

North Country

# Regional Plan

July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2029

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## Regional Service Strategies

- a. Identify regional plan strategies and specifically provide detail on how regional plan strategies relate to the workforce needs of local businesses, as well as priority projects from the appropriate Regional Economic Development Council ([REDC](#)).

The three North Country Local Workforce Development Boards oversee workforce development activities in seven North Country counties, including:

- Jefferson-Lewis – Jefferson and Lewis counties
- North Country – Clinton, Essex, Franklin, and Hamilton counties
- St. Lawrence – St. Lawrence County

The same seven counties also comprise the seven-county region assigned to the North Country Regional Economic Development Council (NCREDC). This is a congruence between the territory served by both the NCREDC and the three Workforce Development Boards (WDB).

The North County region constitutes approximately 23% of New York State's land area and is home to approximately 2.23% of the state's population. In addition, the region has no population center where economic and workforce activities are focused within the region. Its two most populous cities, Plattsburgh and Watertown, include populations of about 19,867 and 24,157 respectively (Census 2023). They are located approximately 160 miles apart; resulting in a three-hour drive from one city to the other (in good weather). Furthermore, about 18% of the region's population resides in its two major "population centers."

The North Country region has a combined civilian labor force of 168,700 as of May 2025. This is a 1% decrease over the previous year.

It is important to draw attention to these geographic and demographic realities because they make it difficult to manage cohesive regional economic development planning, not to mention workforce planning and delivery, for the seven-county region. The NCREDC has struggled with this issue since its inception in 2011 (i.e., how to adopt meaningful strategies that apply to the diverse and extended region and not just to areas where the population clusters are located).

The region's three Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) are aware of this challenge because all three WDB executive directors are engaged in the NCREDC, one of them since its implementation. The three directors serve on the NCREDC Workforce Committee and Ms. Mayforth (Jefferson-Lewis) is its co-chair.

There are economic commonalities across the region – and the NCREDC has done its best to make the most of them. Dairy farming has a major presence in all but one of the seven counties; tourism is a major factor in all seven counties; and in all but Hamilton County, significant employment is still created by what is left from mines and rural resource-based manufacturing establishments (paper, lumber, dairy products, and transportation). Jefferson County is home to Fort Drum, the largest single site employer in the state.

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Notwithstanding this, the differences among the region's counties – and even within the counties - are dramatic and make it difficult for the seven counties to engage in one single workforce strategy.

b. Provide a list of executed cooperative agreements (where applicable) and define how local service providers, including additional providers, will carry out the regional strategies.

The three WDB's have examined the circumstances of the North Country region and have concluded that using cooperative service delivery agreements is not practical because of the region's expanse (23% of NY State's land mass) and the lack of a central community on which the economy and labor market focuses. The three areas cannot envision cooperative service delivery scenarios in which the inefficiencies generated by the region's geography and demography do not exceed the efficiencies attained.

NYSDOL recognizes these challenges. It serves the seven-county North Country region from eight offices and only among the three offices located in St. Lawrence County is there significant shared service delivery in place.

## **Sector Initiatives for Regional In-demand Industry Sectors or Occupations**

a. Identify in-demand regional industry sectors and occupations.

As part of the preparation of the three WDB's respective Local Plans, the region's three WDB's developed a common demand occupations list. The list focuses on occupations, not sectors, because of the region's heterogeneous employer base. For example:

- There are paper mills in four counties, but not in the other three.
- Businesses focusing on supporting Ft. Drum in Jefferson County may also affect portions of neighboring Lewis and St. Lawrence counties but demand for such occupations in the rest of the region is non-existent.
- The four colleges located within 10 miles of each other in central St. Lawrence County create occupational demands whose only close parallel is a two-hour drive to the Plattsburgh and Saranac Lake areas (each hosting two colleges).
- Jefferson Community College is a Liberal Arts college offering an Associate degree in nursing that is ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in NYS.
- SUNY Canton has received an 8-million-dollar grant from NYS to establish a SUNY Regional Nursing Simulation center to serve the rural nature of the region.

The list for in-demand occupations can be accessed at: <https://dol.ny.gov/lmi-workforce-planning>. It is a testament to the sub-regional differences that characterize the region's employers' skills demand but also demonstrates (as noted earlier) the overlapping in occupational demands among the three WDB's. Examples of the latter include health care professions and tourism.

b. Identify and describe sector initiatives that address the needs of the identified in-demand regional industry sectors or occupations.

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In order to address the needs of the workforce it is important to note the need for wrap-around services such as childcare, housing and affordability.

## Regional Labor Market Analysis

a. Include an analysis of regional economic conditions incorporating the existing emerging in-demand sectors and occupations, the employment needs of businesses in those sectors and occupations, as well as attesting that the information used in the analysis was determined in conjunction with the appropriate New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL) Labor Market Analyst.

The North Country Region has been declared a Childcare Desert, and the lack of childcare has taken a toll on hiring and contributes to labor shortages. All three WDB's and the NCREDC workgroup have been working on strategies to address this issue.

- Jefferson-Lewis, in partnership with the IDAs, WDB, Small Business Development Center, and CAPC's Child Care Resource Center, have developed a Childcare Bootcamp to train possible new providers.
- St. Lawrence County has a pipeline group to address the issue and is using the Jefferson-Lewis bootcamp model to develop childcare training programs.
- North Country WDB has the Stand Up For Childcare Advocacy group.

Healthcare: Continues to be an in-demand sector.

Tourism & Hospitality: This has been one of the hardest hit areas during the pandemic with the loss of workers. The WDB's have been working with the region's BOCES, colleges and Chambers, as well as hosting job fairs to assist this sector with hiring.

Transportation: The need for CDL drivers is in high demand. Through SUNY Canton, SUNY Jefferson, Jefferson-Lewis BOCES and St. Lawrence BOCES both CDL-A and CDL-B training programs are available.

Manufacturing: The North Country has RAMP and NAmTrans, while Jefferson-Lewis and St. Lawrence counties utilize BOCES and On-the-Job Training to support this sector.

b. Describe the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to meet the employment needs of businesses in those sectors and occupations.

The North Country Region is home to 7 Colleges and Universities along with excellent Career & Technical training provided at BOCES. In review of Knowledge, Skills and Abilities by the WDBs it has been determined that pipelines are in place to take community members from entry level to higher skill levels and provides for career ladders. With excellent partnerships with economic development, businesses and training programs, adjustments are made to meet the needs of local businesses.

c. Provide an analysis of the regional workforce.

As per the Labor Market Profile provided by NYSDOL for May 2025. The total Civilian Labor Force consists of 168,700, which is a decrease of 1% over the last year. The region is experiencing a decrease in population. Agriculture has a 1.8-billion-dollar economic impact in the region. Even though the North Country has one of the highest

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unemployment rates in the state, 3.4% is historically low for the region. Total private sector jobs equal 151,600.

## Regional Spending Plan

a. Include a regional spending plan that includes administrative cost arrangements between LWDBs and the pooling of funds where applicable.

N/A

## Supportive Services

a. Describe how supportive services (e.g., transportation) will be coordinated throughout the region.

Supportive services will be provided in accordance with each local area's policies. Other than localized public transportation, the region does not have the ability to connect from county to county.

## Economic Development

a. Describe how economic development and workforce investment activities will be coordinated in the region and specifically provide detail on how continued coordination can further relationships between the region and its respective REDC.

Per WIOA, it states the regional plan should include "the coordination of services with regional economic development services and providers." The three North Country WDBs currently work closely with their local and county-level economic development services and providers.

Though there are many local and county-level development services and providers, there are few that cover the entire region. Aside from the NCREDC, there are only four other regional economic development service providers whose service territory covers the same seven counties of the region as the NCREDC. These four (4) organization are:

- CITEC - the Regional Technology Development Organization for the region
- North County Alliance (NCA)
- Workforce Development Institute (WDI)
- Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA)

CITEC provides training for manufacturing clients, and all three WDBs use its services when appropriate. However, the training CITEC focuses on are upgrades to skills and management training. Generally, there are fewer opportunities to use WIOA funds for such trainings because the employees to be trained are ineligible for WIOA assistance due to income. The three WDB's collaborate with CITEC in other areas.

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The NCA is a seven-county economic development organization which started as a trade association of the region's economic developers in the mid-1980s. Since then, it has expanded its membership to include bank and business memberships. Since the NCA has for the last few years been expanding beyond its trade association roots, it is time for the other two North Country WDB's to join the organization.

ANCA has economic development programs to assist small businesses with services and can assist with the sale of a small business.

Lastly, the WDBs also work in close collaboration with WDI as it funds training and education activities such as Manufacturing Day, Business and Education Forums, Childcare assistance programs and Career Jam. The WDI also participates in the activities of the NCREDC's Workforce Committee. Examples of WDI's collaboration with the WDBs include:

- The Medical Academy of Science and Health (MASH) Camp in Jefferson and Lewis counties.
- Participation in the Workforce Development Councils in Clinton, Essex, Franklin and Hamilton counties.
- The WDI's recent commitment of training funds to assist families with childcare assistance.
- The WDI has also worked to bring NAmTrans and USDA grants to the region.

In addition to continuing their collaboration with CITEC, WDI, ANCA and the NCA, as well as with their local economic development partners, the three WDBs will continue to work with the NCREDC. As mentioned in the introduction to this Regional Plan, the three WDB Directors have been involved with the NCREDC, and will continue to serve on these and other appropriate work groups constituted by the Council.

## **Performance Accountability Measure Negotiation and Reporting Agreement**

- a. Include an agreement concerning the Performance Accountability Measure Negotiation and Reporting. Performance Accountability Measure Negotiation and Reporting may be negotiated by LWDBs individually, involving strategies and methods collaborated on at the regional level. If this is the case for the region, include a statement that reflects that the measures were negotiated individually, and any collaborative efforts devised and agreed to by the region.

As each LWDA is significantly different in profile, each LWDB has and will continue to negotiate performance measures individually.

## **Public Comment**

- a. Describe the process used by the region to provide a period of no more than 30 days for public comment and input into development of the plan by representatives of business, labor organizations, and education prior to submission.

Each area will adhere to their policy on providing for public comments on the plan.

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**\*Note:** Per WIOA §679.510(b)(4), comments representing disagreement with the contents of the Regional Plan must be submitted with the Plan.