offers several Trauma Informed Care (TIC) training series to staff. The purpose of these trainings is to improve service delivery, by providing training and support to facilitate collaboration, as well as to create collective strategies to cope with the macro-level stressors that impact social services. All trainings include content on implicit bias and the trauma of racial inequity.

This training is intended for all frontline staff working with individuals, families and children who have experienced complex trauma. HSD also offers courses on Unconscious Bias which illustrates acknowledgement and identification of different types of unconscious bias and how they occur, as well as Cultural Intelligence, and how to work effectively with different cultures or people of different cultures. HSD also offers Peer Support Counselor Trainings, which enable staff to conduct support peer groups, using an evidence-based format, in the event of a critical or stressful incident.

In the area of building staff capacity, the Human Services Department has developed and rolled out professional development training to staff that have focused on a wide range of topics related to racial equity:

- Trailblazing for Equity Series
- Racial Equity Foundations
- Anti-Racist Results-Based Accountability trainings
- Developing a Culture of Belonging
- “Why We Ask: Prompting for Race and Ethnicity Toolkit” to support staff when clients have questions about race and ethnicity related data collection elements.

**2025 – 2028 Strategies to increase training and/or professional development that will be provided to frontline staff to ensure cultural competencies and an understanding of the experiences of trauma-exposed populations:**

- Provide mandatory annual training for all staff and partner staff in Trauma-Informed Care, CalWORKS 2.0 framework, equity and inclusion, including cultural competency, mental health, and best practices on how to serve/engage with our priority populations.
- All supervisors will be trained in Trauma Informed Care and Reflective Supervision
- Have guest speakers from partner and community agencies at staff meetings to present on services

- Continue convening the WIB's DEIB Ad-Hoc group to guide the strategies for achieving the set goals and objectives towards using an equity lens in its practices

## Rapid Response and Layoff Aversion Activities

**How the Local Board will coordinate workforce investment activities carried out in the Local Area with statewide rapid response activities, as outlined in WSD16-04 (PDF), *Rapid Response and Layoff Aversion Activities*.**

The WIB oversees a cross-partnership team that responds to Rapid Response requests, layoff notices, or other outreach activities such as when a Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) is posted. When a business is closing or laying off employees, our Rapid Response team is there to assist employers and workers with the layoff transition, provide free information, resources and guidance to explain the services and training opportunities that are available, and provides direct, on-site and virtual presentations for employees and seeks to assist with re-training or job placements to avoid layoffs wherever possible. Rapid Response is a cooperative effort between the Rapid Response Coordinator, the AJCC, and the Employment Development Department (EDD) to assist employers and workers during a mass layoff or business closing. The Rapid Response outreach team includes staff from:

- WIOA Rapid Response Coordinator (resume assistance, training opportunities)
- Employment Development Department (Unemployment Insurance Benefits)
- Healthcare Insurance Options (COBRA, existing health plan, etc.)
- Financial Advisor (Pension, 401K, etc.), as appropriate
- Other AJCC Partners (DOR, Goodwill, CHD, etc.), as appropriate

In 2025, Job Link and SonomaWORKS, began implementation of an HSD Division-wide initiative to expand Job Link Business Services to serve all clients in HSD's Employment and Training (E&T) Division. Using Job Link's successful Business Services model, SonomaWORKS staff and Job Link staff will collaborate to serve mutual clients. The E&T Business Services Team will partner with the Economic Development Collaborative business outreach team to monitor and screen for businesses that may be at risk for layoffs. When a business is identified, the E&T Business Services team works with the employer to determine if retraining would prevent layoffs, and provide training support for the business to reduce or eliminate the need for the layoff. When appropriate, Business Services staff also puts together customized hiring events for groups facing a layoff in order to reduce or eliminate the gap between jobs. On these occasions, staff seeks to work collaboratively across the county to attract businesses looking for a workforce with transferable skills sets and enroll appropriate clients in rapid reemployment services.

Enrolling clients in rapid reemployment services can be challenging as oftentimes WARN notices are not posted immediately or provided at all. Consequently, Rapid Response team may not be notified until potentially up to four weeks after the layoff notices have been

entered into the CalJOBS system. Also, a high percentage of Sonoma County businesses re small businesses, which are not required to submit WARN notices, at all. In both scenarios can significantly reduce the rapid reemployment windows and can limit the team's ability to conduct proactive outreach. In such cases, the responsibility falls on the employees to make contact on their own.

**2025 – 2028 Strategies to coordinate workforce investment activities carried out in the Local Area with statewide rapid response activities:**

- Increase the utilization of labor market research software and workforce data systems (Chmura JobsEQ, EconoVue, Lightcast, etc.) partnering with EDC as needed, to provide projections of growth and decline within industries in order to get ahead of potential layoffs and keep abreast of trends.
- Work with EDC, individual WIB members, and other business partners to gather information on which businesses may be looking to close or lay off employees in addition to conducting outreach to multiple businesses through networking events, Employer Spotlights (presentations on career paths, hiring practices, skills needed, etc.) and local business publications (North Bay Business Journal, the Press Democrat, etc.).
- Connect job seekers that are going through layoffs with one business to another business that is hiring in order to enroll in rapid reemployment. This could be done through either identifying hiring employers in similar fields or working with the job seekers through our career services (career coaching, retraining, OJT, resume review and other basic career services, etc.) to identify skills that can be applied across multiple sectors.
- While having capacity to conduct services virtually, most, if not all, activities are conducted in person, which allows for better collaboration, relationship building, and for larger events, integrating a job fair into the Rapid Response events.

## Priority Services for Adult/Dislocated Worker Career and Training Services

**A description and assessment of the type and availability of adult and dislocated worker employment and training activities in the Local Area. This includes how the Local Board will ensure that priority for adult career and training services will be given to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient, as outlined in WSD15-14 (PDF), *WIOA Adult Program Priority of Service*.**

The WIB values the critical importance of assisting individuals with higher barriers to achieve greater employment success. The Sonoma County WIB maintains the 'Priority of Service' policy for its WIOA Adult Program, within its Eligibility policy and in accordance with WSD14-14, that defines priority groups, and requires that these groups be given priority access to individualized career services and training funds in the event that 85% of Job Link's training funds have been obligated. In addition to the priorities of individuals who may receive services,

the WIB may also identify industries in which to prioritize for the use of training and supportive services.

Priority of service is given in the following order:

- Veterans and their eligible spouses receive first priority
- Dislocated Workers
- Adults who meet one or more of the following criteria: low-income (includes homeless individuals), Basic Skills Deficient, including limited English speakers
- Recipients of cash-aid, public assistance (examples: CalFresh, TANF, General Assistance, SSI)
- Opportunity Youth between 18-24
- Non-custodial parents who owe, but who are not paying child-support
- Have a disability (includes individuals with severe mental illness)
- Have at any time served a custody sentence in an adult or juvenile facility (Federal, State, Local); or in an alternative custody program such as home detention; are on parole, probation, mandatory supervision, post-release community supervision, or are otherwise a part of the supervised population
- Individuals currently, or formerly in the Foster care system; including youth in placement through juvenile probation

The WIB has prioritized marketing and outreach efforts to reach the customer groups identified in the Priority of Service policy, and focused on meaningful collaboration with community partners who also serve the same groups of individuals. For any future development or modification of services, the WIB solicits feedback from these customer groups to help determine which enhancement efforts will be the most valuable.

All AJCC partners provide services to both adults and dislocated workers in Sonoma County. This includes job counseling, assistance with training or retraining, layoff support, and job placement assistance. For special populations, such as older adults, younger adults, justice involved, limited English Speakers, veterans, or housing insecure individuals, additional support services are provided. These services are designed to provide additional support in overcoming barriers due to a lack of soft skills, literacy skills, education, transportation, and more. Individuals are able to access information on jobs, training, and community resources, as well as access to trained staff members who are able to provide individualized assistance and training funds for those that qualify.

The WIB has strong relationships with community partners focused on workforce development. In order to ensure we are reaching as many populations as possible, WIB and Title I staff coordinate with several partners in the community to reach our priority populations. Priorities include building and aligning programs that establish training initiatives

and close the skill gap between the workforce and the technical and soft skills employers seek. Increasing the diversity of experience and skills present in the workforce ensures an adaptable workforce and focusing on training efforts can cultivate a qualified workforce that satisfies employer demand to meet current and future job requirements.

The WIB is continuing its collaboration with those that work with justice-involved individuals through the EDD Prison to Employment Grant (P2E) and are currently working alongside EDC on a process improvement map to identify gaps in our current customer services model which will lead to enhanced outreach efforts and improved coordination of services and referrals within the justice and workforce development system. Job Link staffs one Employment and Training Counselor at Probation's Day Reporting Center two half days a week and one-half day at the Family Justice Center.

Employment & Training continues its partnership with variety of agencies that serve other individuals with barriers to employment, such as agencies who serve those who are housing insecure or homelessness, individuals with disabilities, and farm and agriculture workers. Job Link is exploring ways to improve referrals to and from such connections.

**2025 – 2028 Strategies to ensure that priority for adult career and training services will be given to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient:**

- Grow staff expertise in serving our community – those who are excluded from prosperity, through staff training on priority populations through best practices for demand-driven job seeker services.
- Coordinate a service design that includes Temporary Work Experience (TWEX) and points people to good jobs in growth industries with career pathways with AJCC and community partners.
- Expand training provider and business engagement through the Employment and training Business Services Team and EDC with job development and placement by connecting job seekers with employment opportunities with in-demand industries:
  - Expand E&T Business Services to provide opportunities to SonomaWORKS families and individuals receiving CalFresh and General Aid.
  - Job Link will seek out and partner with education providers that have programs resulting in certificates, degrees, or skills considered desirable by employers in in-demand industries.
  - E&T Business Services Team will connect and partner with an employer(s) operating in one or more of our priority industries and identify a variety of occupational pathways and the skills required to move up the career ladder. The Business Services Team will seek a commitment from the employer to hire and support job seekers in targeted, priority populations to utilize OJT funding.

- Developing apprenticeship opportunities outside of Building and Trades for in-demand industries such as:
  - Culinary
  - Early Childhood Education
  - Manufacturing
  - Electric Vehicles and Solar
- Strengthen and enhance partnerships with community-based organizations, Department of Health Services, DOR, California Human Services (CHD), Day Reporting Center, Corrections, etc. to encourage collaboration on workforce system supports.
- Invite more community partners to be located on-site to provide expertise on specific priority populations.
- Incorporate client voice, including youth in conversations around service delivery through:
  - Focus groups with clients or informational groups to learn more about their needs.
  - Targeted surveys.
  - Talking to community partners working with priority populations about how best to serve and continue to develop partnerships.
- Further develop and introduce workshops in coordination with partners like National Asian Pacific Center on Aging (NAPCA), CHD, and Probation on populations or topics such as:
  - Older adult workers.
  - Industry specific needs.
  - Expungement workshops (justice involved).
- Revisit enhanced client training experience by:
  - Revising the existing scholarship application to include specific career ladder information for each industry on every application.
  - Supporting clients by funding certifications and licensing and providing supportive services along the way.
- Link employers and education and training providers to identify in-demand career pathways for a variety of industries to help guide job seekers through:
  - Using existing educational material to create a method for mapping out unique pathways for each job seeker depending on interests and skill set of job seeker.

- Job Link providing presentations (during both business and evening hours) for the community on local employers, career pathways, and Labor Market Information (LMI), etc.

## Youth Workforce Investment Activities

**A description and assessment of the type and availability of youth workforce investment activities in the Local Area, as outlined in WSD17-07 (PDF), *WIOA Youth Program Requirements*. This includes any strategies the Local Board has about how to increase the digital literacy and fluency of youth participants, including youth with disabilities.**

Sonoma County has an abundance of workforce programs serving the local youth population. The WIB is involved in many of these initiatives, particularly those that involve serving disconnected and out of school youth, and other youth with barriers, including youth with disabilities. The central focus of these initiatives is to:

- Educate youth about the career pathway opportunities available to them, and the training and education that will help them to successfully meet the workforce needs of local industry in growing sectors.
- Provide opportunities for youth to interact with local industry, and within different occupations. This may be through apprenticeships, job shadowing, temporary work experience, or other hands on activities that provide youth the opportunity to learn about possible careers.
- Ensure all youth have basic literacy and numeracy skills, high school diplomas, English language skills, and appropriate job training to be able to earn a living wage.
- Reduce or eliminate barriers to accessing information or services, by developing smoother intake and referral processes, eliminating cumbersome or unnecessary steps to access services, and integrating youth feedback into program design.
- Provide supportive services for youth who have additional needs such as housing, childcare, and/or are struggling with a learning, mental or physical disability that is interfering with their ability to obtain or retain employment.
- Develop life and soft skills such as time management, conflict management, financial literacy and anger management.
- Promote and assist youth with receiving post-secondary training or education, including apprenticeships, vocational certificates or traditional two- and four-year degree programs.
- Align education programs with the needs of industry.
- Provide opportunities for youth to “Earn and Learn”, where they can receive wages while learning a new skill and training in a job.
- Engage with employers who offer youth friendly employment opportunities.

- Expand opportunities for youth to network with local business and education and training providers.
- Provide training on entrepreneurship and small business in order to help youth build their own businesses.

The goal of Sonoma County's Upstream Investments initiative is to ensure evidence based and promising practices are used to develop programs with public funding. Many of the youth programs available in Sonoma County meet Upstream Investment standards.

The WIB provides services in these areas to youth through two programs:

### **My Pathway Program (MPP)**

This Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act-based program serves youth and young adults, primarily between the ages 16 to 24, and is designed to fill the gaps in the lives of youth who may lack the family, educational, and/or social framework to prepare them to make a successful transition to adulthood. Additionally, this program is meant to further their education and employment opportunities along a career path in one of Sonoma County's growing sectors.

MPP participants receive access to career and education development assistance, case management support for other identified needs, workplace readiness and access to training and vocational development opportunities through Temporary Work Experience and On-the-Job Training, while also ensuring all 14 WIOA Youth Program Elements are available to youth participants.

The WIB contracted with Goodwill of the Redwood Industries (GIRE) and Petaluma People Services Center (PPSC) in 2024 to provide services to youth under MPP.

### **Sonoma County Youth Ecology Corps (SCYEC)**

This program provides youth and young adults with meaningful, paid work experience, environmental education, and the opportunity to explore careers and develop work-readiness skills. The program is open to all local residents between 18 and 24, and targets disadvantaged youth, especially youth currently enrolled in WIOA and current or former foster youth.

Participants work with public or non-profit agencies on crew-based projects or in individual placements in order to develop work readiness and/or vocational skills related to a chosen career path. The SCYEC also provides participants with soft skills training, financial literacy training, and culminates with a final event where participants can interact with education and training providers and local business. As appropriate, youth who are at least 18, may also be co-enrolled in the WIOA Adult programs, and work with staff at the AJCC.

### **2025-2028 Strategies to increase youth workforce investment activities:**

- Continue to provide individualized career pathway planning support, including short- and long-term employment goals, work experience, and other supports necessary to help youth progress on their path. Track all progress.
- Develop a checklist to use before contracting with Work Experience (WEX) employers to confirm they meet the criteria of providing a “good job” considering the North Bay Job Quality framework.
- Ensure service design considers changes post pandemic (e.g., virtual workshops, virtual work, types of available jobs, etc.) and helps meet clients where they are.
- Identify barriers and critical needs of current and former foster youth, those involved with the justice system (including probation youth in placement whom are considered a part of the foster care system) and young adults experiencing homelessness. With youth partners, explore and expand opportunities for these youth to connect them to workforce services, career pathways and entry and advancement in gainful employment.
- Link youth to work experience opportunities in in-demand sectors, in addition to public and non-profit agencies.
- Train youth providers on in-demand sectors and providing Labor Market Information (LMI).
- Leverage Business Services to outreach to employers to expand employment opportunities for youth.
- Get input on youth’s interests regarding the in-demand sectors.
- Enhance connection and engagement to AJCC and youth programs through youth targeted events and activities such as job and resource fairs at the AJCC and partner locations, like juvenile hall.
- Development of Youth Committee to focus on youth workforce initiatives.

### **Student Training and Employment Program (STEP)**

In Program Year 2023-24, 60% (36) of the WIB’s youth program participants self-reported as having a disability. Mental or psychiatric disability and Learning disability were the most common reported (69% (25) and 50% (18), respectively. Strategies to alleviate the effects of the disability are identified in the youth service provider’s written procedure for serving youth with disabilities.

Through the Student Training and Employment Program (STEP) grant funding, the WIB is expanding to provide additional work experience and job preparation transition for students with disabilities ages 16-21 through by leveraging collaborative partnership between the WIB, AJCC and DOR.

### **Digital Literacy**

The WIB recognizes that digital literacy and fluency are essential for our youth participants,

including youth with disabilities, to be able to obtain and retain employment and succeed in our increasingly digitized world, post-pandemic.

**2025-2028 Strategies to increase the digital literacy and fluency of youth participants, including youth with disabilities:**

- Assessing participant literacy/fluency at program entry.
- Including critical employability digital literacy skills (i.e., problem solving using technology, computer and mobile device interactions, basic tools such as email and word processing, data security, and data ethics) in work readiness training activities.
- Identifying occupation-specific digital skills required to meet the local workforce needs on their identified career pathway.
- Helping participants develop a plan to acquire those skills.

While the Title I programs mentioned above are available to youth with disabilities, the following local organizations offer additional programs specifically to serve this population:

**Sonoma County Office of Education (SCOE)**

SCOE provides a special education Transition Program. The Transition Program is designed to “teach work” to special education students, ages 18-22, and to support their growth into adulthood. Program activities take place at work sites and other locations with the goal of helping students acquire the skills to secure and maintain employment after they leave school. All of SCOE’s other workplace development activities are available to youth with disabilities.

**Santa Rosa Junior College (SRJC)**

The Disability Resources Department facilitates equal access for students with disabilities to workforce development assistance. They also do specific outreach to identify high school seniors who have received Special Education to assist with transitioning them to become an SRJC student and navigating the SRJC system.

**Sonoma State University (SSU)**

The Disability Services for Students (DSS) provides specific access to students on navigating support in the SSU community.

**Department of Rehabilitation (DOR)**

DOR provides workforce services specifically to individuals with disabilities who are at least 18. Individuals can receive customized support to obtain or retain employment, and to receive appropriate vocational training, including on-the-job support.

**North Bay Regional Center (NBRC)**

NBRC provides workforce, educational support, and supportive services to individuals with development disabilities that began before the age of 18.

**Redwood Empire Industries (REI)**

REI offers work training and educational enrichment classes onsite and in community settings for adults with developmental, physical, and mental health disabilities who are over 18 years old that are referred by the Department of Rehabilitation or the North Bay Regional Center. REI provides individual plans focused on the needs and interests of each customer including entry level job habits, training, and job placement individually and in groups. Specifically, designed placement plans for employment preparation, job development, placement, and job coaching services are available.

**Becoming Independent (BI)**

BI provide a spectrum of programs, called Employing Abilities, that helps hundreds of individuals 18 years and over with developmental disabilities become successful employees in the North Bay community. They do this through three strategies: tailored day services, supported employment services, and vocational services.

**Buckelew Programs**

Buckelew Programs serves youth, adults, seniors and families experiencing mental health and/or substance use challenges. Their employment services program provides a comprehensive approach to assisting people to secure and maintain employment and includes pre-employment counseling, vocational training, job development, placement, and job coaching. In addition, Buckelew's social enterprises offers paid training opportunities through their Blue Skies Clerical and Blue Skies Janitorial Services. They also operate the Transition Age Youth (TAY) Program serving 15 young adults, ages 18 to 26, which need mental health services and housing. Youth are given the skills they need to live and thrive independently, including assistance with finding housing and jobs.

**Goodwill Industries of the Redwood Empire (GIRE)**

GIRE administers a number of employment programs for the Sonoma County Human Services Department, including the Learning Enhancement & Achievement Program (LEAP). The purpose of the LEAP program is to identify learning disabled customers and support them through individualized accommodation plans. GIRE also provides MPP youth services.

**North Bay Industries (NBI)**

NBI assists adults 18 and over with disabilities to become more productive, self-reliant members of their communities through participation in agency-sponsored training, housing and employment programs. These programs may include gainful employment, pre-vocational training, and other habilitation and rehabilitation services.

**America's Job Centers of California<sup>SM</sup> (AJCC)**

Finally, the AJCC also has Navigators that are available to youth to assist them with accessing specific services from partner agencies, such as those listed above and connect them with youth program services.

## Disbursal of Grant Funds

**The entity responsible for the disbursal of grant funds as determined by the Chief Elected Official (CEO) or the Governor, and the competitive process that will be used to award the sub-grants and contracts for WIOA Title I activities.**

The Sonoma County Human Services Department, Employment and Training Division, is responsible for the disbursal of WIOA grant funds through an arrangement with the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors. The WIB is housed within the Human Services Department.

## AJCC Operator

***A description about how the Local Board fulfills the duties of the AJCC Operator and/or the Career Services Provider as outlined in WSD19-13 (PDF), Selection of AJCC Operators and Career Services Providers. This should include the name(s) and role(s) of all entities the Local Board contracts with.***

In October, 2022, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors approved the Human Services Department's request to hire a dedicated, full-time Employment & Training Program Coordinator to serve as the One Stop Operator (OSO). The Sonoma County Workforce Investment Board will fulfill statutory requirements associated with running the multi-agency one-stop career center, Sonoma County Job Link.

## Stakeholder and Community Engagement

The Sonoma County WIB used multiple processes to elicit participation in planning efforts and the public comment process. Input was solicited through CalWORKS survey, and at the Local Stakeholder Engagement feedback session for WIOA. This included Employment & Training programs, the Workforce Investment Board, AJCC Steering Committee, Child Support, Veterans, and Youth Populations in February and March 2025. An ADA-compliant copy of the draft plan was posted to the WIB website ([www.joblinksonoma.org](http://www.joblinksonoma.org)) on February 21st, 2025 and notifications were sent to regional Workforce Development Boards, workforce partners, education, labor, business, community-based organizations and other stakeholders. No public comments were received that disagreed with the Local Plan.

Mode of Outreach	Target of Outreach	Summary of Attendance	Comments
<p>Sonoma County Workforce Investment Board General Meeting</p> <p>(Email, part of regularly scheduled committee meeting)</p>	Sonoma County Workforce Investment Board Members/Partners	25 attendees in total (17 WIB members; eight staff)	<p>March 12, 2025</p> <p>The Workforce Board reviewed strategic priorities and provided input for Local Plan</p>
<p>AJCC Steering Committee Zoom Meeting</p> <p>(Email, part of regularly scheduled committee meeting)</p>	AJCC Steering Committee	6 attendees consisting of AJCC Partners and county staff (Housing support, Economic Assistance Programs, Library, One-Stop Operator, Department of Rehabilitation, and various non-profits.)	<p>February 13, 2025</p> <p>Input from stakeholders</p>
CalWORKS Outcomes & Accountability Review (Cal-OAR) SonomaWORKS Participant Feedback Survey	Public Assistance including CalWORKS and General Assistance, Medi-Cal , and CalFresh populations	27 respondents	<p>January 2025</p> <p>Input on barriers, workshop suggestions, and recommended resources.</p>
CalWORKs Email	Public Assistance including CalWORKS and General Assistance, and Cal Fresh populations	4 respondents	<p>February 21, 2025</p> <p>Input from SonomaWORKS managers</p>

DOR's Meeting (Email, Website Post, Social Media Posts)	Individuals with Disabilities	8 attendees including Department of Rehabilitation staff and partner agencies who serve the same populations	February 24 <sup>th</sup> , 2025 Input for Local Plan from Stakeholders who work with Individuals with Disabilities
Youth Program Providers (regularly scheduled committee meeting)	WIOA Youth Program	9 attendees including contracted WIOA youth providers and county staff	February 10, 2025 Input for Local Plan from WIOA youth providers
WIOA Title I Staff Input (Email, part of regularly scheduled staff meeting)	WIOA Title I Staff	7 attendees including WIOA staff respondents (second chance, WIOA adult and dislocated workers)	February 13, 2025 Input for Local Plan from WIOA staff
Veterans Services (Email, part of regularly scheduled committee meeting)	Veterans Employment-related Assistance Program	22 attendees including county staff and representatives from EDD, DVOP, Mendocino Private Industry Council, Department of Rehab and Probation Department	February 24, 2025 Input from Stakeholders who work with Veteran population

## Public Meetings and Public Comment

Meetings were properly noticed, agendas were made available and the public had an opportunity to provide comment on local policy and operations. Comments on the draft plan were solicited from March 4<sup>th</sup> to April 3<sup>rd</sup> on the WIB's website and notices were sent to local stakeholders. WIB Chair acceptance took place at the April 9<sup>th</sup> WIB Executives meeting as a public hearing where the local plan was posted on the agenda. Accommodations were available to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities to ensure access to meetings as well as the draft plan. Sonoma County offered Zoom and Microsoft Teams online meetings which were utilized to meet requirements for community engagement participation. For both the planning and review processes, a dedicated effort was made to reach out to priority community groups and customers and agencies which assist in serving higher barrier individuals.

Input was gathered from a variety of key stakeholders regarding current workforce service needs in Sonoma County, to help inform the WIOA Local Plan. Stakeholder groups included the Job Link Steering Committee, the Employment Development Department (EDD), Department of Child Support Services (DCSS), the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR), Petaluma Adult School, Santa Rosa Junior College (Early Childhood Education), the Sonoma County Main Adult Detention Facility, youth services providers (including Conservation Corps North Bay, Goodwill, and Petaluma People Services Center), recipients of public benefits (CalWORKs, CalFresh, and Medi-Cal), and members of the Workforce Investment Board (WIB). Notes from the conversations with each group were analyzed, to determine any themes that came up more than once. To review themes are organized by topic area please see the WIOA Local Plan: Workforce Service Needs Thematic Analysis in the appendices (pages 1-10).

## Signature Page

### PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION DESIGNEE AND PLAN SIGNATURES

This local plan represents the Sonoma County Workforce Development Board's (WIB) efforts to maximize and coordinate resources available under Title I of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

This local plan is submitted for the period of April 15, 2025 through June 30, 2028 in accordance with the provisions of the WIOA.

Through an agreement with the Board of Supervisors and the WIB, the Human Services Director has been granted authority to sign documents on behalf of the Board of Supervisors which serve as the Chief Elected Officials of Sonoma County.

#### Local Workforce Development Board Chair

#### Chief Elected Official

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Signature

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Signature

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Brandy Evans

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Angela Struckmann

Name

Name

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Chair, Sonoma County  
Workforce Investment Board

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Director, Sonoma County  
Human Services Department

Title

Title

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Date

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Date



### **WIOA Local Plan: Workforce Service Needs Thematic Analysis March 2025**

#### **Background**

Input was gathered from a variety of key stakeholders regarding current workforce service needs in Sonoma County, to help inform the WIOA Local Plan. Stakeholder groups included the Job Link Steering Committee, the Employment Development Department (EDD), Department of Child Support Services (DCSS), the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR), Petaluma Adult School, Santa Rosa Junior College (Early Childhood Education), the Sonoma County Main Adult Detention Facility, youth services providers (including Conservation Corps North Bay, Goodwill, and Petaluma People Services Center), recipients of public benefits (CalWORKs, CalFresh, and Medi-Cal), and members of the Workforce Investment Board (WIB). Notes from the conversations with each group were analyzed, to determine any themes that came up more than once. The following themes are organized by topic area.



## Key Themes

### Strengths: What Job Link Services are Most Helpful and Working Well?



**One-stop partnerships and collaboration:** relationships between partner organizations and the one-stop model enable job seekers to access multiple services at one location



**Workshops:** offering a wider range of workshops helps job seekers gain helpful skills to move forward with their job search or career progression



**Work experience:** opportunities for temporary work experience, such as the Sonoma County Youth Ecology Corps program, help build resumes and give job seekers vital skills



**Job search:** assistance with locating and applying for jobs, including support with resumes and cover letters, help job seekers connect with employers



**Job fairs:** easy to attend, low stress ways to connect with employers and potential resources, particularly for priority groups like individuals experiencing homelessness



**Long term one-on-one support:** having individual time spent discussing goals with an experienced career counselor allows for trust and confidence to build



**Motivation and a sense of accomplishment:** Job Link services increase participants' sense of accomplishment and motivation to pursue more opportunities

### What Job Link Services are Most Helpful and Working Well?

Other strengths included: bilingual services, ELL programs, soft skills training, Job Link orientation, Hot Jobs, Rapid Response, STEP, youth services, providing funding for partners, computer loans, warm handoffs, and meeting job seekers – particularly youth – at locations where they feel comfortable.



## Challenges: What are the Biggest Challenges People Face in Getting a Good Job?



**Housing instability:** Housing is not affordable compared to wages in Sonoma County, and housing resources are limited – especially for young people



**Transportation:** Without a driver's license or reliable transportation, it can be challenging for individuals to get to interviews and to get to work



**Complex applications and paperwork:** long and complicated job applications can make applying for jobs feel overwhelming, and some job seekers need help navigating



**Gaining training, education, and/or skills:** access to affordable training can be limited, and many jobs require certain levels of training, college degrees, or special skill sets



**Language barriers:** many jobs require proficiency in English, and it can take time for job seekers – who may only speak Spanish or Haitian Creole – to learn a new language



**Lack of confidence, feeling insecure or underqualified:** challenges with low self-esteem, confidence, or feeling underqualified may cause participants to not apply for jobs



**Mental health:** challenges with mental health are common and can make it hard to find or keep a job, and getting access to mental health counseling is not always easy



**Computer and technology barriers:** not knowing how to navigate technology or use a computer can be a barrier to finding jobs, applying, and getting hired



**Lack of knowledge about available resources:** many job seekers are not aware of the resources currently available, and don't know about help they could be eligible for



**Wages:** some employers only offer entry level wages to new employees and wage rates are not keeping up with the high cost of living in Sonoma County



**Childcare:** finding childcare with a schedule that enables parents to work and being able to make enough money at work to afford childcare are both notable challenges



**Concerns about applying and interviewing:** many job seekers share fears about applying for jobs and the interview process, and may not feel prepared



**Finding job opportunities:** in some industries, such as the trades, job openings may not always be available and it can be hard for job seekers to get a foot in the door



**Gaining work experience:** many jobs require a certain level of work experience in order to get hired, and finding opportunities to gain work experience can be challenging



**Not having a resume:** many job seekers do not have a resume or need to make updates to their resume in order to be competitive in the job market



**Employment or job preparation:** some job seekers, particularly youth, may need to work on soft skills and learn how to get to work on time or talk to a supervisor



**Justice involvement:** being recently released or legal troubles, like no longer having a driver's license, can make it difficult for job seekers to keep steady employment

## What are the Biggest Challenges People Face in Getting a Good Job?

Additional challenges mentioned were: immigration status, working under the table, financial insecurity, not having a high school diploma, substance use, domestic violence, health issues, being a single parent, a lack of career exposure, a lack of local jobs, how AI is now used in recruiting, transferability of skills (especially for veterans), a need for soft skills, a need for an entrepreneurial mindset, limited networking, personal branding, difficulty with time management, and budgeting.



## Needs: What Training and Employment Services are Most Needed?



**More training opportunities:** stakeholders indicated a need for more skills training – ranging from healthcare training to training for niche industries like wildland firefighting



**Computer literacy:** there is a need for basic computer skills workshops, potentially with the ability to earn a certificate, that includes training on Excel, Word, and PowerPoint



**Job search help:** finding and applying for jobs can be a daunting process, especially on your own, and support is needed bridging the gap between education and employment



**Job preparation and readiness:** opportunities for developing job readiness skills can help individuals prepare and maintain jobs over time



**Drivers ed:** it would be beneficial if there were accessible, affordable programs to help individuals – especially youth – learn to drive and successfully obtain their licenses



**Networking:** support for job seekers to learn networking language, how to navigate professional relationships, and develop their own networks

## What Training and Employment Services are Most Needed?

Other needed services mentioned included: more one-on-one time with job seekers, guidance on entering the trades, more support with resumes and cover letters, more interview skills training and practice, professional development, communication styles/strategies, personal branding, English as a Second Language (ESL), offering VA benefits counseling coupled with job search, more affordable education and brochures that give hope for school attendance, help for students with the transition to on campus housing, access to physical activity/stress reduction, opportunities to enter industries at higher than entry level pay, templates for success with examples, and more inclusion of client voices.



## Sectors: What Sectors Would You Like to See Job Link Focus On?



**Healthcare**, including care for the aging population and mental health



**Trades**, with a focus on apprenticeships and on-the-job training



**Information Technology (IT)**



**Hospitality and the wine industry**

## What Sectors Would You Like to See Job Link Focus On?

Sectors mentioned less frequently included: administration, animal caregiving, barbers/cosmetology, customer service, firefighters, general education, law enforcement, mechanics, retail, tree care, utilities, viticulture, wildfire prevention, and in-demand industries (as indicated by labor market information).



## Suggestions: How Can Our Training and Employment Services Be More Helpful?



**Offer services in different areas of the county:** providing basic career services at satellite offices and hosting job/resource fairs throughout Sonoma County



**Virtual services:** provide more virtual services – for example virtual classes or virtual hiring events – which may interest young job seekers or individuals with barriers



**Shorten wait times:** lessen the gaps between CalJOBS registration, orientation, and a job seeker's first one-on-one meeting with a counselor

## How Can Our Training and Employment Services Be More Helpful?

Other suggested improvements: offer more funding for early childhood education apprenticeships, offer more training resources, connect job seekers with resources for remote work (like FlexJobs), create an employment hub with a comprehensive list that includes unadvertised jobs, close the loop on referrals between Job Link partners, increase marketing for job fairs and have more employers and resources at job fairs, gather data on customers who are involved with the Department of Child Support Services (DCSS), include DCSS in orientation presentations, and refer customers to DCSS as appropriate.



## Accessibility: How Could We Make Our Services Easier for People to Access?



**Co-located services and mobile staff:** provide multiple services at one location and station staff at partner agencies, the Day Reporting Center, the jail, and Juvenile Hall



**More marketing of available services:** devote resources to getting the word out about the different services offered, so Job Link is no longer a “best kept secret”



**Avoid duplication:** minimize repetitive paperwork for job seekers by increasing coordination and sharing information between Job Link partners when possible



**Share information on partner services:** maintain strong connections between partner agencies and share the latest info on services, to enable referrals and warm hand-offs



**Remote training or workshops:** virtual offerings can be particularly helpful for job seekers with transportation barriers, those who live in rural areas, youth, and veterans

## How Could We Make Our Services Easier for People to Access?

Additional ideas for increasing accessibility included: invite job seekers to come to the office with questions, share a list of resources at orientation (there can be a lot of information to retain), build rapport with customers, reorganize or update the job board in the Job Link Resource Center, post information and resources for veterans at local gyms, connect youth and others with Goodwill’s work readiness training, tailor training to different geographic areas, provide additional resources for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, and ensure that online content adheres to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) – recommendations developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities.



## Education: What Ideas Do You Have to Strengthen Coordination with Education Activities?



**Collaboration with local colleges and universities:** continue collaboration and improve communications with colleges like the Santa Rosa Junior College (e.g. monthly meetings)



**Increase outreach at schools:** visit career centers at local schools, offer presentations, or even visit classrooms to share information about how Job Link can help students

## What Ideas Do You Have to Strengthen Coordination with Education Activities?

Additional ideas for strengthening coordination: assist education programs with getting on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), offer more funding for training opportunities, provide employment services to students, help with navigating technology, offer more career assessment opportunities – especially for youth, coordinate with partners so that resume development is not duplicative, explore the potential of an AI database to connect students and employers, increase tracking of classes offered for various career opportunities, and consider ways to make education sound more approachable to individuals (e.g. “earn a certificate”).



## Business: How Can Job Link Business Services and Partners Strengthen Support to Businesses?



**Gather input from employers:** collect and use feedback from local employers to help inform what skills training and education opportunities are offered by Job Link



**Help employers connect with future employees:** facilitate connections between employers and job seekers with specific skills (e.g. a job seeker database)



**Outreach to businesses:** conduct more outreach and increase communication with local employers, to build positive relationships and share information about support available



**Connect with employers hiring priority populations:** create a directory of veteran business owners or those hiring homeless or justice involved adults/youth, foster youth



**Advocate and educate:** share information and success stories with local employers about the value of hiring and working with individuals with employment barriers

## How Can Job Link Business Services and Partners Strengthen Support to Businesses?

Additional suggestions for strengthening business services were: increase collaboration with local chambers of commerce, foster positive (non-intimidating) relationships with businesses, offer tours of Job Link to business partners, reach out to businesses and explain what we can do to get them work-ready employees, gather frequent feedback from local employers, create more internships offered along with support/career counseling, develop a centralized virtual job board, create a designated County classification for people emerging from workforce development programs, share information about the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC), engage more employers for the next job fair at the jail, continue the business services collaboration between Job Link and SonomaWORKS (CalWORKs), and offer more funding for partnerships with businesses – communicating when funding will end well in advance.