



REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT BOARD
OF HAMPDEN COUNTY, INC.

Your Connection to Workforce Development

Massachusetts Gaming Commission

Statement of Proposed Strategies

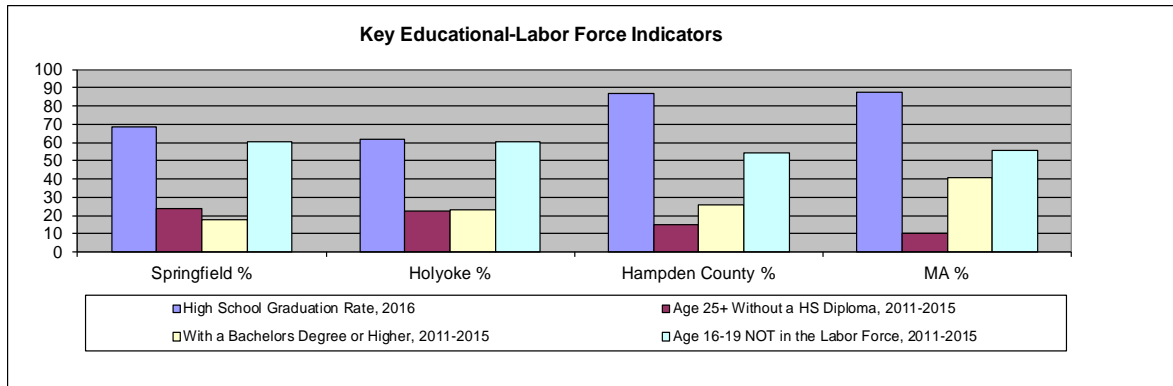
I. Introduction

The Regional Employment Board of Hampden County, Inc. (REB), the Workforce Development Board in Hampden County, located at 1441 Main Street in Springfield, is formally submitting a Statement of Proposed Strategies to the Massachusetts Gaming Commission to develop and implement a broad and comprehensive array of programs, services, and supports targeted to in-school youth and disconnected out-of school youth ages 16-24. The REB is requesting \$1,050,000 for FY 2019, contingent upon legislative appropriation.

II. The Problem Statement

The economic growth of the region is constrained by a labor shortage while young jobseekers are looking for work. Existing and potential employers require access to a larger talent pool of job ready candidates. In addition to academic and occupational skills, there is a significant need for improved workplace readiness skills, specifically related to work ethic and professionalism, communication, and interpersonal skills.

Workforce development will be a key contributor to the success of MGM Springfield and to the overall economic development of the region immediately surrounding this gaming facility. In Hampden County, disadvantaged youth and adults with limited skills make up the greatest proportion of the future workforce. Hampden County continues to face interrelated challenges of inadequate educational attainment, low labor force participation rates and high poverty, particularly in our two primary Gateway Cities of Springfield and Holyoke and our secondary Gateway Cities of Chicopee and Westfield.



Source:

US Census Bureau; Massachusetts Department of Early and Secondary Education,

III. The Research Data

The 2016 high school graduation rates in Springfield and Holyoke (currently in Receivership by the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education), have shown improvement in the past three years; however, they still lag behind other cities in Hampden County and in the Commonwealth. In addition, these two key anchor cities have significant challenges in advancing students towards a Bachelor’s degree or higher. One particularly disconcerting trend is the increase in youth not participating in the labor force.

Based on the 2011-2015 American Community Survey report, only 31% of the teens (16-19) in MA were employed during an average month. This is 23 percentage points less than the amount of teens that were employed in 1999 (54% vs. 31%). While all teens have experienced steep declines in their employment rates over the past decade, young teens, males, African-Americans, Hispanics and low-income students have fared the worst.

Further, census data suggests approximately one in six Gateway City youth age 16-24 is struggling to find a career pathway. These at-risk youth are either not enrolled in school and not working, or they hold low-wage jobs with little hope for advancement and they are not continuing their education.

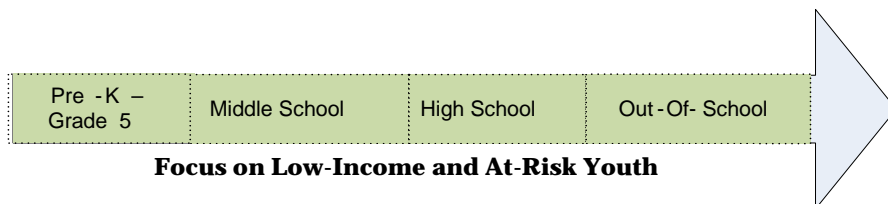
There are approximately 8,000 at-risk youth (age 16 to 24 living below poverty level) in Hampden County’s four Gateway Cities, 4,500 reside in Springfield (the remaining 3,500 are evenly distributed between Holyoke, Chicopee, and Westfield). 75% of these youth are in their early 20s; approximately 2/3 are not in school and in low wage jobs (<\$10/hr.); and 1/3 are not working and not in school.

In August, 2017, the REB organized a focus group of fifteen (15) cross-sector regional employers in order to gather real time information on skills and competencies needed by employers, challenges in hiring and retaining employees, and suggested approaches to strengthening the workforce. Employers emphasized the need for more strategic partnerships between employers and education and training providers with a particular focus on improved workplace readiness skills.

III. The Proposed Strategic Framework and Strategies

The REB proposes a priority focus on at-risk youth. While the percentage of youth fitting this description is high, the REB believes that with strategic allocation of new and existing resources and the use of evidence-based interventions, it can improve outcomes for both youth and businesses that will increase job creation and have a continuous positive impact on the regional economy. The proposed strategies are drawn from the following section of the REB's FY 2018-2020 Strategic Plan as well as from research and strategies outlined in the recently released *"Calling All Gateway City Leaders: An Action Guide to Workforce Development Transformation in Massachusetts,"* (MassINC Gateway Cities Innovation Institute and Commonwealth Corporation, 2017).

Strategic Priority 3: Develop 21st Century Youth Education and Employability Skills for Quality Careers



Goal A) Prepare youth for college and careers.

Strategy A1) Establish common indicators of workplace readiness across industries through the OSCC WIOA Core Partner MOU and/or the MOU between all youth-serving programs/agencies funded through the REB and at the One-Stop Career Centers.

Strategy A2) Establish a common career pathway framework applicable across all sectors that describes how to advance youth along the career continuum, included in MOUs above.

The REB believes that subsidized employment, especially when combined with workplace readiness training and mentoring helps youth find clear career pathways, improve employment readiness skills, and develop the self-esteem and confidence required to make good educational and career decisions.

As the Workforce Development Board in Hampden County, the REB currently directs and manages all youth programming funded federally by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA; YouthWorks), and by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (Connecting Activities). These coordinated and highly integrated subsidized employment programs have strong outcomes and regional partnerships and have an existing and well-established infrastructure that with additional resources can be scaled up to significantly impact short-term and long-term employment and create sustained regional economic development.

Embedded in these programs are a structured and interactive workplace readiness curricula and tools that include the following proven and validated instructional modules and accountability metrics that have the potential to significantly increase the quantity and quality of young people ready to succeed in growth sectors of the economy.

- ✚ Signal Success (Commonwealth Corporation)
- ✚ Workplace Readiness Certificate Program (REB- Springfield Public Schools)
- ✚ Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan (MA DESE)

As of July 1, 2017, 22 partners (including the REB, the One-Stop Career Centers, and youth agencies focused on college and career readiness and employment) signed the Hampden County Youth Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), to develop and implement an integrated workforce system for youth (Attachment A). The MOU partners have agreed to work together to connect and enhance services through innovative use of existing and new resources to produce the best possible outcomes for youth and businesses. The infrastructure created through the MOU provides an exciting new opportunity to connect and bring to scale the highest quality youth services in the region. The following section outlines current youth employment programs connected to the MOU that are managed by the REB and have demonstrated outcomes and effective partnerships. **Additional resources could bring these programs and the youth workforce development system as a whole to scale, significantly increasing the number of young people ready to succeed in high demand growth sectors of the economy.**

A. WIOA Youth Program

WIOA is federal legislation that provides funding to support a public workforce system that provides integrated service delivery for in-school and out-of-school youth and young adults. The REB partners with youth service providers to coordinate resources and activities including career exploration and guidance, continued support for educational attainment, opportunities for skills training in in-demand industries and occupations, and job placement along a career pathway or enrollment in post-secondary education. The WIOA Youth Program includes both year-round and summer jobs components.

B. YouthWorks

The goal of the state's subsidized employment program, YouthWorks, is to help ensure young people are ready for work and are acquiring marketable skills. YouthWorks provides young people with the skills, experience, and networks to be able to secure employment in the unsubsidized labor market.

Hampden County YouthWorks is a partnership of the REB, the One-Stop Career Centers, and local public, private and community-based organizations. Youth ages 14-21 are recruited, trained, placed and supervised in subsidized employment opportunities. Youth participants also complete work-readiness training (*Signal Success*, described below) to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful in an entry-level position or community-service activity, as well as strategies for work retention and advancement, job search and career exploration.

YouthWorks also includes leadership training, case management, mentoring, academic services, and project-based learning. YouthWorks includes both year-round and summer jobs components.

C. Connecting Activities

Connecting Activities (CA) is a Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) initiative that sustains a statewide infrastructure to support "college and career readiness" for all students. The CA line item in the state budget establishes public-private partnerships through the 16 local workforce investment boards to connect school districts with businesses for a wide range of career development education (CDE) experiences. A primary focus of these partnerships is the creation of structured work-based learning experiences for students that support their academic and employability skill attainment, career awareness and career exploration.

D. Workplace Readiness Curricula

Signal Success is a workplace readiness curriculum developed by the Commonwealth Corporation to provide youth (ages 14-24) instruction and skill development opportunities in Initiative, Communication, Collaboration and Dependability.

The *Workplace Readiness Certificate Program* was created by the REB and Springfield Public Schools. Focus areas are Attendance and Punctuality, Motivation and Initiative, Communication, Teamwork and Collaboration, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, and Workplace Policy, Culture and Safety.

The Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan is a diagnostic, goal setting and assessment tool designed to drive learning and productivity on the job. Foundational skills categories assessed align with focus areas of Signal Success and the Workplace Readiness Certificate Program.

IV. Budget

Investment in the development of the next generation of the workforce is one of the most promising strategies to create individual self-sufficiency and regional economic growth. The REB is requesting \$1,050,000 from the MA Gaming Economic Development Fund for FY 2019 to bring to scale innovative youth programming that builds on the strength of the regional partnership infrastructure and supports activities with demonstrated employment outcomes. The REB's current collaboration with the MOU partners creates an integrated youth workforce development system that responds to regional industry need, connects complementary services, increases accessibility to those services, and strengthens the system of support that will prepare the future workforce in our region.



REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT BOARD
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Hampden County Workforce Development Board Youth Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

I. PURPOSE

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) communicates the agreement developed and executed between the ***Regional Employment Board of Hampden County, Inc. (REBHC), as the designated Workforce Development Board for Hampden County***, the One-Stop Career Center (OSCC) operators and their youth-oriented programs, the region's WIOA Title I Youth service providers, YouthWorks providers, DESE School-to-Career Connecting Activities (STC-CA) funded partners, the Westover Job Corps Center, the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission/ Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MRC/MCB) WIOA 15% funded youth program/ activities and the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) funded youth program/activities as they relate to the operation of youth services and programs in Hampden County.

This MOU ***augments the WIOA Core Partner Umbrella MOU*** that defines the roles and responsibilities of the OSCC Required Partners to operationalize the delivery of services necessary to produce the best possible outcomes for shared WIOA Core Partner customers, which includes youth. This MOU is designed to specifically align and coordinate the delivery of WIOA and other services to youth aged 14-24 with the other REBHC youth-funded programs.

The MOU may include other provisions agreed to by all parties that are consistent with all Partner programs, services and activities, authorizing statutes and regulations.

II. DURATION OF THE MOU

This agreement shall commence on July 1, 2017 and shall terminate on June 30, 2018, unless otherwise terminated by agreement of all parties or superseded.

III. ASSURANCES

The parties agree to conduct the following activities at a local level:

1. Enter into a local MOU with the REBHC relating to the operation of the youth delivery system.
2. Participate in the operation of the youth delivery system consistent with the terms of this MOU, the requirements of WIOA, and the requirements of Federal and State laws authorizing the youth programs and activities.
3. The MOU will be reviewed and updated as needed, but not less than once every 2-year WIOA youth procurement period, to ensure appropriate funding and delivery of services.

IV. MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING CONTENT

1. The REBHC convened and facilitated a representative group of youth providers to develop this MOU and to come to an agreed upon career pathway model/youth service path for youth being served its programs. A sub-group worked on the career pathway model, led by the Westover Job Corps Center representative, which was then reviewed by the larger group. The MOU and accompanying documents were reviewed and approved by the REB Youth Council.
2. The following are the priority youth segments of the population identified by the MOU Partners:
 - a. low-income in-school and out-of-school youth meeting WIOA and YouthWorks eligibility,
 - b. high-school drop-outs,
 - c. high school students meeting DESE STC targeted services,
 - d. youth with disabilities;
 - e. re-entry populations;
 - f. young parents; and
 - g. other youth with barriers to employment.

The REBHC and Youth Partners understand that while there is a priority on youth who have barriers to employment, we recognize the context of our regional labor market (e.g., the expectations of area employers). We also acknowledge a need to fill the local businesses' workforce needs with qualified applicants and as such will strive to develop youths' work readiness and essential skills so that they are prepared for the workplace.


3. The MOU Partners intend to collaborate to provide a holistic continuum of services to youth in Hampden County based on a youth-centered design / career pathway model as seen in Attachment A ("Hampden County Workforce Region Career Pathway Model"), as adapted from CLASP's Alliance for Quality Career Pathways Initiative's Model. We envision the following:
 - a) Various types of supports and services will be made available to youth through the MOU partners that promote the education, training and career advancement of youth receiving services.
 - b) Community resources and social supports will be engaged by MOU partners to ensure youth do not fall through the cracks between critical transition points in their pathway.
 - c) That through #4 as described below, there will be an ability to refer youth between the partners for appropriate services and activities. The individual partner will outline the service strategies they are providing and share any "individual service strategy plans" with the other partner(s).
4. In addition to the coordination and referral mechanisms between the OSCC Operators and WIOA Core Partners in the Umbrella MOU (which includes the Westover Job Corps Center and MRC/MCB); the OSCCs also will refer appropriate center customers aged 14-24 to the WIOA Youth service providers, with particular emphasis on out-of-school youth providers, YouthWorks

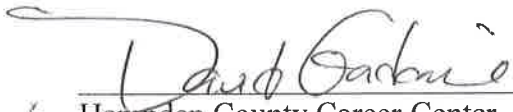
Jobs programs (for the cities that have a program), STC-CA lead coordinators, DTA funded Young Parent Programs, and to the MRC/MCB WIOA 15% funded youth programs. Examples of when such referrals are appropriate include, but are not limited to, when a youth drops out of one of the programs or needs services as provided by another program. Program Contact lists will be on the REBHC website maintained at: <http://www.rebhc.org/youth-development-14-24-year-olds/>. Conversely, Youth programs will refer to the OSCCs those youth who can benefit from their services and assist in obtaining employment, participating in their workshops, etc. For WIOA youth, these activities will be captured in the MOSES database as well as documented in the youth's individual service strategy plan. For STC-CA youth, the DESE Connecting Activities/ Work-based Learning Plan platform will capture such career exploration activities that may be delivered at a OSCC.


5. The MOU Partners intend to share various tools utilized in the provision of services to youth, e.g., MA Work-based Learning Plan, assessment tools, work readiness training, mentoring supports, and other tools as agreed upon by the parties, amongst each other via Youth Council presentations, email distribution, and other means.
6. The MOU Partners will engage with business partners and industry groups in varying ways to provide career exposure, exploration and immersion (e.g., work experiences, internships, etc.) activities. While the intent is to provide such experiences in areas aligned with regional labor market needs and "future ready workforce" demands, for many youth it is understood that any work-based exposure will be helpful in building work readiness skills, especially in the area of developing 21st Century "essential/soft/employability" skills. The REB and Career Centers will partner with youth program providers, within a business partner/ employer engagement framework to be developed over time as part of demand-driven strategies envisioned under WIOA.
7. The REB will facilitate mechanisms to ensure that the tracking and reporting of youth enrollment and outcomes across various databases/programs, where appropriate and allowable, occurs to the maximum extent possible.
8. Other provisions, as agreed to by all parties and that are consistent with all programs' services and activities, authorizing statutes and regulations, may be added to this agreement over time.


V. SIGNATORIES

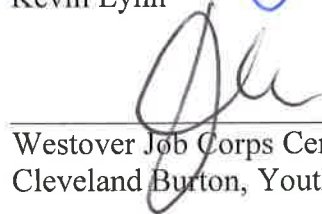
By signing this agreement, all parties agree to the provisions contained herein are subject to all applicable, Federal, State, and local laws, regulations and/or guidelines relating to nondiscrimination, equal opportunity, displacement, privacy rights of participants, and maintenance of data and other confidential information relating to youth customers. By signatures affixed below, the parties specify their agreement:


REBHC, Inc. President & CEO
David M. Cruise



Hampden County Career Center, Inc.
dba CareerPoint, David Gadaire


FutureWorks, Inc.
Kevin Lynn

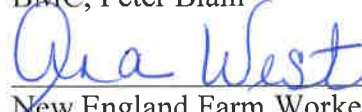

MA Rehabilitation Commission
Paula Euber, MRC Youth Council Member



Westover Job Corps Center
Cleveland Burton, Youth Council Chair

WIOA Title I Youth Provider Points of Contact:

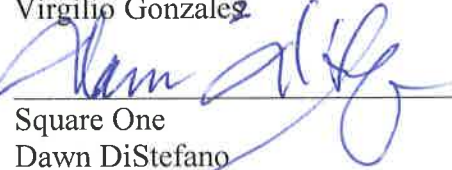

Baystate Springfield Educational Partnership,
BMC, Peter Blain


Holyoke Public Schools
Normand LeBlanc

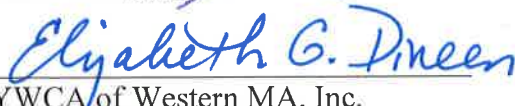

New England Farm Workers Council, Inc.
Ana West


New North Citizens Council, Inc.
Virgilio Gonzales



Pathfinder Vocational Technical HS
Denise Carrier



Square One
Dawn DiStefano



Valley Opportunity Council, Inc.
Judith Kocik

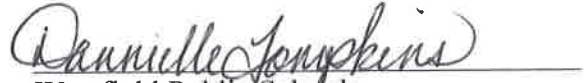

YWCA of Western MA, Inc.
Elizabeth G. Dineen

YouthWorks Points of Contact:


Hampden County Career Center, Inc.
dba CareerPoint, Gladys Lebron-Martinez

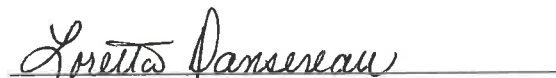

Valley Opportunity Council, Inc.
Kristen Wing


New England Farm Workers Council, Inc.
Ana West



Westfield Public Schools
Danielle Tomkins

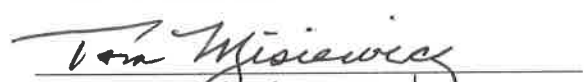
School-to-Career Connecting Activities Points of Contact:


Chicopee Public Schools
Kara Blanchard

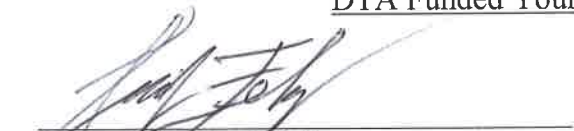

River East School-to-Career, Inc.
Loretta Dansereau



Springfield Public Schools
Julie Donovan



Holyoke Public Schools
Normand LeBlanc


River West Schools
Tom Misiewicz

DTA Funded Young Parents Program Points of Contact:


Corporation for Public Management, Inc.
Luis Feliz

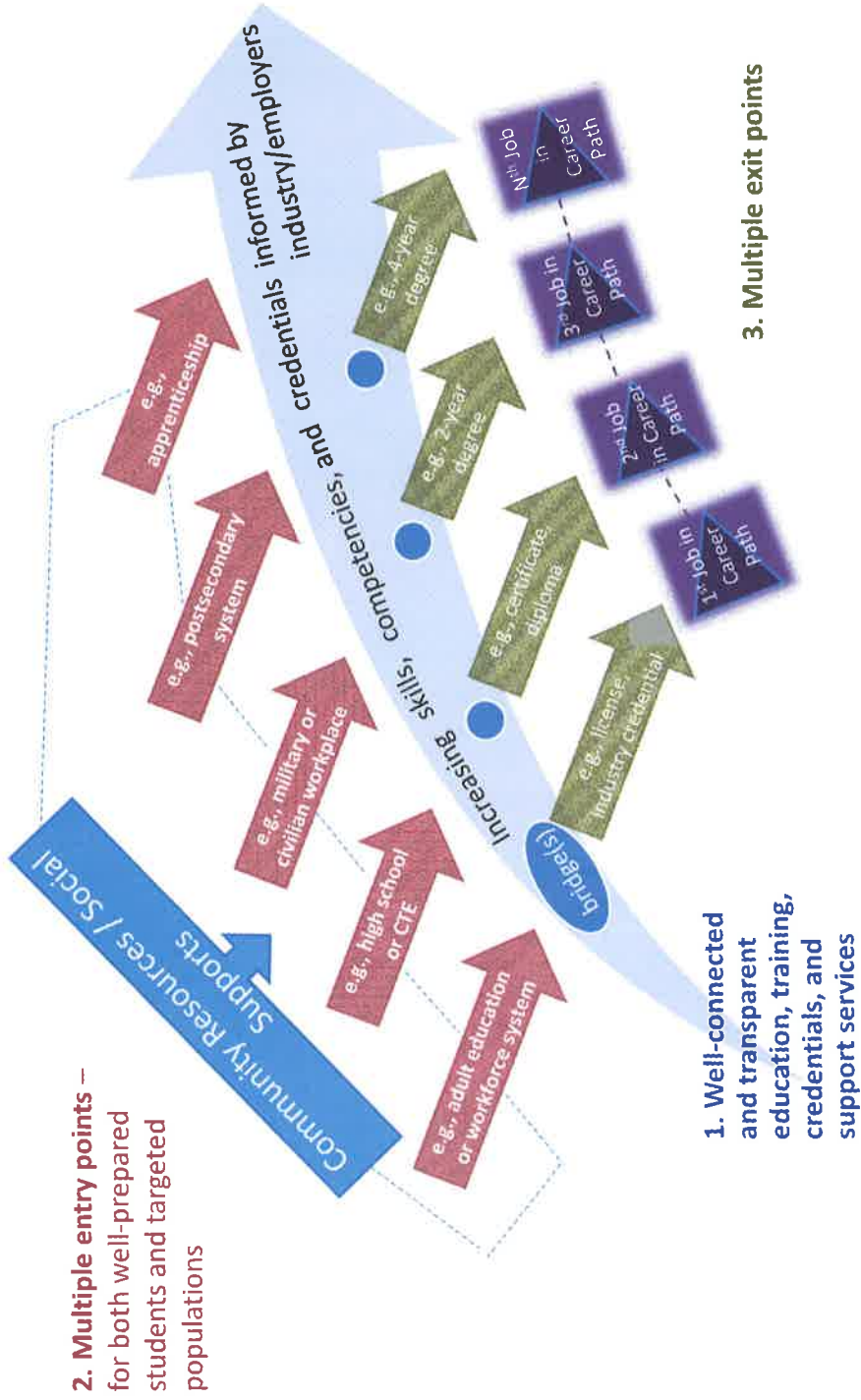

Training Resources of America, Inc.
Jynai McDonald


The Care Center, Inc.
Anne Teschner

Attachment A: Hampden County Workforce Region Youth Career Pathway Model*



REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT BOARD
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Your Commitment to Workforce Development



* As adapted from CLASP's Alliance for Quality Career Pathways Initiative's Model