

**Regional and Local Plans**

Minnesota’s Workforce Development System under WIOA

Program Years 2016 & 2017

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Submitted by

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| RWDA: | Regional Workforce Development Area 2  *(Local Workforce Development Areas 3 & 4)* |
| LWDA: | Local Workforce Development Area 4 – City of Duluth |

## Department of Employment and Economic Development

1st National Bank Building **|** 332 Minnesota Street **|** Suite E200 **|** Saint Paul, MN 55101-1351 Phone: 651-259-7544 **|** 800-657-3858 **|** Fax: 651-215-3842 **|** TTY/TDD: 651-296-3900

888-GET JOBS (888-438-5627) **|** mn.gov/deed

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### REGIONAL LEADERSHIP APPROACH

*The regional leadership approach describes how the local area boards within each regional workforce development area will define and coordinate the strategic priorities established by the Governor under WIOA.*

1. Describe how the approach used will ensure that partner engagement includes diverse representation, specifically among populations experiencing barriers to employment.

Engagement of key stakeholders with diverse perspectives and experiences is critical to the success of regional planning efforts. The leadership team will utilize the February 28th convening with Marnita’s Table as a starting point for reaching out to and garnering input from individuals and organizations, including those with the greatest barriers to employment. Intentional efforts have been made to engage those who are experiencing barriers to employment first-hand, including African American and Native American populations and individuals/families in poverty.

Efforts have included outreach to key decision-makers from organizations that serve individuals with barriers to employment, and other key stakeholders who can help identify and implement solutions. This includes, but is not limited to, representatives from communities of color, tribal communities, those involved with the criminal justice system, individuals with disabilities, K12, higher education, and organizations/associations specifically committed to addressing employment disparities. The Marnita’s Table convening provides a valuable opportunity to engage diverse groups early in the process to ensure strategies are reflective of their voices and ideals.

Following the event, board members and staff will facilitate connections with individuals who express interest in working with the boards to further develop and begin implementation of regional strategies. Efforts to understand how, when and where people prefer to engage will be undertaken to remove barriers and ensure authentic, meaningful engagement can occur. This could include having individual conversations, small group discussion, facilitated focus groups or alignment with existing groups that are also working on these efforts.

Finally, to ensure a firm foundation upon which this work can be accomplished, development opportunities for staff and board members will be incorporated to raise awareness and understanding of implicit bias, micro aggressions, and cultural awareness. It is important to increase understanding of and appreciation for the varying experiences and perspectives that will contribute to the planning process so true change and positive employment outcomes for all can be achieved.

1. Describe any cooperative service arrangements being planned for the region and how they will promote consistency within the regional workforce development area and with state policy.

Relationships and respect have developed over time and provide a firm foundation upon which Northeast Minnesota partners work to ensure consistency within the regional workforce development area and alignment with state policy.

To further support regional planning efforts, cooperative service arrangements in the following areas will be developed:

### Coordinated professional development for staff and boards.

As is the case in other parts of Minnesota, the diversity of the NE region is changing. Efforts to ensure those engaged in this work have the foundational skills and understanding they need to work effectively with people from various cultural, ethnic, economic and religious backgrounds is foundational to any action aimed at addressing employment disparities and meeting the workforce needs of employers. Our commitment to establishing that foundational awareness and understanding will be supported by this cooperative service agreement.

### Coordinated marketing and communication of WFC programs, events and initiatives.

To address the general lack of awareness or understanding of services available at Workforce Centers in the NE region, a cooperative service agreement outlining a commitment to collaborate on marketing and other efforts will be developed. This approach will enable us to maximize resources, align messaging, and more broadly promote the work being done.

### Coordinated Career Pathways Efforts

Strong, employer led sector partnerships are critical to meeting the needs of job seekers and employers across the entire NE region, specifically in the areas of Healthcare and Skilled Trades/Construction. To maximize the time and effort employers are willing and able to invest, joint working groups have been established to work on pathway development in each of the two areas. A cooperative service arrangement documenting these ongoing efforts will be formalized.

In addition to the above stated plans, existing informal agreements between Workforce Center partners in the northeast region that continue to work effectively will also remain in place. For example, determination of which WIOA provider at the Duluth Workforce Center serves Duluth residents vs. non-Duluth residents is clear and referrals occur seamlessly: Duluth Workforce Development staff work with City of Duluth residents and NEMOJT staff work with non-Duluth residents. If situations arise that necessitate adjustments to the established process, partners simply maintain open lines of communication and adjust accordingly to ensure the needs of program participants are met.

Partners in the northeast region also work collaboratively on special projects and frequently facilitate cross-referrals and co-enrollments between agencies. For example, individuals served through WIOA programs may also co-enroll with Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS). Job counselors may promote program eligible participants to training opportunities available through another partner’s special project (i.e. AEOA’s non-traditional training for women).

A cooperative service agreement between the Office of Job Training and AEOA is currently in place that identifies a process to serve dislocated workers by either agency. Other cooperative service agreements will be developed with other system partners over the development of career pathways initiatives.

### REGIONAL STRATEGIC PLANNING

*The strategic planning component of the Regional Plan addresses three elements: strategic analytics, strategic approach and strategic operations. The overarching theme is to engage regional stakeholders in the process of establishing the strategic plan and to ensure that decisions are data driven and that the data can be used to measure gains and identify needs for improvement.*

***Strategic Analytics****: The assessment of the regional workforce development area focuses on key conditions. These conditions are detailed in the following response needs.*

***Strategic Approach:*** *The core areas of the strategic design focus on priorities of the Governor and the system of service delivery.*

### Area 1 – Business Engagement

1. Describe how the region will use the labor market information and conduct outreach to business and industry to select the targeted sectors for developing career pathways for occupations in demand that provide family sustaining wages. If sectors and occupations have been already selected, describe them within this response. Complete **Attachment G – Local Workforce Development Area Key Industries in Regional Economy.**

Based upon real time and LMI data, Region 2 has selected healthcare and skilled construction trades as the first two sectors around which to build career pathway partnerships and initiatives. It is our intent to develop a model for building career pathways that can be honed through experience and applied to any sector. This includes identifying the career pathways, ladders and lattices within each sector and engaging service providers, training institutions, and employers within each sector in deliberate and meaningful ways. Employer engagement will focus on validating pathways and training opportunities, assisting in the development of training curriculum, engaging in experiential learning opportunities and work experience, and sharing their industry expertise.

Regional in-demand occupations are spread across different sectors but are also concentrated in the region’s major industries, especially in healthcare. Home Health Aides, Registered Nurses, Medical Assistants, Surgical Technologists, Physicians, and Pharmacists are occupations that are needed in the healthcare field and span education requirements. Construction, retail trade, and accommodation and food services are also industries that are creating significant demand for workers in the region. Of these industries, healthcare and construction/trades top the list of those that offer jobs that are in demand, clear career pathways, and family-sustaining wages.

With 32,805 jobs at 874 firms, healthcare and social assistance is the largest employing industry in the Northeast region, accounting for 23.2 percent of total jobs in the region. This is over 7 percent higher than the state’s concentration of employment in the healthcare industry. The amount of jobs in this industry held stable recently, with only 150 jobs added since 2010 and about 30 jobs in the previous year. At $43,680 in 2014, average annual wages were about $3,000 higher in healthcare than all industries.

The construction and mining industries saw strong gains from 2010 to 2014 as

they both grew by nearly 20 percent, and combined to add 1,800 jobs in the region.

Wages are high in these industries, with annual average wages of $57,392 and

$90,012 respectively. Though recent events have affected employment specifically in the mining sector in Northeast Minnesota as many mining workers have been idled, the industry is expected to make a full recovery. Skill requirements between the mining, supply chain, and construction industries often intersect, including the needs for skilled trade workers. Accounting for 4.5% of the region’s total employment, wages in the construction and extraction occupations make slightly more in the Northeast region than statewide, where the per capita income is nearly $5,000 less than statewide. The median hourly wage of occupations in this sector are $25.65 compared to the region’s average wage among all industries of $16.58.

Outreach will be conducted using a combination of DEED BSS staff, LWDB members, WFC staff and service area Directors, as well as the new Rural Career Counseling Coordinator. Outreach will begin by identifying key employers within the healthcare and skilled construction trades sectors and convincing them of the benefits of participating in a career pathways system. This message will be clear and concise and help targeted employers understand:

* How participating will help the workforce system better meet their workforce needs;
* How they may gain access to a wider pool of qualified applicants;
* How they will be helping to make the northeast region a more economically competitive place;

Part of this process will be to clarify the roles of participating key employers, which may include:

* Determining which occupations within targeted industries and sectors should be included within the career pathways system;
* Vetting the set of foundational academic, work readiness, and technical skills, abilities, and knowledge that are chosen as required for key occupations;
* Vetting the certificates and credentials that are required for key occupations
* Collaborating with training institutions to design education and training programs;
* Participating as instructors or training sites in the skill training programs;
* Providing training funds for individuals through tuition reimbursement or class- size training projects;
* Participating in the skill certification/credentialing process;
* Serving as mentors;
* Serving as a job shadowing site;
* Providing paid or unpaid internship positions for students; and/or
* Hiring individuals who have obtained the required certificates and credentials.

Region 2 will also take advantage of technical assistance resources from Maher and Maher as available and deemed appropriate for our region by both Boards to advance existing sector strategies work. Region 2 will utilize tools, training and other resources to ensure sector strategies are reflective of best practices and maximize the impact of available resources.

### Area 2 – Community Engagement

1. Describe the process for identifying the characteristics, size and scope of populations not fully benefiting from the economic recovery, experiencing factors such as high unemployment, lack of credentialed skills and other barriers to employment.

The process for identifying the characteristics, size and scope of populations not fully benefitting from economic recovery will include:

* The February 28th Marnita’s Table event will facilitate dialogue between individuals and organizations, including those with the greatest barriers to employment. This dialogue will increase understanding and awareness of the characteristics, size and scope of populations not fully benefitting from economic recovery.
* The Regional Asset Mapping Initiative will increase understanding of populations that lack services geographically or programmatically and increase awareness of programs and providers serving populations experiencing inequities and with whom to connect.
* Review of the Blandin Foundation’s study of unemployment in Itasca County which seeks to understand the factors at play for individuals who are underemployed, unemployed (short- and long-term), and individuals who are on public assistance. It will be a great source of insight into the needs of this population.

* Review of results from a survey of Duluth-based job seekers. While not statistically significant, the survey will provide insight into barriers to employment and other challenges from a qualitative perspective.
* Integration of questions as part of the mapping activity that can draw out information from service providers, including those serving opportunity youth, to better understand their client population (i.e. unemployment, educational attainment, participation in public assistance, etc.).
* Work with all counties in the region to identify the number of county residents on public assistance (MFIP, FSET, etc.).
* Connect with the State demographer’s office.
* Review of corrections/judicial system demographics.
* Work with Vocational Rehabilitation Service and other partners to collect information on people with disabilities in the northeast region.
* Broad stakeholder engagement/dialogue with individuals not fully benefiting from the economic recovery and groups representing those directly affected.