



**HAMPDEN COUNTY
WORKFORCE BOARD**

FY2027 – FY2029 Strategic Plan

July 1, 2026 - June 30, 2029

1441 Main Street, Springfield, MA 01103
www.masshirehcnwb.com



HAMPDEN COUNTY WORKFORCE BOARD

To Our Partners and Stakeholders,

We are pleased to present the MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board's FY2027–2029 Strategic Plan, which sets our direction for the next three years and reflects the opportunities and challenges shaping our region's workforce and economy.

The workforce landscape continues to evolve rapidly. Employers are navigating persistent talent challenges, workers are adapting to changing skill requirements, and emerging technologies are reshaping how work is performed. Our role is to help our region respond to these changes while ensuring residents have access to the skills, resources, and opportunities they need to succeed.

Over the next three years, we will focus on strengthening our role as a regional workforce leader, expanding opportunities for adults and young people, deepening employer partnerships, and connecting residents to careers that offer long-term economic opportunity. We will continue to use data and employer input to guide our investments, pursue innovative approaches, and bring partners together around shared workforce challenges.

AI and emerging technologies will be an important consideration as we prepare workers and employers for a changing economy. Our goal is a workforce system that is adaptable, responsive, and ready for new opportunities.

This work cannot be accomplished by any one organization. Our progress will depend on strong partnerships with employers, education and training providers, our MassHire Career Centers, community organizations, government, and other stakeholders across the region.

We invite you to explore our FY2027–2029 Strategic Plan and join us in strengthening the workforce and economy of Hampden County.

Jeffrey Sullivan
Chair, MHHCWB
President & CEO, New Valley Bank & Trust

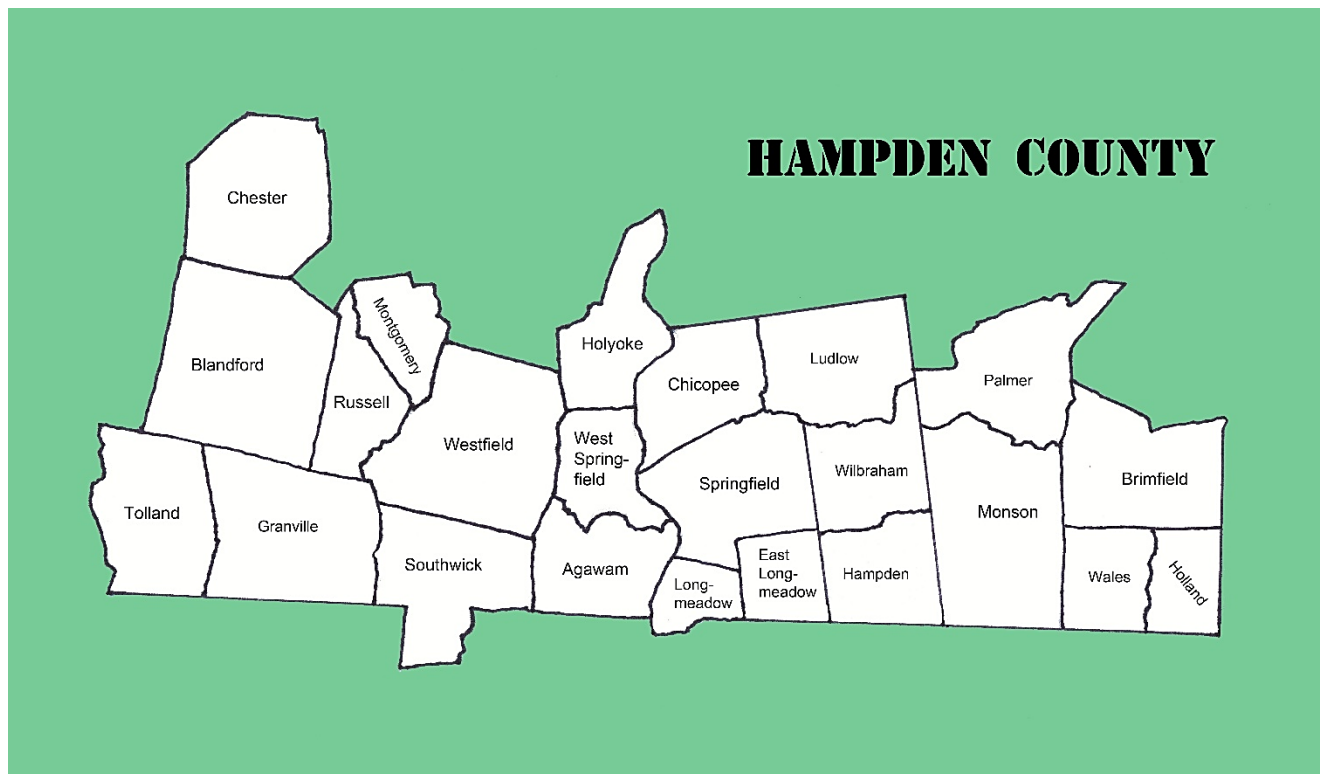
Peter Farkas
President & CEO
MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board

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WHO WE ARE

MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board is a business-led, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and one of 16 local Workforce Development Boards in Massachusetts. Our sole focus is workforce development. As the region's primary planner, intermediary, and convener, we work in partnership with business, government, labor, education, and community organizations to develop local workforce policy, align workforce programs with employer and resident needs, coordinate and oversee publicly funded workforce development initiatives, leverage resources and partnerships, and oversee the region's MassHire Career Centers.



Hampden County consists of the following 23 cities and towns: *Agawam, Blandford, Brimfield, Chester, Chicopee, East Longmeadow, Granville, Hampden, Holland, Holyoke, Longmeadow, Ludlow, Monson, Montgomery, Palmer, Russell, Southwick, Springfield, Tolland, Wales, West Springfield, Westfield, Wilbraham*

OUR LEADERSHIP

Board of Directors: Provide strategic leadership, governance, and oversight, bringing together representatives from business, government, labor, education, and the community

Board Staff: Provide the leadership, expertise, and operational support needed to implement the Board's strategic priorities and advance regional workforce development.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The workforce landscape is changing rapidly. Employers across the Pioneer Valley continue to face challenges finding and retaining skilled workers, while residents and jobseekers navigate changing skill requirements and an evolving economy. Emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, are also influencing how work is performed and the skills employers will need in the years ahead.

As the region's workforce development leader, MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board plays a central role in understanding these changes, bringing partners together, and developing strategies that connect residents and employers to opportunity. In partnership with business, education and training providers, government, community organizations, labor, and our MassHire Career Centers, MHHCWB works to strengthen the workforce system and respond to regional economic needs.

The FY2027–2029 Strategic Plan provides a focused framework for this work, emphasizing regional leadership, employer-informed strategies, meaningful career pathways, and innovative approaches that expand workforce capacity and economic opportunity. The Plan also recognizes the importance of leveraging regional resources, strengthening employer partnerships, and pursuing innovative funding and partnerships to expand the capacity of the workforce system.

The Plan is organized around three Strategic Priorities:

Priority 1: Regional Leadership in Workforce Development

Lead the region through timely labor market information, strong partnerships, and innovative workforce strategies that respond to employer and workforce needs.

Priority 2: Empowering Adults for Workforce Success

Prepare adults with industry-driven skills, training, and career pathways that connect them to quality careers and opportunities for advancement.

Priority 3: Preparing Youth for High-Demand Careers

Connect youth to education, career readiness, training, and work-based learning experiences that build skills and prepare them for high-demand careers and long-term success.

Across all three priorities, MHHCWB will remain focused on collaboration, measurable results, and responsiveness to changing workforce conditions. The Strategic Plan recognizes the need to remain flexible and adapt strategies as technology, employer needs, and economic conditions evolve.

MHHCWB will track progress through key performance indicators, use results to strengthen accountability, and adjust strategies as workforce and economic conditions change.

We look forward to working with our regional partners to implement this Plan and strengthen the workforce and economic future of Hampden County and the Pioneer Valley.

A copy of the FY2027–FY2029 Strategic Plan is available on the MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board website at www.MassHireHCWB.com

VISION STATEMENT

The MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board leads a workforce system that expands access and opportunity for employers and job seekers while driving economic growth and community development.

MISSION STATEMENT

The MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board leads an employer-driven workforce system that aligns education, training, community organizations and employment partners to connect individuals to quality jobs and career pathways that advance economic mobility.



OUR REGIONAL WORKFORCE LANDSCAPE

I. Regional Demographic & Economic Snapshot

462,584 Population (2025) Population decreased by 1,130 over the last 5 years and is projected to decrease by 2,714 over the next 5 years.	222,815 Total Regional Employment Jobs grew by 7,679 over the last 5 years but are projected to decrease by 537 over the next 5 years	\$71.3K Median Household Income (2024) Median household income is \$9.4K below the national median household income of \$80.7K
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Source: Lightcast Q3, 2026 Data Set: Hampden County Economic Overview

II. Labor Market & Workforce Participation

Unemployment Rate

Hampden County's unemployment rate was 5.1% in June 2026, compared with 4.4% statewide and 4.2% nationally. While unemployment has decreased from 5.4% in June 2025, the rate remains slightly above the state and national averages.

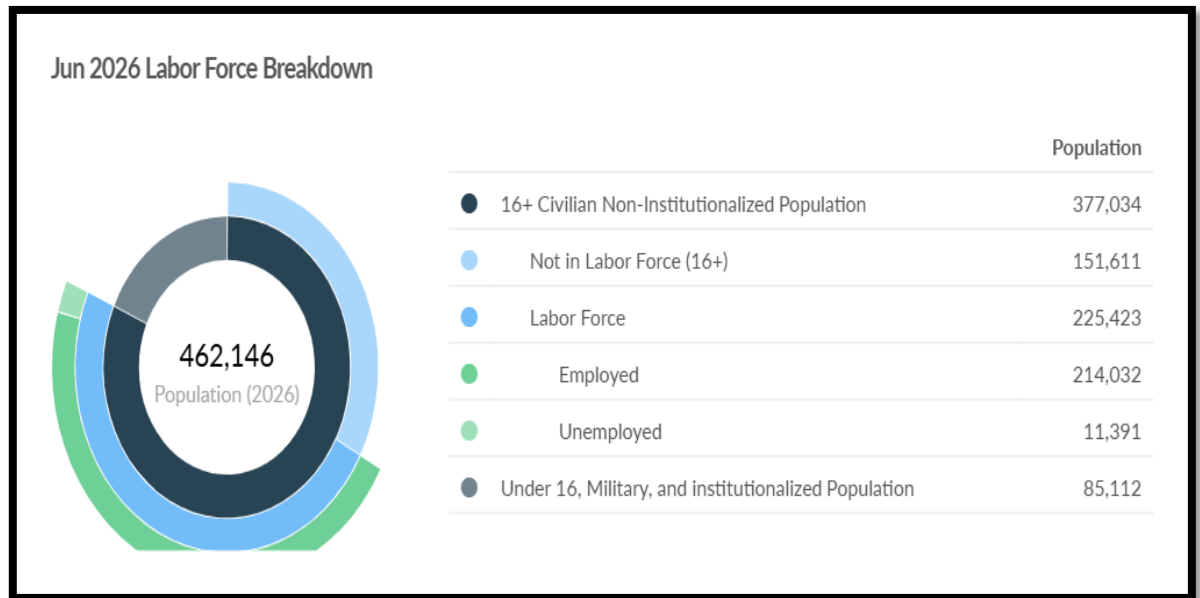
The unemployment rate provides an important measure of the number of residents actively seeking work, while the region's declining labor force participation rate points to a broader challenge of connecting more residents to the labor market.

Labor Force Participation Rate

Despite growth in the number of jobs, Hampden County's labor force participation rate declined from 61.1% in 2020 to 59.9% in 2025, indicating a smaller share of the working-age population participating in the labor market. At 59.9%, the county's participation rate was also approximately 2 percentage points below both the Massachusetts and national rates.

- **Youth labor force participation** remains a significant workforce opportunity, with just 54.2% of Hampden County residents ages 16–24 participating in the labor market. Expanding career exposure, work-based learning, and connections to employment can help engage more young people in workforce.

June 2026 Labor Force Breakdown



III. Key Regional Trends

Population

Hampden County is experiencing modest population decline, with the population decreasing by 0.2% between 2020 and 2025 and projected to decline another 0.6% by 2030. This trend underscores the importance of strategies that expand workforce participation, attract and retain talent, and connect residents to quality employment opportunities.

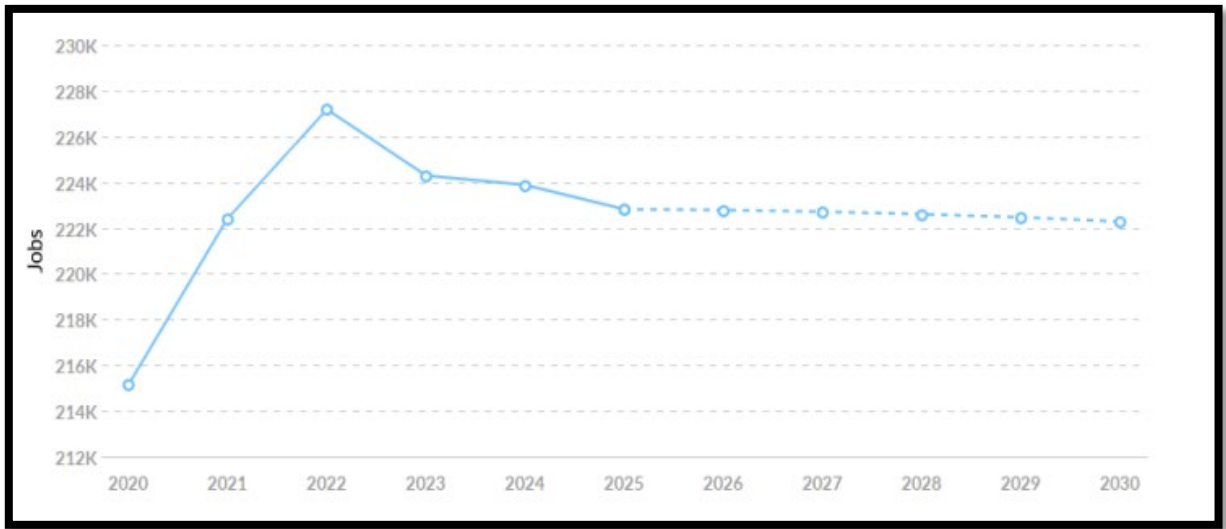
Educational Attainment

Educational attainment in Hampden County presents both opportunities and challenges. Approximately 17% of residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher, 4.8 percentage points below the national average, while 10% hold an associate's degree, 1.1 percentage points above the national average.

Job Growth

Hampden County added approximately 7,700 jobs between 2020 and 2025, representing 3.6% employment growth. While the region experienced job growth, it trailed national growth of 10.7% by 7.1 percentage points, highlighting the need to strengthen economic and workforce strategies that support job creation and regional competitiveness.

Job Trends: 2020 - 2030



Source: Lightcast Q3, 2026 Data Set: Hampden County Economic Overview

Regional Workforce Challenge

Hampden County faces a dual workforce challenge: a declining population and labor force participation rate, combined with unemployment that remains slightly above state and national levels. Strengthening labor force participation, connecting residents to employment, and attracting and retaining talent will therefore be critical to the region's workforce and economic competitiveness.

IV. Industry & Occupational Outlook

Largest Industries & Employment Outlook

Industry	2026 Jobs	2030 Jobs	Change	% Change
Health Care & Social Assistance	58,654	59,901	+1,247	+2%
Government	35,248	35,621	+373	+1%
Retail Trade	25,368	25,281	-87	0%
Manufacturing	17,140	16,351	-789	-5%
Accommodation & Food Services	17,140	17,258	+119	+1%
Transportation & Warehousing	15,445	16,635	+1,190	+8%
Finance & Insurance	15,362	16,080	+718	+5%
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	15,296	16,661	+1,365	+9%
Other Services	14,032	14,221	+189	+1%
Construction	13,576	13,869	+293	+2%

Source: Lightcast Industry Tables, Extracted 7-20-26

Health Care & Social Assistance remains the region's largest employment sector, with nearly 59,000 jobs in 2026 and continued growth projected through 2030. While overall employment growth is expected to be modest and uneven across industries, several sectors show strong potential for expansion, including Real Estate & Rental & Leasing, Transportation & Warehousing, and Finance & Insurance.

Regional Occupation Employment & Projections

Description	2026 Jobs	2030 Jobs	2026 - 2030 Change	2026 - 2030 % Change	Median Annual Earnings
Sales and Related	31,239	32,087	848	3%	\$42,607
Office and Administrative Support	25,881	25,983	102	0%	\$47,575
Management Occupations	24,280	25,217	937	4%	\$107,516
Healthcare Support	22,475	23,169	694	3%	\$37,810
Business and Financial Operations	20,712	21,654	942	5%	\$89,724
Transportation and Material Moving	19,956	20,537	581	3%	\$41,976
Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	18,050	18,358	309	2%	\$89,906
Educational Instruction and Library	17,616	17,774	159	1%	\$67,701
Food Preparation and Serving Related	16,046	15,936	(110)	(1%)	\$33,373
Production	11,116	10,644	(472)	(4%)	\$45,384

Source: Lightcast, 2026. Data for Hampden County, MA; employment projections for 2026–2030

The region's largest occupation groups include Sales, Office & Administrative Support, Management, and Healthcare Support. Business & Financial Operations and Management show the strongest projected growth, while Production and Food Preparation are expected to decline. Earnings vary significantly, with the highest median wages concentrated in Management, Healthcare, and Business & Financial Operations.

WORKFORCE TRENDS, OPPORTUNITIES, & STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Federal Level

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) continues to provide the foundation for the public workforce system, emphasizing employer engagement, career pathways, work-based learning, industry-recognized credentials, and coordinated services. Potential WIOA reauthorization and modernization during the strategic plan period could significantly influence workforce system priorities, funding, and service delivery. MHHCWB will monitor and respond to these changes while leveraging WIOA and other federal investments to strengthen workforce opportunities for individuals and employers.

An emerging opportunity is the *Workforce Pell Grant*, which could expand access to short-term, career-focused postsecondary education and training aligned with employer demand. The continued federal emphasis on Registered Apprenticeships reinforces the importance of work-

based learning and supports MHCWB's ongoing efforts to expand and strengthen apprenticeship opportunities across the region, particularly in high-demand industries.

State Level

MHCWB will align its work with the *Massachusetts Workforce Agenda 2024–2028*, the Commonwealth's WIOA State Plan, and evolving state workforce priorities, including talent attraction and retention, talent development, workforce system infrastructure, and leadership by example. *Free community college* represents an important opportunity to expand access to postsecondary education and career-focused training, particularly for individuals seeking credentials aligned with regional employer demand.

Regional Level – Pioneer Valley

MHCWB will continue to collaborate with the MassHire Franklin Hampshire Workforce Board and regional partners to advance priorities identified through the *Pioneer Valley Regional Labor Market Blueprint*. The Blueprint will inform workforce planning, employer engagement, training investments, and regional resource development. As state or regional guidance evolves, MHCWB will participate in efforts to refresh the existing Blueprint or develop a new regional labor market framework during the strategic plan period.

Hampden County

MHCWB will continue to advance workforce development in Hampden County through employer engagement, regional partnerships, and targeted workforce strategies aligned with labor market needs. Key areas of focus include:

- **Priority Industry Sectors:** Continue to develop workforce strategies in priority industries, including advanced manufacturing, healthcare and social assistance, and education, while responding to emerging industries and occupations.
- **Healthcare Workforce Partnership of Western Massachusetts:** Continue to lead and strengthen this regional partnership of healthcare employers and education and training providers to address current and emerging healthcare workforce needs, including nursing, behavioral health, and other high-demand occupations.
- **MassHire Career Centers:** Provide leadership, oversight, and strategic direction for the *MassHire Springfield* and *MassHire Holyoke Career Centers*, ensuring effective delivery of workforce services and strong alignment with employer and jobseeker needs.
- **Career Pathways and Apprenticeship:** Expand Registered Apprenticeship, work-based learning, industry-recognized credentials, and other pathways connecting individuals to high-demand careers.
- **Employer and Education Partnerships:** Strengthen collaboration among employers, education and training providers, community organizations, and economic development partners to improve recruitment, training, and career advancement opportunities.

- **Youth and Adult Workforce Development:** Expand opportunities for young people entering the workforce and adults seeking employment, career transitions, upskilling, and advancement.
- **Innovation and Emerging Needs:** Respond to emerging workforce challenges and opportunities, including artificial intelligence, technology, changing skill requirements, and new approaches to workforce development

CROSS CUTTING FOCUS: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE & TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

Artificial intelligence, automation, and emerging technologies are reshaping how work is performed, the skills employers need, and how workforce services are delivered. MHHCWB will monitor these changes and help the region anticipate and respond to their impact on employers, workers, jobseekers, occupations, and training requirements.

The pace and direction of AI and technological change remain uncertain. While AI infrastructure investment is at record levels, it is unclear how these markets will ultimately find equilibrium, which applications will provide the greatest value for employers and jobseekers, how AI will be integrated into education and training, and what regulatory frameworks will emerge. New developments over the next three years may significantly alter the workforce landscape in ways that are difficult to anticipate today. MHHCWB will therefore take an adaptive approach, monitoring emerging trends and adjusting its strategies as the implications become clearer.

Through partnerships with employers, educators, workforce organizations, and other regional stakeholders, the Workforce Board will promote digital and AI readiness, responsible adoption of emerging technologies, and innovative approaches that strengthen workforce system capacity and expand economic opportunity.

This cross-cutting focus will inform and be integrated across all three strategic priorities, ensuring that the Workforce Board's strategies remain responsive to technological change and that employers, workers, and jobseekers are prepared to adapt and succeed in an evolving economy.

STRATEGY PRIORITIES, GOALS & STRATEGIES

The Strategic Plan is organized around three priorities reflecting the role as a regional workforce leader, convener, and intermediary: regional workforce leadership, adult workforce success, and youth career preparation. Each priority includes corresponding goals and strategies that provide a framework for implementation and measurable progress.

STRATEGY PRIORITY #1

Regional Leadership in Workforce Development

Lead the region in workforce development by providing labor market insights, convening and aligning partners, and driving innovative strategies that expand workforce capacity and economic opportunity for employers and jobseekers.

GOAL A: Lead with Data and Regional Labor Market Insights

Provide timely, accurate, and actionable labor market information that informs regional workforce planning, investment, and decision-making.

- **Strategy A1:** Provide timely labor market data and insights to regional workforce partners on employer demand, workforce supply, skills, wages, and industry trends.
- **Strategy A2:** Support the ongoing development and use of the Pioneer Valley Labor Market Blueprint, or its successor, to identify current and future workforce needs.
- **Strategy A3:** Engage regional stakeholders to identify and respond to current and emerging workforce needs.

GOAL B: Convene and Align Regional Partners

Bring together employers, education, workforce, labor, economic development, government, and community partners to align strategies and develop solutions to regional workforce challenges.

- **Strategy B1:** Convene regional partners around critical workforce issues, priority industries, and emerging challenges, including the impact of artificial intelligence and technological change.
- **Strategy B2:** Align regional workforce priorities with the strategic priorities and initiatives of key economic development organizations, educational institutions, municipalities, and other regional partners.
- **Strategy B3:** Develop and advance regional workforce initiatives, particularly in the region's Gateway Cities, that respond to identified employer and jobseeker needs.

GOAL C: Drive Innovation and Workforce System Improvement

Design and promote innovative workforce strategies that respond to changing employer and jobseeker needs and improve workforce system outcomes.

- **Strategy C1:** Advance innovative employer-driven workforce strategies, including work-based learning and Registered Apprenticeships.
- **Strategy C2:** Develop and advance innovative, evidence-informed workforce practices that address emerging labor market needs and continuously improve workforce system outcomes.
- **Strategy C3:** Advance the responsible use of AI, automation, and emerging technologies across the workforce system.

GOAL D: Mobilize Resources and Advocate for Workforce Investment

Increase public and private investment in workforce development and elevate workforce development as a critical component of regional economic growth and competitiveness.

- **Strategy D1:** Identify and pursue public and private funding opportunities aligned with regional workforce priorities.
- **Strategy D2:** Educate and engage local, state, and federal policymakers and key stakeholders on regional workforce challenges, opportunities, and investment needs, while strengthening MHHCWB's visibility and leadership as a workforce convener, thought leader, advocate, and partner.

STRATEGY PRIORITY #2

Empowering Adults for Workforce Success

Prepare adults with industry-driven skills and pathways to quality careers that foster personal and professional growth.

Goal A: Strengthen an Integrated Workforce System for Adults

Align Career Centers, education, workforce, business, and community partners to improve outcomes for adults.

- **Strategy A1:** Strengthen coordination among the MassHire Career Centers, workforce partners, education, employers, and community organizations.
- **Strategy A2:** Enhance customer flow, referrals, and access to workforce, education, training, and support services.
- **Strategy A3:** Use shared data and outcomes to improve workforce services and system performance.

Goal B: Connect Adults to Quality Careers and Employer-Driven Skills

Expand access to training and career pathways that meet employer needs and lead to quality jobs.

- **Strategy B1:** Strengthen and expand employer-driven training, work-based learning including Registered Apprenticeships.
- **Strategy B2:** Expand access to training, upskilling, and career advancement opportunities

Goal C: Build an Adaptive Workforce for a Changing Economy

Help adults develop the skills needed to succeed as technology, industries, and occupations evolve.

- **Strategy C1:** Incorporate digital, AI, and emerging technology skills in workforce services and training.
- **Strategy C2:** Align training with changing skills, occupations, and employer needs.
- **Strategy C3:** Expand incumbent worker training and other opportunities for adults to reskill and upskill throughout their careers with a particular focus on ESOL training.

Goal D: Strengthen Education-to-Career Pathways

Connect adult education, post-secondary education, workforce development, and employers to create pathways to careers.

- **Strategy D1:** Strengthen partnerships among MassHire Career Centers, Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) providers, higher education institutions, training providers, and employers to create effective pathways to education, training, employment, and career advancement.
- **Strategy D2:** Align education and training with foundational, technical, digital, and employability skills.
- **Strategy D3:** Increase successful transitions to education, training, employment, and career advancement.

STRATEGY PRIORITY #3

Preparing Youth for High-Demand Careers

Empower youth by connecting them to education, training, and work-based learning experiences that build skills and prepare them for in-demand, high-quality careers and long-term success

Goal A: Prepare Youth for Career Success

Prepare youth with the academic, technical, digital, and employability skills needed for success in education, work, and careers.

- **Strategy A1:** Strengthen career exploration, advising, and pathway planning aligned with high-demand occupations.
- **Strategy A2:** Expand opportunities for youth to develop technical, digital, AI, and essential employability skills.
- **Strategy A3:** Strengthen pathways that connect secondary education, postsecondary education, training, and careers.

Goal B: Expand Work-Based Learning and Career Experiences

Increase access to meaningful work-based learning experiences that connect youth classroom learning to real-world careers.

- **Strategy B1:** Expand unsubsidized employment opportunities that connect youth directly with employers and the regional labor market.
- **Strategy B2:** Expand internships, work experiences, and other work-based learning opportunities including Registered Apprenticeships aligned with high-demand industries and career pathways.
- **Strategy B3:** Strengthen supports that enable youth to transition to employment, training, or post-secondary education.

Goal C: Strengthen Employer and Community Partnerships

Engage employers and community partners in preparing youth for the workforce and expanding access to career opportunities.

- **Strategy C1:** Strengthen employer partnerships that create career exploration, mentoring, and work-based learning opportunities for youth.
- **Strategy C2:** Align high schools, MassHire Career Centers, youth-serving organizations, employers, and training providers around youth career pathways.
- **Strategy C3:** Engage the Youth Council to share workforce information, expand career opportunities, and incorporate youth perspectives into the regional youth workforce system.

IMPLEMENTATION & ACCOUNTABILITY

A three-year Strategic Plan provides direction, but successful implementation requires ongoing assessment and adjustment. MHHCWB will translate the Plan's Strategic Priorities, Goals, and Strategies into annual areas of focus and measurable actions.

A *Strategic Performance Dashboard* will provide a clear framework for monitoring progress. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will be used to assess whether MHHCWB is advancing its goals, achieving meaningful outcomes, and strengthening the regional workforce system.

Progress will be reviewed regularly by Board leadership and staff, with the Strategic Planning Committee providing ongoing guidance and oversight. Performance results, labor market conditions, employer and partner feedback, and emerging workforce trends will be used to inform decisions and refine implementation throughout the three-year plan period.

This approach allows MHHCWB to maintain a consistent strategic direction while remaining responsive to changing economic conditions, employer needs, technology, funding, and workforce opportunities. The *Strategic Performance Dashboard* will serve as a tool for accountability, continuous improvement, and keeping the organization focused on results.



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