

SOUTHEASTERN MASSACHUSETTS WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STUDY: AN AGENDA FOR REGIONAL ACTION

Introduction

Purpose of the Study

The Southeastern Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board (SEWIB) Consortium, a collaborative of the five workforce investment boards (WIBs), sponsored this study to help it identify workforce development issues common to its five workforce investment areas (WIAs) and to develop an initial agenda to address these issues.

Under the federal Workforce Investment Act, local WIBs have primary responsibility for leading and managing an area's workforce development system. WIBs are responsible for developing a local plan, designating one-stop center operators and eligible training providers, and monitoring provider performance. Their boards, appointed by a lead local elected official, represent key workforce development constituencies. They have a majority of business representatives, but also include education providers, labor organizations, community-based organizations, and economic development agencies.

While each WIB has its own plan, SEWIB members recognize that their individual workforce investment areas are becoming increasingly interconnected. Development patterns, transportation infrastructure investments, economic restructuring, and other factors have reshaped and generally expanded the contours of labor markets. WIA boundaries, which were established in the 1970s, do not necessarily reflect these changes. At the same time, public resources for workforce development are small and shrinking. WIBs have to stretch available resources by using them more effectively and cost-efficiently. These factors have converged to provide a strong rationale for greater regional collaboration.

The study sought to identify common needs, opportunities, and challenges among WIAs that could be addressed through collaborative initiatives. Types of collaboration could include:

- *collaborative programs and projects* such as regional sectoral training programs;
- *shared organizational capacity* such as joint labor market research and information dissemination; and
- *joint advocacy efforts* on regional policy issues of common concern such as public transportation services.

Characteristics of the Study Area

The five WIBs in the SEWIB Consortium, the South Coastal WIB, Brockton Area WIB, Bristol WIB, Greater New Bedford WIB, and Cape and Islands WIB, collectively

serve a region of 79 cities and towns extending from the southern Boston suburbs to the Rhode Island border and the tip of Cape Cod.

The southeastern region includes a number of mature, smaller industrial cities, the largest of which are Fall River, New Bedford, and Brockton. These have traditionally been the major employers in the Bristol, Greater New Bedford, and Brockton WIBs, respectively. Other such cities include Attleboro and Taunton in the Bristol WIB. These communities have experienced steep declines in their traditional industrial bases, but some (notably Taunton) have rebounded as they have benefited from new waves of economic development. The region also has new growth centers such as Dartmouth in the greater New Bedford WIA, Barnstable in the Cape and Islands WIA, and many smaller suburban communities along major highway corridors. Both the South Coastal and Cape and Islands WIAs, with no dominant traditional employment centers, have been more dependent on these new growth centers for employment opportunities.

The region's economy and labor market have been strongly influenced by the construction of major highway corridors. Over the past 50 years, business and residential development have occurred along these corridors, dispersing employment outside older central cities. The I-495 and Route 24 corridors, both of which pass through or are adjacent to four of the five WIAs, exemplify this trend.

The region's economy and labor market are also strongly influenced by factors outside its boundaries, including one large and one mid-size metropolitan area overlapping its borders. The Boston labor market draws significant numbers of workers from the southeastern region, and part of the region, including much of the South Coastal WIA, is included in the federally-defined Boston Labor Market Area. Another part of the region, including Fall River and communities to its west, are included in the Providence-Fall River Labor Market Area.

Study Methodology

Three types of information were used in the preparation of this study:

- ***Economic and demographic data.*** Various data were analyzed to compare and contrast the characteristics of the five WIA economies and labor forces.¹ Data were analyzed at both the WIA level and the municipal level. Municipal data were presented in map format to facilitate the identification of spatial patterns and trends.
- ***Key informant interviews.*** A series of 38 interviews was conducted with various stakeholders in workforce development. The purpose of the interviews was to gain on-the-ground intelligence about what interviewees view as the critical workforce development challenges in their areas and to

¹ Data on the labor force characteristics were obtained primarily from the 2000 U.S. Census. Data on the employment status of the labor force were obtained from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS). Data on economic characteristics were obtained primarily from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics ES-202 series employment and wage data. ES-202 data were used because it is the only source of economic data at the municipal level. Data on the occupational structure of employment were obtained from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OES).

obtain their assessment of the importance and desired form of regional responses to these challenges.

- **Program models.** Various relevant programs models from around the U.S. were reviewed in preparing recommendations on an initial action agenda for SEWIB.

Organization of this Report

The report is divided into four sections:

1. ***Economic and Demographic Profile of Southeastern Massachusetts*** summarizes the findings from the analysis of labor force and economic data, with a focus on the similarities, differences, and spatial relationships among the five WIAs.
2. ***Issues and Opportunities for Regional Collaboration*** summarizes the findings from the key informant interviews.
3. ***An Initial Action Agenda for SEWIB*** presents three initiatives that emerged as immediate priorities for action through the study research and discussions with the SEWIB members.
4. ***Other Options for Regional Action*** presents other initiatives that did not emerge as immediate priorities, but may be considered by SEWIB at a later date or pursued if other actors in the region express strong interest.

Economic and Demographic Profile of Southeastern Massachusetts

This section of this report draws upon various data sources to analyze the economic and labor force characteristics of the southeastern region, looking at data on both the WIA and municipal levels. The purpose of the analysis is to:

- identify common or complementary employment and industry characteristics;
- identify common or complementary workforce characteristics;
- identify spatial relationships of industry and workforce across WIA boundaries that may facilitate joint activity.

The data, while mixed, generally suggest a number of similarities and complementarities among the WIAs that establish a basis for collaboration.

The Regional Economy: Structure and Trends

The data suggest broad similarities in the industry and occupational structure of employment of the five WIAs, indicating similarities across WIAs in the workforce development needs of employers. There are also some notable differences, however. Data on employment trends show that employment is continuing to disperse away from traditional employment centers and to cluster along highway corridors. This trend is likely to increase the proportion of workers who live in one WIA and work in another.

- ***The distinct employment patterns among the five southeastern WIAs have blurred as employment in the region has dispersed from mature urban centers to suburban communities.***

Employment in the southeastern region is concentrated in a few major employment centers in each WIA, including older industrial communities like Fall River, New Bedford, and Brockton, and emerging employment centers such as Plymouth and Barnstable. In recent years, there has been dispersion of employment away from the larger urban centers. Employment growth has occurred in suburban communities, while older urban centers have experienced decline.² Growth along major highway corridors, including I-495 and Route 3, has created new clusters of employment, some cutting across WIA boundaries. One of these is the I-495 corridor, which passes through an area where the boundaries of the four WIAs meet (referred to hereafter as the “four corners” area). Many of the communities along this corridor have experienced rapid growth. Another example is the dispersion of employment from Fall River and New Bedford to adjacent suburban communities, notably Dartmouth, which is situated between the two cities, creating a new employment cluster that links them more closely.

- ***The economies of all five WIAs are increasingly dominated by the service and trade sectors. Their industry structures are generally similar at the primary industry level, with the exception of manufacturing and financial services.***

The industrial structure of employment is generally similar at the primary industry level, with trade and services dominant in all regions. Each of these industries provides roughly one-quarter to one-third of employment in each WIA. Shares of construction, government, and transportation, communications, and utilities employment are also similar. The major differences are in manufacturing and financial services. Manufacturing continues to provide significant employment in the Bristol and New Bedford WIAs (24 and 18 percent, respectively), but very little in the Cape and Islands WIA (4 percent), with Brockton and South Coastal in between. Financial services provide 12 percent of employment in the South Coastal WIA but only 3 to 5 percent in all other WIAs.

Trends in the sectoral distribution of employment across WIAs have also been similar, with all WIAs experiencing rapid growth in service employment between 1989 and 2000. All WIAs also experienced growth in trade and government, and declines in manufacturing. All but one (Brockton) experienced growth in transportation, communications, and utilities. Trends in financial services and construction were less uniform.

² The analysis of employment growth used the period 1989-2000, the period between peak employment in the last two expansions. This period was used to factor out changes resulting from cyclical trends.

- ***Service and manufacturing industry employment remain concentrated in a small number of employment centers, although manufacturing employment is becoming more dispersed. Trade employment is more evenly distributed.***

Service employment is highly concentrated in a relatively small number of communities, with each WIA having its own major employment centers. There is some clustering of major employment centers across WIA boundaries. This includes: Fall River and New Bedford; Brockton and the upper South Coastal WIA communities of Quincy, Braintree, and Weymouth; and Plymouth, Falmouth, and Barnstable.

Manufacturing employment is even more heavily concentrated in a few traditional employment centers—Fall River, Attleboro, Taunton, Mansfield, Brockton, and New Bedford. Among these, the greatest cross-WIA geographic proximity is between Fall River and New Bedford. Manufacturing employment is becoming more dispersed, with almost all of the major employment centers experiencing declines between 1989 and 2000, while some communities along the I-495 corridor and other highway corridors experienced growth. Some of these growth corridors cut across WIA boundaries.

Trade employment is widely dispersed, a trend that has increased in recent years. Some major sources of trade employment, including Fall River, New Bedford, Brockton, Plymouth, and Quincy, experienced declines in the 1989-2000 period. Growth has been particularly pronounced along highway corridors, cutting across WIA boundaries. Cross-WIA employment clusters include Fall River/Dartmouth/New Bedford, Plymouth/Wareham/Bourne/ Falmouth, the I-495 corridor, and a cluster linking Brockton with upper South Coastal communities.

- ***There are strong commonalities across all five WIAs in the structure of the service and trade sectors at the 2-digit SIC level.***

In the trade sector, three industries—restaurants, food stores, and miscellaneous retail—were among the top five 2-digit industry segments in all five WIAs. These three industries were also among the five fastest growing trade sector segments in all WIAs.

Similarly, health services and educational services were the number one and two service industries in all five WIAs. (Health services was also the largest of all 2-digit industries in four of the five WIAs.) Social services was among the top five service industry segments in all five WIAs, and business services and engineering, accounting, research, and management services were among the top five in four WIAs. With respect to growth trends, business services, health services, social services, and educational services were among the top five growth segments in all five WIAs.

- ***There is more divergence across WIAs in the structure of the manufacturing sector, but there are some commonalities in the presence of certain technology manufacturing industries.***

Two manufacturing industries, instruments and electronic and electrical equipment, are among the top five manufacturing segments in four WIAs, and machinery and computer equipment is among the top five in three. Trends in 2-digit manufacturing growth, however, show no clear similarities among WIAs.

➤ ***The five WIAs are similar in occupational structure of employment.***

The occupational structure of employment is generally similar across WIAs with a few exceptions. The Cape and Islands WIA is an outlier in its very high proportion of jobs in service occupations, reflecting the importance of the hospitality industry, and its very low proportion of operator/fabricator/laborers jobs, reflecting the minor role of manufacturing. As a whole, there are considerable differences among WIAs in the proportion of jobs in the operator/fabricator/laborer category, reflecting the variations in manufacturing activity.

The Regional Labor Force

The data show that the region's labor force is becoming increasingly dispersed. Like the corresponding trend in employment, this is likely to increase the proportion of workers who live in one WIA and work in another. The data also suggest broad similarities in the occupational structure of the workforce of the five WIAs, indicating similarities across WIAs in the workforce development needs of workers. There are also some notable differences, however. Finally the pattern of clustering of special needs populations (e.g., individuals with education, language, and childcare barriers) at the municipal level suggests the potential for cross-WIA collaboration to coordinate services to these populations more effectively and cost-efficiently.

➤ ***Like employment, the region's labor force is concentrated in a few major population centers but is becoming more dispersed as the population suburbanizes.***

The region's labor force is concentrated in a few major populations centers in each WIA, including older as well as some emerging centers. However, recent labor force growth has been widely dispersed around the region, and is occurring almost everywhere except in the older population centers of Fall River, New Bedford, and Brockton, and some adjoining communities. A few Cape and Islands communities are also experiencing declines. Some of the labor force clusters cut across WIA boundaries. These include New Bedford/Dartmouth/Fall River and Brockton/upper South Coastal.

➤ ***Unemployment levels are similar across WIAs.***

The percentage of the workforce that is unemployed—out of work and actively looking—was similar across WIAs as of 2000. Unemployment rates, for the most part, converged during the 1990s. Only New Bedford had an unemployment rate exceeding 4 percent in 2000. New Bedford was also the only WIA with stagnant employment growth during the 1990s. At the municipal level, there is a large cluster of relatively high unemployment communities in the New Bedford/Fall River area, cutting across the Bristol and New Bedford WIA boundaries. The highest unemployment is found in outer Cape communities. Other communities with relatively high unemployment include Attleboro, Taunton, Brockton, and Barnstable.

- ***The occupational structure of the workforce is generally similar across WIAs, with relatively high proportions of workers in service, clerical, and sales occupations.***

Like the occupational structure of employment, the occupational structure of the labor force is generally similar across WIAs, indicating commonalities in training and skill levels. There are a few exceptions. These include:

- higher proportions of workers in production/transportation/material moving occupations in Bristol, related to the higher proportion of manufacturing jobs;
- a higher proportion of managers and professionals in the South Coastal region, probably reflecting the higher proportion of commuters to managerial and professional jobs in and around Boston; and
- a higher proportion of service workers on the Cape and Islands, reflecting the importance of the hospitality industry in that WIA.

- ***There are both similarities and differences between WIAs in the educational attainment of adult workers. All WIAs have similar and significant adult populations with intermediate educational attainment (obtained high school diploma but not higher education degree). They vary in the proportions of population with low educational attainment (no high school diploma).***

Educational level is highly correlated with job quality. The WIAs in the region are similar in the proportion of the adult population with a high school diploma, ranging from a low of 46 percent in New Bedford to a high of 53 percent in Brockton. They differ considerably more in the proportion with less than a high school degree (and, conversely, the proportion with a higher education degree). New Bedford and Bristol are highest (30 and 25 percent without a diploma, respectively), Cape and Islands and South Coastal are lowest (8 and 10 percent, respectively), and Brockton is in between (16 percent).

At the municipal level, the low educational attainment populations are most highly concentrated in older urban centers. Across WIAs, there is a very extensive cluster in Fall River, New Bedford, and adjoining communities. There are also clusters in the Brockton/upper South Coastal area and in the “four corners” area. Populations with intermediate educational attainment are broadly dispersed. The most significant cross-WIA concentrations are in the Brockton/upper South Coastal area and the lower South Coastal/eastern New Bedford/upper Cape area.

- ***Minority and immigrant populations with special workforce needs are not heavily represented in the region’s population and tend to settle in clusters of adjacent and nearby communities, some of which cut across WIA boundaries.***

WIAs in the region have relatively small concentrations of populations belonging to major racial and ethnic minority groups. All five WIAs have 5 percent or less Latino and Asian populations. Only the Brockton WIA has more than a 5 percent black population (11 percent).

At the municipal level, minority populations tend to be concentrated in a small number of communities and community clusters, some cutting across WIA boundaries.

For blacks, these cross-WIA clusters include Brockton/upper South Coastal, and New Bedford/Fall River. For Latinos, they include New Bedford/Fall River, Attleboro/Taunton/Bridgewater, and Bridgewater/Brockton/Randolph. For Asians, they include the Brockton/upper South Coastal area.

The region has a small proportion of new immigrants (4 percent or less who immigrated during the last decade), an indicator of potential linguistic, educational, and cultural workforce barriers. There are considerably more residents who report English language barriers (speak English less than very well) in some WIAs. This is highest in New Bedford, at 10 percent, followed by Bristol and Brockton at 7 percent each.

At the municipal level, there are a few scattered clusters of recent immigrants. The most significant are Brockton/upper South Coastal and New Bedford/Fall River, both cutting across WIA boundaries. Among residents with language barriers, the largest clusters are Fall River/New Bedford, Brockton/upper South Coastal, and Barnstable/the Islands, the first two cutting across WIA borders.

➤ ***Female-headed households with minor children are roughly evenly distributed across WIAs, with particularly high concentrations in a few communities.***

The proportion of female-headed households with minor children is an indicator of childcare and after school care needs since single-parent families are more likely to need these services. The proportion of female-headed households with minors does not vary greatly by WIA, ranging from 4.5 to 7.5 percent. Brockton and Bristol have the highest percentages. At the town level, these households are distributed widely throughout the region, although with certain concentrations. These include all the older urban centers, but also a number of suburban communities. Certain cross-WIA clusters emerge including New Bedford/Fall River, the “four corners” area, and the Brockton/upper South Coastal area.

➤ ***Low use of public transportation in all five WIAs may indicate mobility problems for workers who do not have their own vehicles. Usage is particularly low in areas without commuter rail.***

Public transportation use in the region is very low. It ranges from 1 to 6 percent by WIA. The Brockton and South Coastal WIAs, with the greatest access to commuter rail to Boston, have the highest use. At the municipal level, usage in most communities is 5 percent or less. All but one of the communities with more than 5 percent usage are in the Brockton and South Coastal WIAs. This indicates that workers are highly auto-dependent, and may indicate mobility problems for those without cars

➤ ***While all WIAs except the Cape and Islands have similar proportions of their populations in the 19 and under age group, communities north of I-495 tend to have the highest concentrations.***

The proportion of population 19 and under is an indicator of the concentration of “emerging” workers who will need youth employment services and services for entry-level adult workers. At the WIA level, the proportion of population in this age group is

similar for all WIAs except the Cape and Islands, which has a very high proportion of population in older age groups. At the municipal level, an interesting pattern emerges, with communities with higher concentrations of youth clustering primarily along or north of the I-495 corridor in the Brockton and South Coastal WIAs.

Indicators of Labor Force Mobility

While specific data on commuter flows between WIAs are not available, other data on regional commuting patterns suggest that significant numbers of workers commute to jobs across municipal and WIA borders. This is consistent with data documenting the increasing dispersion of jobs and workers. While cross-WIA commuter flows do not appear to be in any particular direction, some patterns do emerge at the municipal level, with inflows occurring both in traditional employment centers and along highway corridors.

- ***Regional commuting patterns indicate high levels of labor force mobility. It is likely that there is a significant level of cross-border commuting between the five WIAs.***

Data on commuter flows between municipalities were not available when this study was conducted so it was not possible to calculate the proportion of workers living in one WIA and working in another. Data on the level of inter-municipal and inter-county commuting and mean commuting travel times were reviewed to provide indicators of general residence-to-work mobility.

Except for a few towns in the Cape and Islands WIA, at least half of residents of all the region's communities work in another community. In most communities, the ratio is 70 percent or more. Even in larger employment centers, including, Fall River, New Bedford, Taunton, Brockton, and Plymouth, it is in the 50 to 70 percent range. At least one-third and sometimes more than half of residents in many communities commute outside their county of residence, especially those living in the northern and western parts of the region. The rates are lower in the Fall River/New Bedford Area, Plymouth, and the Cape and Islands. While some of this commuting is to towns and counties outside the southeastern region, and some between towns and parts of counties within a single WIA, the high level of overall commuting indicates the likelihood that many commuters cross WIA boundaries.

Mean travel times also indicate considerable movement. They are highest in the South Coastal WIA and the Brockton WIAs, with mean travel times of 34 and 30 minutes, respectively. These higher travel times may be more associated with commuting into Boston than other southeastern WIAs. At the municipal level, the highest mean travel times are in South Coastal communities along the Route 3 corridor, typically associated with commutes into Boston. The South Coastal and Brockton WIAs also have the most access to commuter rail and the highest public transportation use, also associated with commuting to Boston. Workers in the Bristol and New Bedford WIAs have somewhat lower mean travel times, 27 minutes. The Cape and Islands has the lowest, at 20 minutes.

- *There is at least a rough balance between jobs and workers in all of the WIAs, suggesting that, at the WIA level, there is generally not a strong push-pull dynamic drawing labor from labor surplus to labor shortage areas. There is more evidence of this at the municipal level.*

All WIAs except the Cape and Islands had a rough balance of jobs and employed residents in 2000. The South Coastal WIA was a modest exporter of workers, while Bristol, New Bedford, and Brockton were modest importers. The Cape and Islands WIA is a strong net importer of workers, with about six jobs for every five workers. While the job surplus on the Cape might exert a labor pull from the other WIAs, many of the surplus jobs are likely low-paying and seasonal tourism jobs.

Municipal-level data suggest where inflows and outflows of commuters are likely to be strongest. Communities along several highway corridors and upper- and mid-Cape communities were net importers of workers, but so were some of the older urban centers. The largest net exporter of workers was Plymouth, which also experienced a decline in the ratio during 1989–2000. This indicates that population is increasing faster than jobs in this rapidly growing community. Other net exporters tended to be smaller suburban communities, particularly in the South Coastal and New Bedford WIAs, but also some communities on the lower Cape and outer Cape, the latter of which also experienced declines in jobs relative to workers during 1989–2000.

Issues and Opportunities for Regional Collaboration

These findings are based primarily on a series of 38 “key informant” interviews with a number of stakeholders in workforce development. The interviews were intended to gain on-the-ground intelligence about what these stakeholders view as the critical workforce development challenges in their areas and to obtain their assessment of the importance and desired form of regional responses to these challenges. Interviewees included WIB chairs and chief elected officials, higher education institutions, other training providers, chambers of commerce, economic development agencies, regional planning commissions, social service agencies, and labor organizations. In general, the interviews indicated a growing recognition of the economic and workforce linkages among the WIAs and identified a number of workforce development issues that could be addressed through regional collaboration.

- *While Southeastern Massachusetts is not widely viewed as a coherent region, there is growing acceptance of the concept of regionalism.*

There is increased acceptance of the need for regional collaboration, but regions are generally defined at a lower geographic level than the entire Southeastern region. The most concrete recent effort around regional collaboration covering essentially the entire SEWIB region involves the region’s six higher education institutions, which have formed a group called Connect that seeks to work collaboratively on common issues and to better integrate higher education. Another region-wide effort involving higher education is Bridgewater State’s establishment of a regional economic development

council. Current and planned transportation infrastructure investments promise to further knit the region together.

➤ ***The sense that the region is at an economic turning point creates an opportunity for new initiatives linking workforce development and economic development.***

There is a widespread sense that the region is at an economic crossroads as it experiences substantial population growth and changes in its economic and demographic structure. In the context of these changes, there is a growing understanding of the critical importance of raising workforce skill levels. This has led to heightened attention to public education and the workforce development system. With this increased attention comes an opportunity for high profile initiatives and collaboration between workforce development and economic development actors.

➤ ***The business and economic development communities recognize workforce development as a critical issue.***

In spite of the economic downturn, employer and economic development organizations are still placing a very high priority on improving the region's educational and workforce development systems. Chambers of commerce and economic development organization uniformly consider workforce quality among the highest priority economic development issues for the region. This provides an opening for more intensive WIB engagement with the business and economic development communities.

➤ ***There are concerns that the general public is not fully aware of or prepared to meet emerging workforce challenges.***

Although public officials and economic development and workforce development professionals we talked to are very concerned about workforce issues, they also fear that there is not enough general public awareness or support for workforce development. These concerns relate to broader "big picture" workforce development issues such as maintaining the quality of public education, preparing young people for the changing job market, and retaining talent within the region.

➤ ***Basic skill deficiencies among entry-level workers are a high immediate concern in the business community throughout the region.***

Entry-level workers are seen as often lacking basic literacy in reading, writing, and math. There is also a concern about lack of skills in information technology, a growing need among a wide range of employers. A second major concern is about poor job readiness and workplace skills

➤ ***Some industries of common interest emerged from the interviews.***

- The healthcare industry was most frequently mentioned as having region-wide import. A need was seen for more scale and integration of workforce development activities and more employer engagement.
- Manufacturing and distribution were considered important focal points for workforce development except on the Cape and Islands. Needs were seen as

centering more on increasing quality and productivity than on unique training needs within particular industry segments.

- Tourism and hospitality were mentioned most frequently with respect to the Cape and South Coastal WIAs, but were considered of growing importance in other parts of the region.
- Marine technology was seen as an emerging sector with considerable regional growth potential.

➤ ***Knowledge of how the workforce development system works and what resources are available is very limited, even among important constituencies.***

There was a general lack of understanding of the workforce development system in the business and economic development communities. Economic development professionals and training providers noted that it is difficult for employers and jobseekers to access information about job training and other workforce development resources. Consolidating all this information in one place and making it user-friendly would be an important service.

➤ ***There is recognition of a disconnect between workforce development and economic development activities.***

Economic development agencies recognize that connections should be strengthened through more intensive interaction and integration of activities. Regional chambers are particularly interested in becoming more engaged in workforce development so they can help their members make connections and get the services they need. Using chambers more effectively as intermediaries to the business community may offer an untapped potential for WIBs.

➤ ***A number of gaps in workforce development programs and activities were identified.***

Among those most widely noted throughout the region:

- lack of good information on regional labor market trends;
- severe shortages of ABE and ESOL training;
- no employer-based entry-level training programs;
- services poorly designed to meet the needs of small employers;
- problems with the state Workforce Training Fund; and
- lack of resources to support longer-term career advancement.

➤ ***The system is seen as too fragmented, both functionally and geographically.***

There was a strong sense that workforce development resources in the region should be better integrated and coordinated. The system remains fragmented on a number of levels. These include

- lack of overarching strategic focus for workforce development;
- poor connectivity between components of the K-16 system;

- insufficient integration of training and support services;
- fragmentation and inefficiency in service delivery; and
- excessive competition for training dollars.

➤ ***There is widespread concern about inadequate and dwindling workforce development resources.***

The concerns included declining funding for school to career programs, underfunding of ABE and ESOL programs, and higher education cutbacks. There was a sense that more collaboration and less competition across the region could make the region more competitive for workforce development funding. There also was a sense that more resources should be leveraged from employers. A need to identify and tap into non-traditional funding sources was also seen.

➤ ***Lack of transit options is seen as a barrier to work.***

A number of interviewees identified transportation to work as a problem. There was a sense that new regional transit investments, e.g., new commuter rail, are long-term at best and that smaller-scale, more flexible transit options are needed. These solutions will likely require employer involvement. Regional planning agencies and transit authorities need to work with WIBs and others to ensure that barrier to work issues are given sufficient attention.

➤ ***There is a keen interest in more opportunities for learning and information exchange.***

There is a lot going on in workforce development across the region. However, there are not a lot of venues where practitioners and other stakeholders can exchange information, learn about innovative models, discuss ways to work together better, etc. Many of those interviewed thought there should be more opportunities for stakeholders to come together, learn, and network.

An Initial Action Agenda for SEWIB

Based on the findings from the data and interviews and subsequent priority-setting discussions among the SEWIB members, the following initiatives have been developed for initial action by SEWIB.

Build on Current Regional Workforce Development Initiatives in the Healthcare Sector

The findings in this study, along with other research, indicate a strong rationale for region-wide initiatives in the healthcare field. These include:

- the regional character of the healthcare labor market;
- the large number of jobs in diverse occupations with potential for career advancement;

- strong current and projected demand for workers in certain healthcare occupations; and
- the regional scope of leading educational institutions in the healthcare field.

Among the issues that surfaced in the course of the research that could be addressed through a regional initiative include the following:

- lack of solid data on occupational demand at the regional level;
- shortages in nursing and other critical occupations;
- the need to build on current initiatives to develop career ladders;
- inadequate capacity in nursing and other educational programs—teachers, facilities, and clinical sites;
- difficulties with articulation agreements/transfers among educational institutions;
- the need for new training delivery methods (e.g., distance learning); and
- the need to broaden training initiatives to involve more small employers.

Efforts are already being undertaken to address healthcare workforce issues on a regional basis. Most prominent among these is the Southeastern Massachusetts Nursing Career Ladder Initiative (NuCLI). Part of a recently launched statewide initiative, NuCLI seeks to increase the number of skilled nurses in the region through recruitment, education, and retention efforts. It is overseen by a 50-member regional advisory committee that includes all five WIB directors, leading employers, industry associations, educational institutions, and other training providers.

A comprehensive regional initiative would be designed to build on these existing activities, increase their scope and scale, utilize existing resources more effectively and efficiently, tap additional resources, and more fully engage employers. It would likely include the following components:

- ***improve recruitment of healthcare workers*** (outreach, career information, pre-employment training, support services);
- ***increase educational capacity*** (facilities, faculty, clinical programs);
- ***facilitate career development efforts*** (incumbent worker training, established career pathways);
- ***enhance retention and work environment*** (professional development, internal human resource practices); and
- ***advocate for more supportive public policies*** (funding, programmatic reforms).

SEWIB could start this process by initiating discussions with the NuCLI advisory committee about how to sustain and broaden NuCLI beyond the current round of grant funding. SEWIB could prepare a concept paper for presentation to the advisory committee that would describe a broader regional effort, why it is important, what the key regional issues are, models from elsewhere, and how it proposes to proceed. If there is

sufficient initial interest among committee members, a working group could be established to develop a long-term plan for sustaining and broadening the NuCLI initiative.

Establish Partnerships with Regional Higher Education Institutions

The region's higher education institutions, particularly its six public higher education institutions, form the backbone of the region's workforce training infrastructure. Recently, there has been increased recognition within state government and among the institutions themselves of the importance of more effectively coordinating their workforce training efforts and, more generally, supporting regional workforce and economic development. One high-level effort to act on this recognition is the establishment of "Connect," an organization of the presidents of the region's six higher education institutions that seeks to work collaboratively on common issues and to better integrate higher education services.

The establishment of Connect creates an opening for region's WIBs to develop stronger working relationship with the region's higher education institutions. SEWIB should meet with Connect to begin a dialogue about regional workforce issues and identify how the WIBs and higher education institutions can collaborate to improve the capacity of the training infrastructure. One potential short-term initiative would be to jointly sponsor a regional conference on workforce development that would present the findings and data from this study and other topics of regional interest. The conference could emphasize the common challenges facing the region and the benefits of regional partnerships.

In the longer-term, more concrete initiatives could stem from this relationship. Two initiatives suggested by our research may be particularly suitable for a WIB-higher education partnership.

Human Capital Awareness Campaign

The conference highlighting regional workforce development issues could serve as a kick-off to a broader human capital awareness campaign. Interviews with members of the workforce development, economic development, and business communities indicated a concern that policymakers, residents, and businesses do not fully understand the important role workforce skills will play in the region's future. One way to address this concern is through a broad campaign to raise awareness of human capital issues among key constituencies and the broader public. This could be modeled after a successful effort in the Pittsburgh region, the Human Capital Policy Initiative (HCPI). Sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh's Institute of Politics (IOP), it mobilizes speakers to make presentations about the importance of human capital to a broad range of community leaders throughout the nine-county southwestern Pennsylvania region.

The specific goals of this initiative would be to:

- inform the political, governmental, private, and educational leadership of southeastern Massachusetts about the critical importance of investing in human capital;

- provide a forum where policymakers from various sectors can engage in informed, open discussions on this matter;
- encourage substantive linkages among elected officials and Workforce Investment Boards to nurture a regional perspective on human capital development;
- develop a regional infrastructure of public/private sector leadership on human capital investment; and
- act as a catalyst for a community conversation on the importance of human capital in regional economic development.

The major activity of the effort would be to make presentations throughout the region that engage local residents, businesses, and organizations in a dialogue around a set of human capital issues.

SEWIB could work in partnership with Connect to develop and manage the effort, including organizing the partners and putting together the presentations.

Regional Workforce Development Resources Information

One of the more important infrastructure needs for an effective workforce development system is the availability of quality information that is readily available to all participants in the labor market, including employers, workers, and policymakers. SEWIB could work in partnership with the region’s higher education institutions to develop a regional workforce web portal—a single information source on regional labor force demand and workforce development resources that is useful to key user groups, including economic development professionals, education administrators, workforce development planners, career counselors, and individual jobseekers and employers. The Website could have several components: a labor market information tool; a career information tool; an education and training resource tool; a labor market exchange for jobseekers and employers; and linkages to all other relevant regional and state websites.

As a first step, the sponsors (SEWIB and Connect) could convene a working group made up of key stakeholders. The group would focus on identifying information gaps, audiences, and partners, and suggest design and management options.

Organize Regional Learning and Networking Activities

Our interviews indicated a strong interest in opportunities for greater interchange among workforce development practitioners and among different stakeholders in the workforce development system. This includes information sharing, networking and relationship building, learning about innovations in the field, and brainstorming and problem solving around common issues. Additional contacts could also help identify and build ground-level support for additional region-wide initiatives and reinforce and strengthen the identity of southeastern Massachusetts as a coherent region.

SEWIB could take the lead in organizing an initiative to provide learning and networking opportunities for workforce development organizations and other stakeholders in the workforce development system. While the particular topics and

delivery methods for these activities should emerge from consultations with target audiences, the initiative should have three basic components:

1. practitioner exchanges among workforce development organizations and professionals;
2. interactions between workforce development and related policy areas, including economic development, K-12 education, transportation, and human services;
3. interactions between workforce development and its customers—businesses and workers—both directly and through intermediary organizations (chambers, unions, CBOs, etc.).

There is a particular interest in promoting more linkages between workforce development and economic development activities. Practitioners in these two fields need to better understand each other's roles and develop ways to better coordinate their activities. Means to do this could include periodic information exchanges, cross-training programs, and development of mechanisms for ongoing collaboration.

SEWIB could take the lead in soliciting input on topics and format from various constituency groups and in planning, sponsoring, facilitating, and/or providing logistics for the various activities. Or, it could play a less active role, for instance, developing ideas and seeking to interest other entities in taking the lead role.

Other Options for Regional Action

A number of other issues emerged from the study that could benefit from region-wide action.

Restructuring and Expansion of Adult Basic Education

A number of factors have converged to make this a timely moment to address adult basic education, including heightened concern among employers about poor basic literacy and workplace skills, oversubscription and long waiting lists for many existing ABE and ESOL programs, and the likelihood of state-level restructuring of these programs. SEWIB could take a leadership role in tackling adult basic education issues more systematically on a regional basis. It could convene key stakeholders, oversee a planning process, and promote the development of a strategic framework for funding and delivering services.

Joint Training for Smaller Employers

One of the most commonly mentioned workforce training issues emerging from our interviews involved the problems smaller companies faced in securing training services appropriate to their needs. There are at least two ways to address these needs. One is to help small employers in close proximity with like training needs to develop training consortia, in partnership with existing business and economic development organizations. Two examples are the successful BEST Southeastern Massachusetts

Manufacturing Consortium and hospitality training initiatives sponsored by the Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce. A second and more ambitious way is to develop joint training facilities in convenient locations, such as the current effort to develop a facility at the Dever Development Center adjacent to the Taunton Industrial Park. SEWIB could build on these models to develop new initiatives to more effectively serve smaller employers.

Emerging Sector Workforce Initiative—Marine Technology

One industry cluster that is widely seen as offering potential for future growth and economic restructuring in the region is marine-related industries. This creates an opportunity for the workforce development and economic development communities to work in tandem to plan for emerging industry needs. SEWIB could work with economic development actors to identify emerging industries in this cluster, identify their labor force and training needs, and develop new initiatives to address these needs as they grow. This could start with career awareness programs in the public schools and involve skills at all levels from production and service to technical and scientific. This effort could provide a model for collaboration between economic development and workforce development in other emerging clusters.

Capacity-Building for Community-based Organizations

Community-based and faith-based organizations have been getting more involved in workforce development, but often have limited resources and capacity. With increasing attention being paid to how to help workers advance from low-paying entry-level jobs, there is an opportunity for CBOs to play a stronger role in career development. SEWIB could develop an initiative to support CBOs in providing services including initial job placement, intensive case management, retention assistance, career planning, and/or career advancement support. While CBOs often serve small geographic areas, there may be a number of benefits to a regional approach, including joint research and development of program models, gaining regional philanthropic funding, joint staff training and professional development, and establishing linkages with regional higher education institutions and other regional actors.

Public Transportation Initiatives

The dispersal of employment outside the central cities has made the use of transit to get to work much more difficult. Fixed route services generally are not structured to bring people to work where employment is highly dispersed. The greatest immediate opportunity to address workforce transit issues likely involves the development of unconventional transit models outside of the traditional fixed route systems, such as ride sharing, van pooling, and on-demand transit services. SEWIB could undertake an initiative to research and advocate for such services, working in conjunction with regional planning agencies, transit agencies, and employer organizations. Other transportation issues that SEWIB could address include the development of more cross-jurisdictional agreements among transit agencies where warranted by commuting patterns and improvement of transit services to workforce training sites.

Regional Workforce Development Foundation

To conduct any new initiatives of significant scale, SEWIB will have to consider new funding strategies. It is particularly important to find ways to increase the involvement of the employer community. A regional fundraising initiative could enable SEWIB to expand the overall level of workforce development resources available to the region by tapping additional funding from the private sector, regional and national philanthropic funders, and federal or state agencies. SEWIB should consider establishing a regional education and workforce development foundation or, as an alternative, work with the region's existing community foundations to develop funding initiatives targeted to workforce development.