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**Request for Information (RFI):**

**Regional Business Services**

**March 2024**

1. **RFI Overview**

The Pocono Counties Workforce Development Board is seeking information to inform a regional business services strategy that:

* Effectively bridges the gaps between employer talent needs and the supply of workers (current and emergent)
* Enhances the ability for workforce development services to support industry competitiveness and economic growth,
* Embeds into the footprint of PA CareerLink® and workforce development initiatives prioritized by the Pocono Counties Workforce Development Board, and
* Establishes a continuum of support for employers across the four counties of Pocono Counties workforce development area.

Please note that this Request for Information (RFI) is for informational purposes only, and no contract will be awarded as a result. A firm or organization’s response to the RFI⁠—or lack thereof—will have no impact on the evaluation of responses to any subsequent Request for Proposals (RFP) or Invitation to Bid (ITB) released. Responses will be used solely for information and planning purposes.

Please note that all responses will be public record. **Do not submit confidential information in your response.**

* 1. **RFI Contact**

We have designated the following individual to serve as the official point of contact for this RFI. This individual is the only authorized contact permitted to communicate on behalf of the Pocono Counties Workforce Development Area about this RFI.

**Contact information for RFI point of contact:**

Samuel Hellen, Executive Director

Pocono Counties Workforce Development Area

shellen@pcwia.org

(484) 464-2494

* 1. **Submission Details**

Please submit your responses to this RFI via email before the due date identified in Section 1.3. When submitting your response, please include the subject *“Regional Business Services RFI Response Pocono Counties Workforce Development Area* Responses should be provided in Microsoft Word and 1” margins. Any attachments should be included in one document, clearly organized in alignment with the RFI submission.

If you have any questions about this RFI, please direct them to the RFI contact during the appropriate period identified below in Section 1.1.

* 1. **RFI Timeline**

Please review the below RFI timeline. Dates may be modified or amended by the Pocono Counties Workforce Development Board, which will post an amendment to this RFI notifying prospective respondents of any change.

* RFI Released: March 1, 2024
* RFI Conference: March 12, 2024, 10am EST
* Deadline for Questions: March 18, 2024
* Responses Due: April 1, 2024, 4pm EST
	1. **RFI Conference / Information Session**

An optional RFI Information Session for this RFI will be held to answer questions from prospective respondents. During the Information Session, Pocono Counties Workforce Development Area staff will summarize the goals of the RFI, and the information requested. Pocono Counties Workforce Development Area staff will take questions from prospective respondents and community members during the Information Session. Any answers given at the Information Session are tentative, and final answers will be provided via a Q&A document released after the Deadline for Questions identified in Section 1.3. A recording of the RFI Information Session will be posted to [www.pcwia.org](http://www.pcwia.org).

1. **Background Information**
	1. **Goals and Outcomes**

Employer engagement and the formation of strategic partnerships with industry stakeholders is critical to the mission of workforce development. At the Pocono Counties Workforce Development Board (WDB), we value the workforce system to be looked upon:

* As a known resource to industry and employer partners for talent recruitment and retention,
* With consistent and aligned capacity to engage employers of all sizes across our four (4) counties,
* To leverage expertise and resources that strengthen the education to work talent pipeline,
* To maintain a relevant understanding of industry’s workforce development needs and interests, and
* To increase the prosperity of workers and employers and strengthen the economic growth of our community.

Through this RFI, the Pocono Counties WDB aims to collect information, examples, and identify key design components that inform the development of a regional business services strategy. Anticipated outcomes of a regional business service strategy include, but are not limited to an effective public workforce system that:

* Serves as the “go-to” resource for employers and their talent development and resource needs
* Establishes clear connections between industry, education, and the public workforce development systems
* Efficiently uses workforce funding in areas such as career connected learning, on-the-job training, and incumbent worker activities.

* 1. **Background**

**About Us** The Pocono Counties Workforce Development Board (WDB) is comprised of private-sector business, social service, education, labor, economic development, and community-based organization representatives. The purpose of the Board is to provide strategic oversight, direction, and focus to the employment and training services provided to residents and employers of the four (4) counties that comprise the Pocono Counties Workforce Development Area (WDA) – Carbon, Monroe, Pike, and Wayne Counties.

**Our Vision** The Pocono Counties WDB’s vision is to support regional economic growth and self-reliance through a comprehensive network of service locations, employment and training services, and strategic partnerships with the region’s employment, educational, economic development, and labor organizations. The economic future of our Workforce Development Area is dependent on a workforce that is globally competitive and aligned with the skills needed by the employer community within our local and regional labor markets**.**

**Our Mission** The Pocono Counties WDB is committed to building a workforce system that is universally accessible to our labor force, accountable to its stakeholders, data-driven, and aligned with the economic development and education efforts of our community partners. It is also committed to a regional strategy of interaction andcooperation with the Lackawanna County, Luzerne/Schuylkill, and Northern Tier Workforce Development Boards that are part of our planning region for Northeastern Pennsylvania.

**Our Region**  Located in the northeastern corner of Pennsylvania, the Pocono Counties WDA provides services to residents and employers of Carbon, Monroe, Pike, and Wayne Counties. As part of the PA CareerLink® system, there are four (4) service center locations (one in each county), operated by four vendors funded under the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA). Our Centers provide a wide range of information and services designed to assist both Job Seekers and Employers in meeting their employment and business development needs. Staff at our PA CareerLink® centers provide customer- focused job search assistance, human resource recruiting services, career guidance, and other information on a wide range of community resources. They also offer programs and information on training opportunities and financial aid, veterans' employment services, and other specialized employment services.

In addition to PA CareerLink®, the Pocono Counties WDB is involved in a number of employer-centered initiatives that address consortium-based/industry-sector focused activities, apprenticeship supports, and business-education partnerships.

The Pocono Counties employers and workers are connected to a wide range of labor markets. The labor market is within the borders of the four (4) counties, as well as those of Lackawanna, Luzerne/Schuylkill, the Lehigh Valley and the bordering states of New York and New Jersey. The Poconos WDA is uniquely positioned with a highly concentrated and competitive hospitality & tourism industry, public sector/government employment, and service-oriented healthcare and education footprint.

The Pocono Counties WDA is experiencing a 4.3% unemployment rate (January 2024) – compared to the State average of 3.4%. In the past decades, the Pocono Counties have become home to thousands of visitors who initially came to enjoy the natural landscape, pristine environment, and reputation as a vacation destination. The areas’ quality of life, low cost of living, and location within commuting distance of these larger labor markets has fueled recent growth in both population and economic development opportunities in our region.

When exploring the existing workforce supply, there are a number of influential indicators to consider:

* Approximately 40% of the available workers live in but work outside of the Pocono Counties WDA.
* Labor market projections indicate that over the next 5 years, the Pocono Counties WDA may experience population growth and job growth.
* The nature of the hospitality and tourism industries and visitor population provide significant exposure to employment and entrepreneurship opportunities within the Poconos WDA.

Served by the Pennsylvania Turnpike, as well as the major Interstates 80 and 81, the Pocono Counties are centrally located within the Northeastern U.S. Corridor. The Northeastern U.S. Corridor is home to 17% of the U.S. population and 20% of its’ GDP. If the corridor were a country, it would have the 5th largest GDP in the world. Because of its’ location, the opportunities for economic development and the need for a skilled and diverse workforce within the Pocono Counties WDA are central to our mission. More information on Pocono WDA labor market information can be located [online](https://pcwia.org/lmi/)[[1]](#footnote-2).

1. **Information Requested**
	1. **Who We’re Looking For:**

The Pocono Counties WDB is seeking regional approaches to engage, partner, and serve employers in their human resource and talent development needs. Of priority is the application of effective strategies and practices rooted in a deep understanding of a region's industry and labor market make-up. As indicated previously, Pocono Counties WDB has a unique industry sector make-up that largely represents hospitality, tourism, retail trade, and public sectors.

Specially, the Pocono Counties WDB is interested in hearing feedback on this proposed project from firms, organizations, or professional individuals that have demonstrated experience in providing or evaluating Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title 1 Business Services (or similar services that are compliant with WIOA Title 1 Business services), the expertise in industry sector and employer engagement related to talent development or human resource consultation, stakeholders involved in employer-centered training models, and/or an understanding and application of labor market information to address the workforce investment needs of employers across a multi-county region.

Additionally, we encourage responses from local workforce development boards and workforce-related organizations that operate regional business services strategies.

* 1. **What We’re Looking For:**

Respondents are invited to provide information on the below subjects of interest:

**Question 1:** Describe the greatest opportunities and/or challenges to ***creating and implementing a regional business services strategy*** overall, including factors that align to the Pocono Counties labor market[[2]](#footnote-3).

**Question 2:** [WIOA outlines specific business services](https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/20/678.435)[[3]](#footnote-4) to be provided through the one-stop (PA CareerLink(R) delivery system:

(a) what have been the ***most effective services*** to be delivered including the intensity, duration, or other critical components of the service.

(b) what ***tools and resources****,* including but not limited to technology-based solutions and machine learning, have been most valuable to identify and engage employers to determine and deliver business services.

(c) indicate ***which entities*** are best positioned to administer a regional business service strategy.

(d) other key ingredients that must be present for a regional business services strategy to be successful.

**Question 3:** Describe the key partnerships or collaborations the business services provider must have with the following entities to reduce duplication of effort, leverage expertise, and enhance services.

(a) ***key workforce development entities*** (such as the local workforce development board, WIOA core service providers, one-stop operators)

(b) ***employer-centric organizations*** (such as chambers, economic development organizations, trade associations, etc.)

(c) ***other organizations*** that operate in a community development, human services, or worker-centric sector.

**Question 4:** The Pocono workforce development area has a high concentration of hospitality, tourism, retail trade, and service-type sector representation. What are demonstrated or proven strategies and services that support career-connected learning and business services for these industry sectors?

**Question 5:** In light of the role of workforce development to connect and retain a skilled workforce with good jobs, what are the best ways to incorporate a “worker’s voice” into regional business services?

**Question 6:** State the major cost activities or categories needed to implement a regional business services strategy Cost, staffing, and funding models.

**Question 7:** Describe the short- , medium-, and long-term changes or outcomes of a regional business services strategy that inform deliverables and performance.

**Question 8:** Please share ***other considerations or relevant aspects*** to facilitating a regional business services strategy in the Pocono Counties region.

Information provided should total no more than three (3) 8 ½” x 11” pages per question – with exception to Questions #2 and #3 which are not to exceed 6 pages each. Respondents may include additional attachments, combined, and organized in one document (.pdf preferred) with their response document. Submissions should be directed to the contact listed in Section 1.1.

1. <https://pcwia.org/lmi/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. https://pcwia.org/lmi/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/20/678.435 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)