

BERGEN COUNTY LOCAL WORKFORCE PLAN FOR THE WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT

Program Years: 2022-2026 (July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2027) Updated
2025

Bergen County
Workforce
Development
Board

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INTRODUCTION

About This Plan

This document presents Bergen County's 2025 update to our 2022-2027 Local Workforce Development Plan, prepared under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). It provides a comprehensive analysis of our local labor market, establishes strategic priorities to guide workforce investments through 2027, and defines governance structures that ensure accountability for public resources.

But this plan tells a more urgent story: Bergen County stands at a turning point where economic strength lives alongside widespread insecurity, where technological change accelerates faster than we can adapt, and where opportunity remains frustratingly uneven. How we respond will determine whether our workforce system keeps things as they are or becomes a genuine force for broadly shared prosperity.

Our Mission, Vision, and Values

Our Vision: We envision a workforce system that enhances the quality of Bergen County's workforce and promotes a healthy economy, developing quality workers for employers and quality work opportunities for employees.

Our Mission: As the strategic leader of Bergen County's workforce development system, we bring together partners, analyze labor market data, and guide investments that connect businesses with talent and residents with careers offering economic security and real opportunities for advancement.

Our Core Values:

- **Business-Led:** Ensuring our system responds to employer needs and economic realities
- **Collaboration:** Fostering partnerships across business, education, labor, and community organizations
- **Data-Driven:** Using evidence to guide strategic investments and measure results
- **Equity:** Eliminating barriers and ensuring genuine opportunity for all residents

- **Innovation:** Piloting creative solutions to evolving workforce challenges
- **Accountability:** Providing transparent oversight of public resources and system performance

Why This Update Matters

Since adopting the 2022-2027 plan, Bergen County's economic landscape has shifted in ways demanding strategic recalibration. Between 2022 and 2023 alone, an additional 11,707 families slipped into the ALICE category (working but unable to afford basic necessities), bringing the total to over 127,000 households. Artificial intelligence and automation technologies emerged from speculative possibility to immediate workforce reality, placing more than 150,000 Bergen County workers in occupations facing significant transformation risk.

This update responds to these evolving conditions with sharpened priorities, enhanced governance capacity, and explicit acknowledgment of the technological and economic forces reshaping career sustainability through the plan's remaining implementation period ending in 2027.

The Challenge: Economic Security in an Affluent County

Bergen County presents a paradox. With the state's highest median household income (\$107,310), we also have over 127,000 households (more than one-third of families) who cannot afford housing, childcare, food, healthcare, transportation, and technology that constitute basic survival despite working. Median earnings for Hispanic/Latino workers (\$44,030) represent just 54% of white workers' earnings (\$82,000). Roughly 150,000 residents work in occupations with high automation-displacement risk, while emerging careers demand credentials and skills that many lack the means to develop.

The data compels action. Our workforce system must move beyond job placement to career sustainability, beyond access to equity, beyond isolated programs to integrated pathways offering genuine economic security.

Six Strategic Priorities, One Unified Approach

Bergen County's workforce strategy for 2025-2027 organizes around six interconnected priorities addressing the challenges our analysis reveals:

Strengthening Partnership Infrastructure creates the collaborative capacity transformation that requires establishing the Business/Employer Advisory Council, enhancing governance structures, and formalizing coordination that turns fragmented programs into integrated systems.

Establishing Bergen as a Regional Workforce Intelligence Hub builds analytical infrastructure that enables evidence-based decisions, creates shared data capacity, produces actionable intelligence, and ensures partners have access to information when needed.

Closing the Living Wage Gap directs training investments toward occupations offering genuine economic security, prioritizing family-sustaining wages, clear advancement pathways, and sustainable career trajectories.

Building Automation-Resilient Career Pathways integrates technological transformation into career guidance, assesses displacement risk, emphasizes human-centered skills, and prepares residents for careers that remain viable as AI and automation reshape the economy.

Unleashing Potential Through Equitable Access addresses systemic barriers to opportunity, eliminates discrimination, provides comprehensive supportive services, and ensures the workforce system genuinely serves everyone, especially those facing the highest barriers.

Scaling Work-Based Learning Models expands learning that happens in actual workplaces, growing apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and paid experiences that build skills, paychecks, and professional networks simultaneously.

These priorities represent facets of a unified strategy recognizing that sustainable workforce development requires strong partnerships, reliable intelligence, a living wage

focus, technological adaptation, barrier elimination, and employer engagement working together.

How This Plan Was Developed

This update reflects extensive collaboration and rigorous analysis:

Data Analysis: The Bergen County Workforce Development Board analyzed over 70 distinct datasets spanning employment trends, wage patterns, educational attainment, demographic shifts, and automation risk assessment. This evidence examines Bergen County's workforce through multiple lenses: industry concentration, occupational distribution, skill requirements, credential pathways, and equity indicators disaggregated by race, ethnicity, age, disability status, and geography.

Stakeholder Engagement: The Board convened employers, education providers, community-based organizations, labor representatives, and economic development partners through committee meetings, strategic planning sessions, and targeted consultations. Input from these stakeholders shaped priority identification, strategy development, and implementation approaches.

Enhanced Service Delivery: In 2024-2025, the Board awarded new contracts to strengthen service delivery capacity. Equus Workforce Solutions now provides WIOA Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker services. Greater Bergen Community Action leads youth programming. This vendor transition brings fresh expertise and expanded capacity to serve job seekers and employers.

Regional Alignment: As part of the designated North Jersey region (Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Hunterdon, Morris, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex, Union, and Warren counties), this plan aligns with regional priorities while addressing Bergen County's unique characteristics and challenges.

State Coordination: The plan supports New Jersey's Combined State WIOA Plan priorities, incorporating guidance from the State Employment and Training Commission (SETC) while tailoring strategies to local conditions.

Your Voice Matters: Public Comment Period

Federal law requires this plan to undergo public review, including a 30-day comment period during which anyone can examine proposed strategies, question assumptions, suggest alternatives, and hold the workforce system accountable.

This transparency is not just a legal formality. It is essential to create a workforce system that actually works.

Employers understand whether our training investments match your real hiring needs and emerging skill requirements.

Job seekers know whether proposed pathways reflect the barriers you face and opportunities you need.

Training providers can assess whether our strategies align with how education and skill development actually happen.

Community organizations recognize whether our approaches address the real challenges your clients experience daily.

Economic development partners see whether workforce strategies support your efforts to attract and grow businesses.

Your expertise makes this plan better. Your perspective reveals gaps we might have missed. Your input ensures public dollars get invested wisely.

We need your voice in this process.

Public Comment Period: November 3 - December 2, 2025

Submit feedback to: [insert contact information]

Access the full plan at: bergenjobcenter.com

What Follows

This plan is organized to walk you through the complete picture of Bergen County's workforce development strategy:

Labor Market Analysis presents the evidence documenting workforce challenges, opportunities, and trends shaping our strategic priorities (the data story behind our decisions).

Local Workforce Strategies details the six strategic priorities, explaining what each aims to achieve, why it matters, and how implementation will unfold through 2027.

One-Stop Career Center Operations describes the integrated service delivery connecting job seekers, employers, and training providers across Bergen County's 70 municipalities.

The Local Workforce Development Board Structure and Functions defines governance mechanisms that ensure strategic oversight, partner accountability, and the transparent use of public resources.

The workforce we're building doesn't happen by accident. It requires clear thinking about where we're headed, honest talk about the barriers we face, and sustained partnership among everyone who cares about Bergen County's economic future.

This plan is your invitation to that work. We hope you'll join us.

The Bergen County Workforce Development Board is a business-led policy and oversight body established under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to guide strategic investments in workforce development programs serving job seekers, workers, and employers throughout Bergen County, New Jersey.

1.0 Environmental Scan and Labor Market Analysis (2025-2027 Update)

Executive Summary: The Bergen County Paradox

This analysis reveals a defining paradox at the heart of Bergen County's workforce and economy. We have a robust economic engine, a growing population, and a highly educated talent pool. Yet significant structural challenges threaten the long-term economic mobility of our residents and the competitiveness of our businesses. This plan addresses three core findings:

- **Our strengths mask a structural mismatch.** Bergen County's headline numbers look strong—low unemployment, high incomes, and stable economic output. Yet total jobs have not fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels and lag behind U.S. job growth. We face a persistent mismatch between what our residents studied and what jobs are available, leading to underemployment.
 - **We have two parallel economies.** Our labor market is increasingly split. One economy is high-skill, high-wage professional jobs. The other is large, essential, but lower-wage service jobs. This split creates a surplus of residents with bachelor's and graduate degrees who can't find appropriate work, while simultaneously creating a shortage of good jobs for residents with a high school diploma or less.
 - **The living wage gap is the critical consequence.** Many of our county's largest and fastest-growing occupations pay wages that fall far short of what families need to be self-sufficient in our high-cost region. Bridging this gap—by establishing clear pathways from low-wage jobs to high-demand, family-supporting careers—is the main strategic goal of this workforce plan.
-

1.1 The Foundation: A Region of Strength and Opportunity

Bergen County enters this planning period from a position of strength. We have two core assets: a highly skilled population and a resilient, high-output economy. These foundations give us the platform we need to address structural workforce challenges and strengthen our position as a regional hub for talent and business.

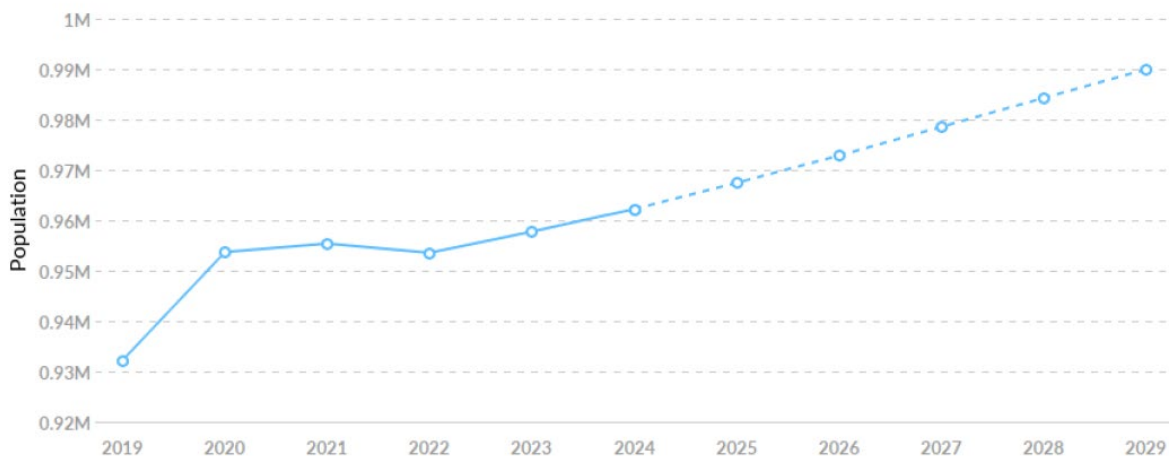
1.1.1 Core Asset 1: A Dynamic and Highly Skilled Population

Our population is growing, diverse, and exceptionally well-educated. This human capital is our most significant competitive advantage.

Consistent, Reliable Growth

Bergen County's population has grown steadily, reaching a projected 967,469 residents in 2025. Since 2019, we've added over 35,000 people. Growth continued even through the pandemic. Projections show this trajectory will continue, with our population expected to approach one million by 2029. This steady growth provides a reliable and expanding talent base for local employers.

[Source: Lightcast Eco Overview]



A Diverse and Experienced Population

Our growing population is exceptionally diverse. Nearly half of all residents (460,757 people, or 48%) identify as racially diverse—far exceeding the national average for a

county our size. This rich diversity is a significant economic asset. It brings a wide range of skills, languages, and cultural perspectives essential for competing in a global economy.

[Source: Lightcast Population Characteristics Data]

At the same time, a large segment of our population (313,550 residents aged 55 or older) represents both a wealth of institutional knowledge and a coming wave of retirements. This reality underscores the need for strategic succession planning and programs that leverage the value of experienced workers. *[Source: Lightcast Population Characteristics Data]*

A Deep Pool of Educated Talent

Bergen County's population is among the most highly educated in the nation. Approximately 53% of residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher. This deep talent pool fuels high-skill, knowledge-based industries and attracts high-value employers.

[Source: Lightcast Educational Attainment Data]

1.1.2 Core Asset 2: A Resilient, High-Output Economic Engine

Bergen County's economy is robust and productive, generating significant wealth. With an economic output of \$98.15 billion and a median household income of \$123,700—approximately \$46,000 above the national median of \$77,719—our economy creates substantial opportunity. Bergen County's share of state economic activity has remained stable, with only minor fluctuations of less than 1% in most metrics since 2022.

[Source: Lightcast Q3 2025 Economy Overview; U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2019-2023]

	Population (2025)	Labor Force (May 2025)	Jobs (2024)	Cost of Living	GRP	Imports	Exports
Region	967,469	536,277	490,304	133.6	\$98.15B	\$84.42B	\$60.99B
State	9,431,076	4,850,968	4,707,613	121.5	\$858.54B	\$682.64B	\$690.36B

(Bergen County Region / State of New Jersey)

However, this overall prosperity masks significant economic disparities. While the median income suggests widespread affluence, approximately one-third of households earn less than \$41,000 annually. Nearly a quarter (23%) earn under \$50,000—income levels insufficient to meet Bergen County's high cost of living, which is 33.6% above the national average.

This disparity creates a fundamental challenge for workforce development. The county has substantial economic resources, but they are not reaching a significant share of working residents. The strategic question is not whether Bergen County can support family-sustaining employment—it clearly can. The question is how to ensure that economic growth translates into broadly shared prosperity and accessible pathways to self-sufficiency.

[Source: Census ACS 2021; Lightcast Q3 2025 Economy Overview]

A Labor Market in Transition: Recovery with Emerging Headwinds

Our labor market has made substantial progress recovering from the pandemic, though the trajectory reveals a more complex story than headline numbers suggest. The unemployment rate dropped dramatically from its 9.24% peak in 2020 to a low of 3.36% in 2022. However, recent data shows a modest uptick to 3.86% as of May 2025. At the same time, the labor force participation rate (the share of working-age adults who are either employed or actively looking for work) declined from its 2024 peak of 69.12% to 67.99% in May 2025.

[Source: Lightcast Q3 2025 Unemployment Rate Trends; Lightcast Q3 2025 LFPR Trends]

More significantly, total employment remains below pre-pandemic levels. Bergen County lost 4,554 jobs between 2019 and 2024 (a 0.9% decline), with only modest growth of 2,647 jobs projected through 2029. While these recent shifts may represent normal labor market fluctuations, they warrant close monitoring given the county's incomplete employment recovery and the structural changes documented later in this analysis—particularly automation-driven displacement affecting over 150,000 workers in high-risk occupations.

[Source: Lightcast Q3 2025 Economy Overview]

These trends could reflect multiple factors: baby boomer retirements accelerating workforce exits, automation beginning to displace workers in administrative and transportation roles, individuals withdrawing from the labor force due to insufficient living-wage opportunities, or broader economic headwinds. Understanding these drivers is critical to ensuring our workforce system responds appropriately to both short-term fluctuations and long-term structural transformation.

[Source: NJDOL Historical Data, Lightcast Q3 2025 LFPR Trends, Lightcast Q3 2025 Unemployment Rate Trends, Lightcast Q3 2025 Economy Overview]

May 2025 Labor Force Breakdown



How Our Population Is Changing

Bergen County's population has remained relatively stable over the past decade, growing modestly from 905,116 in 2010 to 955,732 in 2023—a 5.6% increase. While we're growing, the pace is slower than both New Jersey (6.0%) and the nation (7.4%) overall.

This stability masks an important shift: our population is aging. The median age in Bergen County rose from 40.8 years in 2010 to 42.8 years in 2023. We're getting older faster than both the state (median age 40.4) and the country (median age 38.9).

What this means for workforce development:

- More workers will retire in the coming years, creating job openings
- We need to attract and retain younger workers to fill these positions
- Older workers may need retraining for career transitions
- Age-friendly workplace practices become more important

The Aging Workforce Challenge

The numbers tell a clear story. In 2010, only 13.4% of Bergen County residents were 65 or older. By 2023, that figure jumped to 17.8%—nearly one in five residents. Meanwhile, the share of residents under 18 dropped from 22.8% to 20.5%.

Looking at the working-age population (ages 18-64), we see similar trends. The percentage of residents in their prime working years decreased from 63.8% in 2010 to 61.7% in 2023. Within this group, younger workers (18-34) now make up just 24.0% of the population, down from 25.3% in 2010.

The workforce implications are significant:

- A shrinking pool of younger workers entering the job market
- Increased competition among employers for talent
- Greater need for programs that help mid-career workers adapt to changing job requirements

- Opportunities to tap into underutilized talent pools, including older workers who want to stay employed

Educational Strengths

Bergen County residents are highly educated—a major asset for employers seeking skilled workers. As of 2023, 92.3% of adults 25 and older have at least a high school diploma, compared to 91.2% statewide and 88.5% nationally.

Our college education rates are even more impressive:

- 49.7% hold a bachelor's degree or higher (compared to 42.2% in NJ and 33.7% nationally)
- 19.6% have graduate or professional degrees (compared to 16.7% in NJ and 13.5% nationally)

This educated workforce attracts knowledge-based industries and professional services firms. However, it also creates challenges. Not all jobs require a four-year degree, yet many residents and their families view college as the only path to success. This perception can lead to:

- Shortages in skilled trades and technical positions
- Student debt burdens that limit career flexibility
- Overlooked career pathways in manufacturing, healthcare support roles, and other middle-skill occupations

Our strategy must address both realities: leveraging our educated workforce while also promoting alternative career pathways that lead to good jobs without requiring a bachelor's degree.

Racial and Ethnic Diversity

Bergen County is becoming more diverse, though the pace of change is gradual. As of 2023:

- 59.5% of residents identify as White (non-Hispanic), down from 65.7% in 2010
- 20.7% identify as Asian, up from 17.1% in 2010

- 11.3% identify as Hispanic or Latino, up from 10.9% in 2010
- 5.2% identify as Black or African American, relatively stable from 5.1% in 2010
- 3.3% identify as two or more races or other races

This growing diversity enriches our communities and workforce. It also means we must ensure equitable access to workforce services and address any barriers that prevent diverse residents from accessing good jobs and career advancement opportunities.

Income and Economic Well-Being

Bergen County ranks among the wealthiest counties in New Jersey and the nation. The median household income in 2023 was \$104,443, significantly higher than the state median of \$97,126 and the national median of \$75,149.

However, these averages hide important variations:

- 6.5% of Bergen County residents live below the poverty line (compared to 9.5% statewide and 12.5% nationally)
- Income levels vary considerably across our 70 municipalities
- Many households face high costs of living that strain even middle-class budgets
- Economic security requires more than just employment—it requires good-paying jobs with benefits

Workforce development implications:

- We serve both highly educated job seekers and those with significant barriers to employment
- Career pathways must lead to family-sustaining wages, not just any job
- Support services (childcare, transportation, etc.) are critical even for working families
- Regional wage competition, especially with New York City, affects local employers

Language and Cultural Considerations

Bergen County is home to a substantial multilingual population. As of 2023, 40.2% of residents age 5 and older speak a language other than English at home. The most common languages include:

- Spanish
- Korean
- Chinese (including Mandarin and Cantonese)
- Tagalog
- Hindi and other South Asian languages
- Italian and other European languages

Among those who speak another language at home, 54.3% report speaking English "very well," while 45.7% report speaking English less than "very well." This represents approximately 18.3% of the total population who may face language barriers.

What this means for our work:

- Multilingual outreach and services are essential, not optional
- Language training must be integrated with skills training
- Cultural competency matters for both staff and employers
- Diverse communities bring valuable skills, perspectives, and international connections

Key Takeaways for Workforce Strategy

Bergen County's demographic profile presents both opportunities and challenges:

Strengths to leverage:

- Highly educated population that attracts quality employers
- Economic resources that support workforce investment
- Growing diversity that enriches our talent pool
- Strategic location with access to regional opportunities

Challenges to address:

- Aging workforce requiring succession planning and retraining
- Need to attract and retain younger workers
- Income disparities that require targeted support
- Language barriers for significant portions of the population
- Perception gaps around non-college career pathways

Understanding these demographic realities allows us to design workforce programs that serve the full diversity of Bergen County residents while meeting employer needs for skilled workers. The sections that follow examine our labor market dynamics, industry trends, and occupational demands in detail.

1.2 The Core Challenge: The Bergen County Paradox

Bergen County's foundational strengths are undeniable. Yet a deeper analysis reveals a significant paradox at the heart of our workforce challenges. Despite a prosperous economy and a highly skilled population, we face systemic underutilization of our talent, limiting economic mobility for many residents. Addressing this paradox is the central objective of this strategic plan.

1.2.1 Beyond the Headlines: A Deeper Look at Workforce Engagement

On the surface, Bergen County's labor market appears to be in ideal health. Key indicators point to a large, active, and fully engaged workforce. As of May 2025, the county's labor force participation rate stands at 67.99%. This figure rose steadily from 2020 through 2024, reaching a peak of 69.12%. However, it has declined modestly in early 2025, warranting close monitoring of workforce engagement trends.

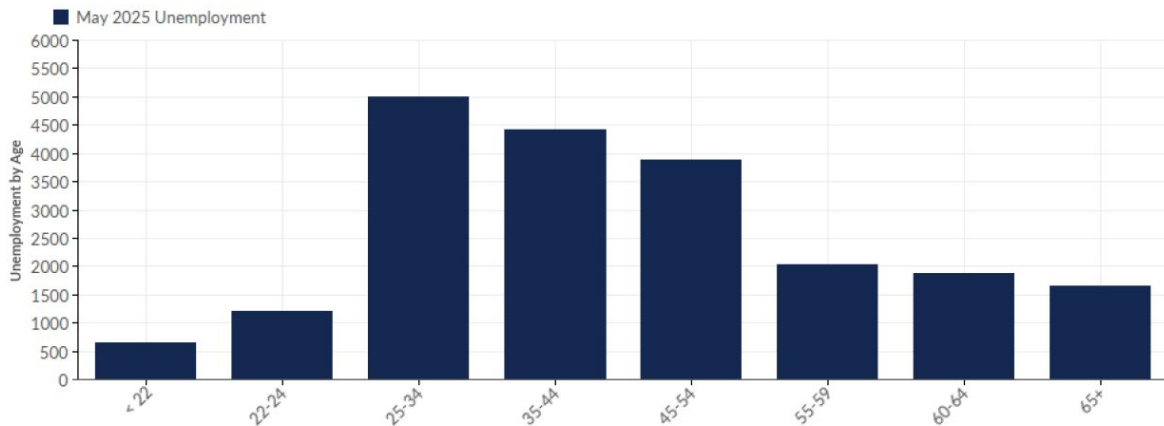
[Source: Lightcast LFPR Trends]

This relatively high level of participation is matched by very low unemployment. The current rate of 3.86% represents a dramatic recovery from the pandemic-era peak and signals a tight labor market with abundant opportunities for job seekers. However, these

positive top-line indicators mask a more complex and systemic challenge: a fundamental mismatch between our residents' skills and the jobs our economy offers.

[Source: Lightcast Unemployment Rate Trends]

Unemployment by Age



Age	Unemployment (May 2025)	% of Unemployed
< 22	646	3.12%
22-24	1,215	5.87%
25-34	4,997	24.12%
35-44	4,421	21.34%
45-54	3,874	18.70%
55-59	2,026	9.78%
60-64	1,879	9.07%
65+	1,654	7.99%
Total	20,713	100.00%

A closer look at unemployment by age reveals important patterns for workforce strategy. Bergen County's unemployment is concentrated among working-age adults. The 25-34 age group represents the largest share at 24% (4,997 residents), followed closely by the

35-44 age group at 21% (4,421 residents) and the 45-54 age group at 19% (3,874 residents). Combined, these three groups—spanning early-career through mid-career workers—account for 64% of all unemployment (13,292 residents).

In contrast, younger workers (under 25) comprise just 9% of the workforce but face dramatically higher unemployment rates: 15.7% for under-22s and 7.6% for 22-24s. This indicates more acute labor market challenges despite smaller absolute numbers.

[Source: Lightcast Unemployment by Age, May 2025]

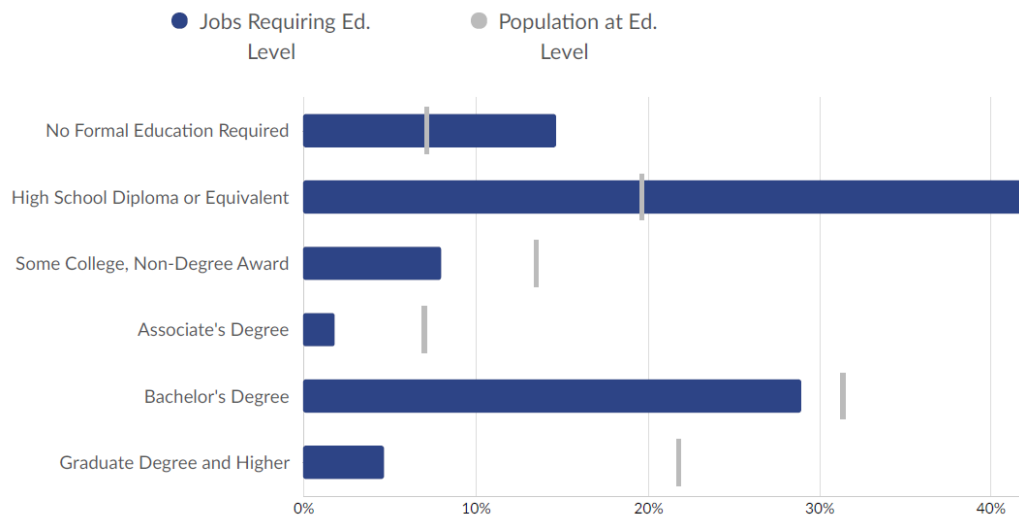
This distribution reveals the need for differentiated service models across the career spectrum:

- **Youth (under 25):** Foundational skill-building and first-job placement support for those facing the highest unemployment rates
- **Young adults (25-34):** Career launch and advancement services for the large cohort establishing their careers
- **Mid-career workers (35-54):** Intensive career coaching and sophisticated retraining for those navigating industry transitions or career pivots with substantial work history

1.2.2 Diagnosing the Structural Mismatch: A Surplus of Skills Amidst a Shortage of Aligned Jobs

The core of the Bergen County paradox lies in a significant structural mismatch. Our population's educational attainment doesn't align with the requirements of the jobs available. This creates a persistent state of underemployment, where thousands of residents work in roles that don't leverage their full potential or provide appropriate wages.

Underemployment



In absolute terms, this structural mismatch affects approximately 59,400 Bergen County residents. This includes nearly 29,600 high school graduates competing for insufficient entry-level jobs, and 29,800 college-educated residents (bachelor's and graduate degree holders) working below their qualification level. This represents 11% of our employed workforce trapped in a cycle of underemployment, unable to fully leverage their skills or earn commensurate wages.

An analysis of the labor market reveals this mismatch at both ends of the skills spectrum:

- A Severe Shortage of Jobs for High School Graduates:** The most acute challenge is faced by residents with a high school diploma or equivalent. The market has a 22% surplus of people with this level of education compared to jobs that require it. This structural imbalance forces nearly one in four of these workers into lower-skilled roles or unemployment.

[Source: Lightcast Underemployment Data]

- A Paradoxical Surplus of Highly Educated Workers:** At the same time, Bergen County has a 17% surplus of residents with graduate degrees and a 2% surplus of residents with bachelor's degrees compared to the number of available

jobs requiring those credentials. Despite our high-skill economy, we are not creating enough opportunities to fully absorb our most educated talent. This compels them to accept positions below their qualifications or to seek employment outside the county.

[Source: Lightcast Underemployment Data]

This data presents the workforce system with a dual mandate. We must create pathways that connect our underemployed, highly educated population to roles that match their skills. At the same time, we must implement targeted upskilling programs to help residents with lower educational attainment qualify for the more abundant mid- and high-skill jobs.

1.2.3 The "Tale of Two Economies": The Engine Driving the Mismatch

This structural mismatch is not accidental. It is a direct consequence of a "tale of two economies" operating in parallel within the county.

The High-Skill, High-Wage Economy: This segment is the primary driver of the county's high GRP. It is defined by knowledge-based sectors like Management of Companies and Enterprises (average earnings of \$204,549) and Information (\$188,454), as well as our highest-earning occupations, such as Management (\$56.75/hr). These sectors leverage our deep reservoir of educated talent.

[Source: Lightcast Top Industry Earnings, Top Occupation Earnings]

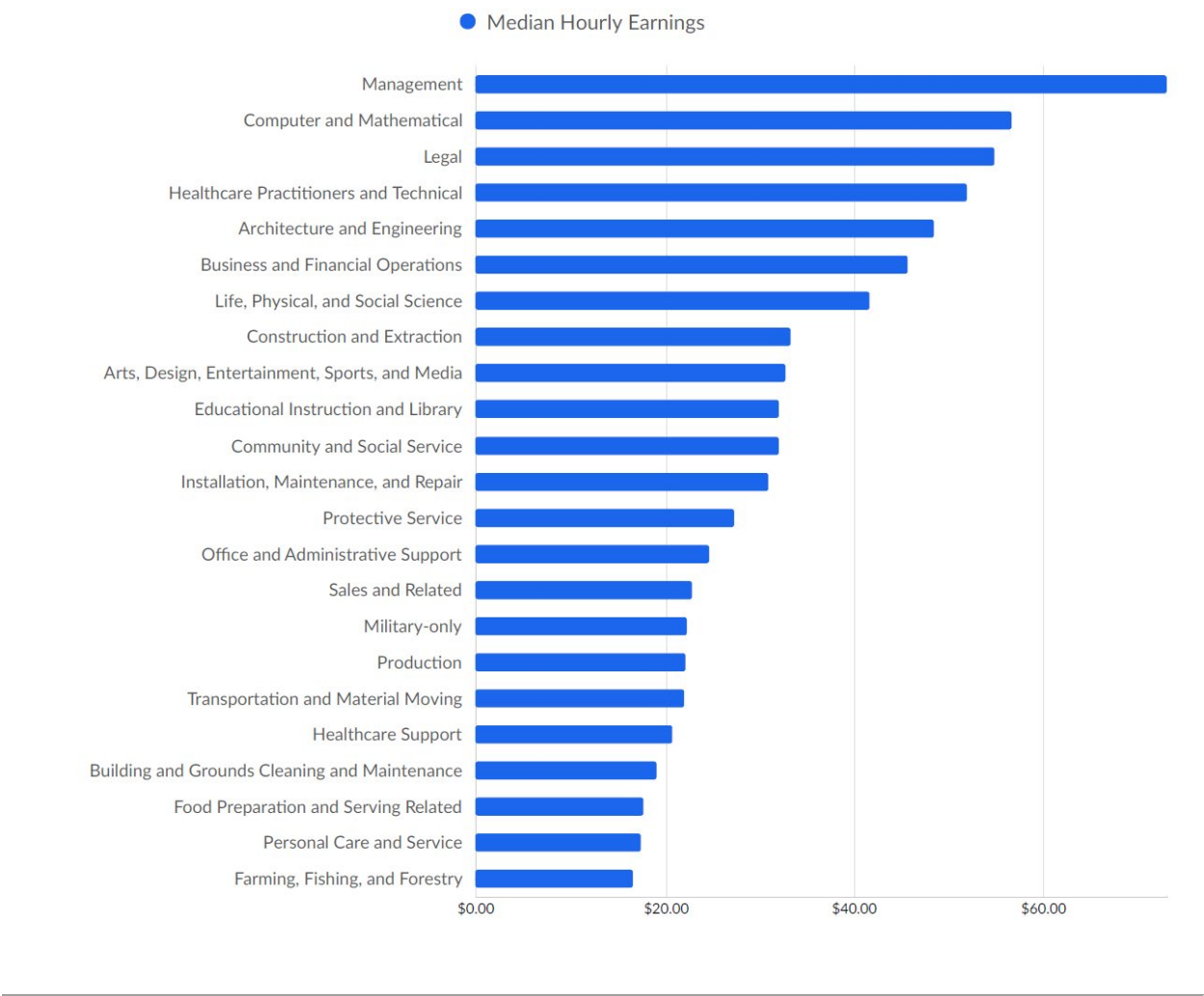
The Essential, Lower-Wage Economy: Operating alongside this high-skill sector is a large and critical workforce earning a fraction of these wages. Industries like Retail Trade (average earnings of \$46,384) and Accommodation and Food Services (\$37,191)—both less than one-quarter of the high-wage sectors—employ over 61,000 workers, making them among our largest employment sectors.

This economic divide is starkly evident in employer demand. High-skill Registered Nurses are the most sought-after occupation, yet high-volume Retail Salespersons and Fast Food Workers dominate job postings.

[Source: Lightcast Top Industry Earnings, Largest Industries, Job Posting Analytics]

This two-tiered economic structure creates the wage disparities that define our labor market. While premium wages exist in management and professional services, a large portion of the workforce faces retention challenges and regional wage competition, particularly from New York City. The clear financial incentive for skills advancement underscores the critical need for workforce development programs that build clear, accessible career pathways—moving residents from the lower-wage service economy into higher-earning, family-sustaining careers.

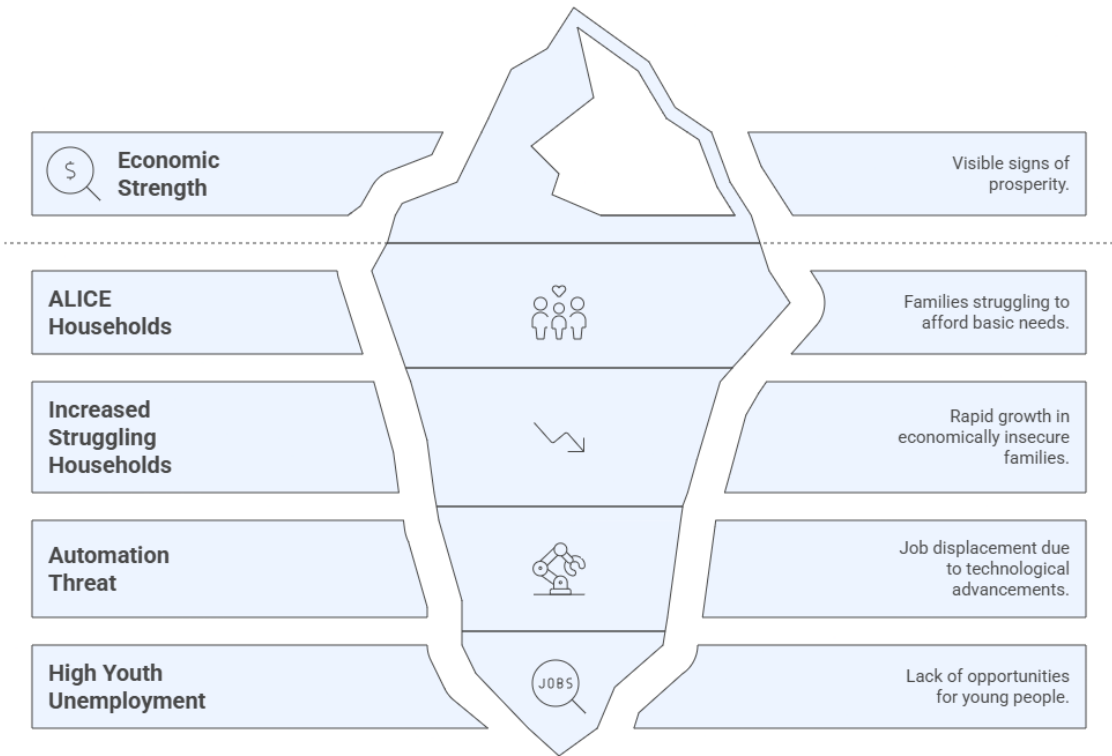
Top Occupation Earnings



1.3 Unpacking the Paradox: The Forces Shaping Our Workforce Landscape

The paradox of underemployment within a strong economy is not random chance. It is the result of three powerful, interconnected forces documented in Bergen County data. These forces include a fundamental restructuring of our industrial base, an employer landscape split between small business dominance and concentrated institutional hiring power, and the accelerating displacement of workers by automation and technology. Understanding these forces with precision is essential to crafting an effective workforce strategy.

Bergen County's Economic Paradox: Prosperity Masks Underlying Insecurity.



1.3.1 A Fundamental Shift in Our Economic Engine

Between 2019 and 2024, Bergen County's economy underwent a structural transformation that permanently altered its employment base and skill requirements.

The Rise of Healthcare Services and Logistics

The data reveal an unequivocal shift toward two distinct growth sectors: healthcare services and goods movement/logistics.

Health Care and Social Assistance now dominates Bergen County's economy. It employs 76,631 workers—representing 16% of total employment—and has added 7,192 jobs since 2019 (+9% growth). This single industry employs more workers than any other sector and maintains a concentration 1.35 times the national average, signaling Bergen's specialization in healthcare delivery.

[Source: 2025 Industry Employment; 2025 Top Growing Industries; 2025 Top Industry Employment Concentration]

Transportation and Warehousing emerged as the second-largest growth engine, adding 1,980 jobs (+11%) to reach 19,746 workers. This reflects Bergen's strategic position within the nation's busiest logistics corridor and the explosive growth of e-commerce distribution networks.

However, this industry-level growth masks a critical workforce disruption. The growth occurred during the labor-intensive expansion phase of e-commerce infrastructure (2019-2022). Meanwhile, the rapid deployment of warehouse automation, robotics, and logistics AI (2022-2025) led to specific occupations within the industry—particularly laborers and material movers—contracting by 55% even as facilities and throughput continued to expand. This illustrates a fundamental challenge: industry growth no longer guarantees occupational stability when automation can dramatically increase productivity per worker.

[Source: 2025 Top Growing Industries]

The Decline of Traditional Economic Anchors

This growth in healthcare and logistics occurred amid contraction in sectors that once defined Bergen's economy. **Management of Companies and Enterprises**—corporate headquarters operations—declined by 29%, resulting in the loss of 2,433 jobs and bringing the total to just 5,950 positions. **Manufacturing** contracted by 8%, shedding 2,454 jobs to reach 28,232 workers.

The decline in the Management of Companies warrants careful interpretation. While some reflect actual corporate relocations or consolidations, the post-pandemic shift to remote and hybrid work is likely to account for a significant portion of this measured decline. Corporate headquarters roles—executives, strategic planners, corporate services—are highly amenable to remote work. If employment data measures "place of work," Bergen County residents working remotely for companies with offices elsewhere, or companies that reduced physical headquarters footprint while maintaining distributed operations, would appear as job losses even though the economic activity and resident employment may persist. This data limitation notwithstanding, the trend signals a reduced concentration of corporate decision-making infrastructure physically located in Bergen County.

The manufacturing decline, by contrast, represents tangible job losses—middle-skill careers that historically provided pathways to middle-class stability without four-year degrees.

[Source: 2025 Top Growing Industries]

The result: Bergen County has fundamentally shifted from a corporate headquarters and manufacturing center toward an economy anchored by two distinct pillars—healthcare services and goods movement/logistics. While some corporate headquarters activity may have shifted to remote work arrangements rather than physically departing, the combined effect is reduced concentration of traditional economic anchors and a workforce increasingly oriented toward healthcare services delivery and distribution operations—sectors with distinctly different skill requirements, wage structures, and

career advancement pathways from the corporate and manufacturing base that previously defined the county.

The Automation Threat to Our Largest Occupational Groups

This industrial transformation is compounded by a severe automation vulnerability concentrated precisely where employment is highest. Bergen County's three largest occupational categories—collectively employing 150,961 workers (31% of total county employment)—face the highest automation risk in the entire occupational structure:

1. **Transportation and Material Moving** (46,345 jobs): Automation Index of **110.9** (Critical Risk - highest in county)
2. **Office and Administrative Support** (60,119 jobs): Automation Index of **98.4** (High Risk)
3. **Sales and Related** (44,497 jobs): Automation Index of **94.6** (High Risk)

[Source: 2025 Largest Occupations - Automation Index]

These index scores measure the proportion of routine, automatable tasks within each occupational category. Transportation and Material Moving's score of 110.9 reflects vulnerability to autonomous vehicles, warehouse robotics, and automated logistics systems already being deployed. Office and Administrative Support's 98.4 reflects exposure to AI-powered workflow automation, robotic process automation, and digital transformation initiatives, eliminating clerical functions. Sales' 94.6 reflects the ongoing displacement by e-commerce, self-service technology, and AI-powered customer service platforms.

The Transportation & Warehousing paradox exemplifies this dynamic: While the industry added jobs through facility expansion, automation simultaneously eliminated the human labor within those facilities. The result is industry growth with occupational decline—more warehouses and distribution centers, but fewer workers per location. The 110.9 automation index signals this trend will accelerate, not reverse, as autonomous trucks reach commercial viability, drone delivery scales up, and "dark store" warehouses operate with minimal human presence.

For context: These three occupational groups alone employ more workers than the entire healthcare sector. Their combined automation risk poses an existential workforce development challenge that requires immediate strategic attention.

1.3.2 The Acceleration of Automation and Workforce Displacement

The automation threat is not theoretical—it is measurably happening now. A comparison of 2022 versus 2025 occupational employment data reveals catastrophic contraction in entry-level positions that have historically served as workforce entry points for residents with a high school education or less.

Documented Job Losses in Entry-Level Occupations (2022-2025)

- **Cashiers:** Declined from 18,690 to 10,810 jobs (**-42%, -7,880 jobs**)
- **Laborers and Material Movers:** Declined from 18,500 to 8,280 jobs (**-55%, -10,220 jobs**)
- **Stockers and Order Fillers:** Declined from 17,020 to 7,960 jobs (**-53%, -9,060 jobs**)
- **Home Health Aides:** Fell from 18,970 jobs (ranked #7 in 2022) to below the top 25 threshold in 2025

Total documented loss across these four occupations: 27,160+ jobs in just three years.

[Source: 2022 Top Occupations Emp & Wage; 2025 Top Occupations Emp & Wage]

This is not gradual evolution—it is rapid displacement. Self-checkout systems have replaced cashiers. Warehouse automation and robotic picking systems have eliminated the need for stockers and material movers. AI-enabled route optimization and automated inventory management have restructured logistics occupations. These technologies were deployed at scale between 2022-2025, fundamentally restructuring the entry-level labor market.

The implications are profound: Bergen County residents seeking entry-level work in 2025 face a labor market with 27,000+ fewer accessible positions than existed just three years ago. These losses occurred even as related industries (retail, logistics)

maintained or grew their overall presence, demonstrating that industry growth no longer translates into proportional job creation when automation can replace human labor at scale.

Occupational Polarization: The Diverging Fortunes

While entry-level positions collapsed, higher-skill occupations demonstrated stability or growth:

- **Registered Nurses:** Maintained strong employment levels while median wages increased 18% (from approximately \$82,000 to \$97,000 between 2022-2025)
- **General and Operations Managers:** Rose into the top 10 largest occupations by 2025, signaling increased demand for strategic leadership
- **Software Developers, Business Analysts, and Healthcare Practitioners:** All showed resilience or growth

[Source: 2022 vs. 2025 Top Occupations Emp & Wage comparison]

This occupational polarization directly intensifies the Bergen County Paradox documented in Section 3.2. The county has a 22% surplus of residents with only high school diplomas competing for entry-level jobs, yet the pool of available entry-level positions has shrunk by over 27,000 jobs in three years. Without aggressive reskilling interventions and new pathway models that offer alternatives to displaced entry-level work, automation threatens to exclude our least educated residents from economic opportunity permanently.

1.3.3 An Employer Landscape of Contradictions

Bergen County's business structure presents a strategic paradox: the economy is powered by vast numbers of small businesses, but hiring activity is driven by a concentrated group of large institutional employers within specialized industries.

Small Business Economy, Institutional Hiring Dominance

Small businesses form the backbone of the local economy. 67.2% of all establishments (38,399 businesses) employ fewer than 10 workers. Breaking this down further:

- 35.8% (20,370 establishments) employ 1-4 workers
- 31.4% (17,848 establishments) employ 5-9 workers
- Only 0.1% (70 establishments) employ 500+ workers

[Source: 2025 Business Size Data]

Yet despite this small-business dominance by establishment count, **hiring activity is concentrated among major institutional employers.** In the past 12 months, just 10,428 companies posted jobs—only 18% of the county's 56,864 total establishments. Among these, hiring is heavily concentrated:

Top Institutional Recruiters (2024 Job Posting Data):

- **Hackensack Meridian Health:** 15,532 total postings / 2,742 unique positions (Posting Intensity: 6:1)
- **Valley Health System:** 3,219 total postings / 1,264 unique positions (Posting Intensity: 3:1)
- **Englewood Health:** 4,214 total postings / 1,380 unique positions (Posting Intensity: 3:1)

[Source: 2025 Employers Posting; 2025 Business Size]

Posting Intensity Explained: Hackensack Meridian's 6:1 posting intensity means each distinct job was advertised about six times in 2024—indicating sustained hiring effort. The system logged 15,532 total posting events (2,742 unique) for HMH, accounting for ~6.4% of all postings and ~2.8% of unique postings in Bergen County (244,495 total; 99,684 unique).

[Lightcast Job Posting Analytics, Q3-2025]

This dynamic demands a **dual-strategy approach** to business engagement:

1. **Broad, accessible services** for the 67.2% of small businesses lacking dedicated HR capacity and needing simplified pathways to workforce resources
2. **Deep, strategic partnerships** with the concentrated institutional employers (primarily healthcare systems) that drive the majority of active hiring volume

Industry Specialization: Where Bergen Stands Out

Bergen County's hiring concentration extends to specific industries where the county demonstrates specialization far exceeding national employment patterns:

Top Industry Specializations (Compared to National Average):

- **Wholesale Trade:** 1.86x national concentration (31,423 jobs)
- **Management of Companies and Enterprises:** 1.40x (though declining rapidly)
- **Health Care and Social Assistance:** 1.35x (76,631 jobs—the largest single industry)
- **Real Estate and Rental and Leasing:** 1.30x

[Source: 2025 Top Industry Employment Concentration]

This specialization matters strategically. Healthcare at 1.35x the national concentration means Bergen has disproportionately more healthcare jobs per capita than the typical U.S. county—reflecting the concentration of major hospital systems (Hackensack Meridian, Valley Health, Englewood Health, Holy Name Medical Center). Wholesale trade at 1.86x reflects Bergen's role as a major distribution and logistics hub for the New York metropolitan region.

Strategic Implication: Workforce development efforts that target these specialized sectors—particularly healthcare—can achieve an outsized regional impact because these industries define Bergen's competitive economic position. Training investments in healthcare occupations align with both current employment concentration and projected growth, maximizing the efficiency of limited workforce resources.

Small Business Realities and Workforce Strategy

The overwhelming prevalence of small businesses (86.9% with fewer than 20 employees) shapes workforce development requirements. These businesses:

Lack of dedicated HR departments and recruitment infrastructure

Have limited capacity for formal training programs or apprenticeship administration

Need simplified access to talent pipelines without bureaucratic burden

Benefit most from shared services, collaborative hiring events, and pooled training approaches

Successful workforce development in Bergen County requires acknowledging this reality. While large anchor institutions drive posting volume and can sustain complex partnerships involving registered apprenticeships and customized training, the small-business majority needs accessible, low-burden services that reduce friction in finding and developing talent.

The workforce development board must simultaneously serve both audiences—maintaining deep institutional relationships with major employers while creating accessible talent solutions for the thousands of small businesses that cannot navigate complex workforce programs on their own.

1.3.4 Strategic Implications for Workforce Development

Bergen County's underemployment paradox stems from three powerful, measurable forces that demand immediate strategic response:

Industrial Transformation: Shift from corporate headquarters/manufacturing to healthcare services/logistics; lost 4,887 jobs in traditional sectors while gaining 9,172 in new sectors requiring fundamentally different skills, wage structures, and career pathways.

Employer Landscape Contradictions: While 67.2% of establishments employ fewer than 10 workers, three healthcare systems (Hackensack Meridian, Valley Health, Englewood Health) drive the majority of hiring volume, requiring dual engagement strategies serving both small businesses and institutional anchors.

Automation Acceleration: 27,160+ entry-level jobs eliminated between 2022-2025 (cashiers -42%, laborers -55%, stockers -53%); 150,961 jobs (31% of total employment) in high-automation-risk occupations face ongoing displacement as industry growth no longer guarantees job creation when automation replaces human labor at scale.

Workforce Development Response

Reskill vulnerable workers. Priority focus on 150,961 workers in Transportation/Material Moving, Office/Admin Support, and Sales occupations facing automation displacement. Establish transition pathways from automating to automation-resistant careers through proactive intervention before displacement occurs.

Build automation-resilient career pathways. Prioritize training in occupations with human-centric skill requirements. Integrate AI literacy and human-AI collaboration into all programs. Avoid "in-demand today, obsolete tomorrow" occupations by systematically assessing automation vulnerability before approving training investments.

Target strategic investments based on automation resilience, not just industry growth.

Healthcare merits heavy investment (76,631 jobs, 1.35x national concentration, moderate automation risk, clear career lattices).

Logistics requires a strategic transformation approach: avoid legacy manual labor occupations already declining 53-55% (warehouse laborers, stock clerks, order fillers); pursue automation-adjacent emerging roles (robotics maintenance, logistics systems analysis, quality control, last-mile coordination); offer short-term training only for transitional occupations with disclosed automation timelines (long-haul trucking).

Wholesale Trade warrants selective engagement (31,423 jobs, 1.86x specialization, more stable than logistics operations).

The Decisive Principle

Industry specialization alone cannot guide workforce investment decisions. Automation vulnerability must be the primary filter for directing limited training resources. Growing industries do not guarantee sustainable jobs when technology can eliminate occupations faster than sectors expand. Bergen County's workforce system must be sophisticated enough to distinguish between industry trends and occupational viability.

1.4 The Talent Pipeline: Aligning Today's Graduates with Tomorrow's Economy

The long-term health of Bergen County's economy depends on a talent pipeline that can consistently produce skilled workers aligned with employer demand. Our local educational ecosystem is a powerful asset. However, strategic analysis reveals a mixed picture: exceptional alignment with our dominant healthcare sector, potential misalignment in other key areas, and a worrying 6% decline in graduate completions over the past five years.

1.4.1 Our Educational Ecosystem: A Powerful Asset Facing Headwinds

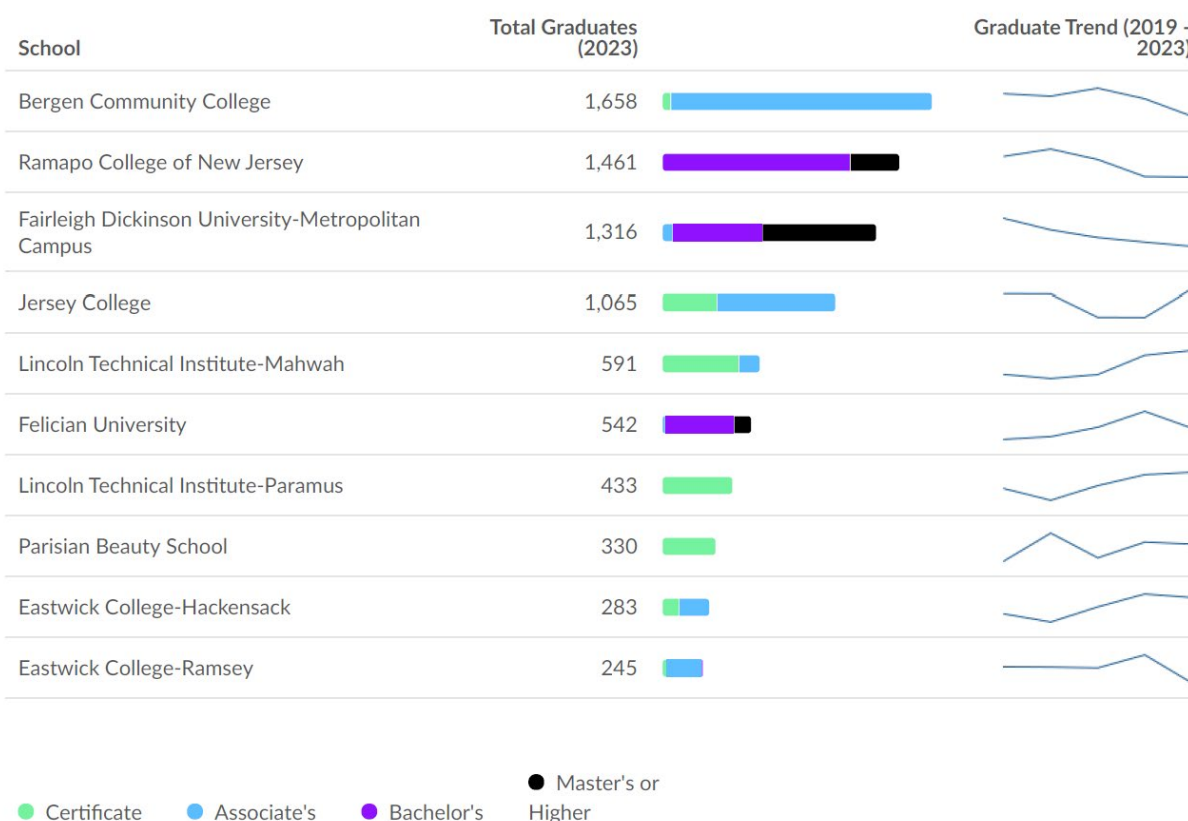
Bergen County is home to a robust network of postsecondary institutions that serve as a primary source of new talent for the regional economy. This ecosystem is a major strategic advantage. Institutions like Bergen Community College, Ramapo College of New Jersey, and Fairleigh Dickinson University, as well as specialized providers such as Jersey College, Lincoln Technical Institute, Eastwick College, and Parisian Beauty School, collectively produce thousands of graduates each year.

However, this powerful asset is facing a critical challenge. In 2023, our local institutions produced 8,299 graduates, a 6% decline from 2019. In a tight and competitive labor market where credential gaps already constrain opportunity, this contraction in talent production is a significant warning sign that requires strategic attention and partnership to reverse.

[Source: Lightcast Educational Pipeline Data]

Educational Pipeline

In 2023, there were 8,299 graduates in Bergen County, NJ. This pipeline has shrunk by 6% over the last 5 years. The highest share of these graduates come from "Liberal Arts and Sciences/Liberal Studies" (Associate's), "Registered Nursing/Registered Nurse" (Associate's), and "Practical Nursing, Vocational Nursing and Nursing Assistants, Other" (Certificate).



Understanding and Addressing the Decline

This 2019-2023 decline likely reflects pandemic-related disruptions in enrollment and persistence during 2020-2021. However, the lack of recovery to pre-pandemic levels by 2023 suggests that structural factors beyond the immediate crisis are at play. Possible underlying causes include:

- Financial hardship is forcing students to leave programs
- Caregiving responsibilities
- Rising costs are deterring persistence
- Demographic shifts in the college-age population

- Labor market pull, as a tight job market, creates opportunity costs for staying in school

This decline raises critical questions about persistence barriers and program capacity. Strategic workforce investment must prioritize not only enrollment but completion support, addressing financial emergencies, childcare needs, and flexible scheduling that allows working adults to finish credentials. **Equally important is ensuring participants are training-ready and employment-ready before enrollment, positioning them to succeed rather than setting them up for failure.** This means robust assessment of foundational skills, career readiness, and support needs upfront. Partnership with institutions to identify and remove completion barriers and strengthen pre-enrollment preparation is essential to maximize the return on public training dollars and ensure graduates can compete effectively in our demanding labor market.

[Source: 2025 Edu Pipeline]

Post-Secondary Enrollment Dynamics and the Path Forward

These completion challenges reflect broader enrollment dynamics affecting community colleges nationwide. Bergen Community College experienced significant enrollment disruption during 2020-2022, mirroring patterns across the sector, but has demonstrated strong recovery momentum with year-over-year growth and improved student retention. The college's evolution as a federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) reflects important demographic shifts in our talent pipeline. More than 40% of Bergen students identify as Hispanic, far exceeding the 25% enrollment threshold required for HSI designation. Looking ahead, all higher education institutions face the demographic "enrollment cliff" beginning in 2025-2026, as the number of high school graduates declines. These trends are driving innovation in credentialing approaches, including significant growth in certificate programs and dual enrollment partnerships with high schools. For workforce development, these dynamics underscore the critical value of WDB-education partnerships focused on career pathway alignment, work-based learning integration, wraparound support services, and recognition of alternative credentials alongside traditional degrees. Our educational institutions are not just

training providers but essential strategic partners in building an adaptive, equity-focused talent development system.

1.4.2 Pipeline Alignment: A Story of Strengths and Strategic Gaps

A deeper analysis of what our students are studying reveals a pipeline that is both highly responsive to some market needs and misaligned with others.

Exceptional Alignment with the Healthcare Sector

Our educational pipeline is exceptionally well-aligned with the needs of the healthcare industry, our largest and fastest-growing sector. "Registered Nursing" and "Practical Nursing" are among the most common degrees and certificates awarded, creating a direct, reliable flow of credentialed talent to major employers such as Hackensack Meridian Health. This synergy is a model of effective alignment that should be protected and expanded.

A Potential Mismatch for Liberal Arts Graduates

In contrast, a significant portion of graduates complete degrees in "Liberal Arts and Sciences." While these programs develop invaluable critical thinking skills, they do not provide a direct pathway to a specific technical occupation. In a high-cost county, this contributes to the underemployment paradox, in which credentialed residents struggle to find roles that utilize their education and offer a family-sustaining wage. Bridging these graduates into professional careers through work-based learning and targeted skills training is a key strategic opportunity.

The Credential Paradox: Simultaneous Barriers and Underutilization

Pipeline misalignment is further compounded by employer credentialing demands and credential inflation. Analysis of real-time job postings reveals that 53% of advertised positions require a bachelor's degree or higher—precisely matching the attainment rate of our population. This creates no surplus of qualified candidates and generates fierce competition for every posted role. For residents with some college or associate's degrees (20.4% of the population), the pathway to the majority of available jobs remains blocked by the bachelor's degree barrier.

[Source: Lightcast Job Posting Analysis, Educational Attainment Data]

Yet paradoxically, we simultaneously have too many highly educated residents for jobs that fully reward advanced degrees. A 17% surplus of graduate degree holders and 2% surplus of bachelor's degree holders means thousands work below their qualification level—the underemployment documented in Section 3.2.

This creates a credential paradox: **Employers post bachelor's requirements even when the work doesn't fully utilize advanced education, forcing overqualified candidates into these roles while blocking access for those without four-year degrees.** The result is both underemployment of the highly credentialed AND credential barriers for the moderately credentialed—a lose-lose outcome that workforce policy must actively address through skills-based hiring advocacy, credential bridging programs, and employer education on alternative pathways.

[Source: 2025 Underemployment Data, 2025 Educational Breakdown]

A Shrinking Local Training Pipeline

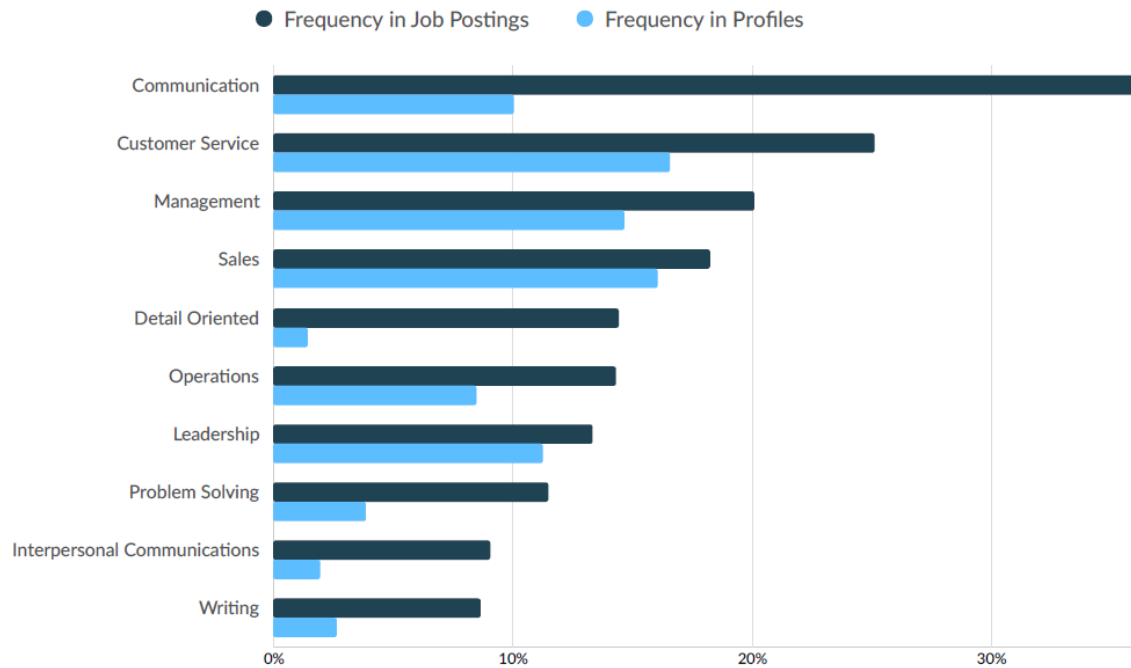
Compounding the credential gap, Bergen County's local educational institutions produced 8,299 graduates in 2023—a 6% decline since 2019. The top programs are concentrated in Liberal Arts and Nursing, leaving gaps in technical fields and emerging occupations. This pipeline contraction underscores the urgency of converting non-traditional talent, supporting adult learners through flexible pathways, and investing in incumbent worker upskilling rather than relying solely on new graduate supply.

[Source: 2025 Edu Pipeline]

1.4.3 Looking Ahead: The Skills That Will Define the Future of Work

Projections show that Bergen County's prosperity will depend less on the sheer quantity of new jobs and more on our ability to upskill our workforce for an increasingly complex and technology-transformed economy.

Top Common Skills



	Postings	% of Total Postings	Profiles	% of Total Profiles	Projected Skill Growth	Skill Growth Relative to Market
Microsoft Office	7,697	8%	34,433	11%	+18.5%	Growing
Microsoft Excel	7,496	8%	31,719	10%	+17.7%	Growing
Microsoft PowerPoint	3,818	4%	21,110	7%	+26.1%	Rapidly Growing
Microsoft Outlook	3,524	4%	7,500	2%	+25.0%	Rapidly Growing
Microsoft Word	2,360	2%	22,269	7%	+7.2%	Stable
SAP Applications	1,698	2%	3,835	1%	+21.6%	Rapidly Growing
SQL (Programming Language)	1,383	1%	7,101	2%	+6.4%	Stable
Google Workspace	1,087	1%	1,033	0%	+18.8%	Growing
Salesforce	1,055	1%	3,841	1%	+24.7%	Rapidly Growing
Epic EMR	991	1%	1,016	0%	+16.4%	Growing

The Future is Led by Managers and Caregivers—But Management Itself is Transforming

Occupational projections identify Management roles among the fastest-growing categories through 2032, while the Health Care sector will continue to dominate as the primary engine of job creation for both clinical and support roles.

However, this masks important nuance about the future of management work. AI and automation are rapidly transforming management itself, eliminating routine supervisory and administrative tasks (scheduling, reporting, performance tracking) while elevating the importance of strategic thinking, complex problem-solving, and people leadership.

The "managers" of tomorrow will require distinctly human capabilities—emotional intelligence, strategic vision, ethical judgment, and the ability to lead in ambiguity—that complement rather than compete with AI systems. Training strategies must prepare residents for this hybrid management reality, not the traditional supervisory model of the past.

The Non-Negotiable Demand for Hybrid Skills—including AI Literacy

To succeed in future roles, residents will need a blend of digital and "human" skills. Real-time employer data provides a clear roadmap for current training investments:

- **The fastest-growing "human skill" demanded** by employers includes Presentations, Prioritization, and Critical Thinking. *[Source: Lightcast Job Postings Data]*
- **Current digital skill demands** include proficiency in enterprise platforms such as Salesforce and SAP Applications, alongside foundational tools such as Microsoft PowerPoint. *[Source: Lightcast Job Postings Data]*

The Critical Gap: AI Literacy as a Foundational Skill

However, current job posting data substantially understates the accelerating importance of AI literacy. While employer postings capture existing demands—Salesforce, SAP, Microsoft Office proficiency—they lag behind the rapid transformation occurring since late 2022, when generative AI tools began reshaping work across industries, from healthcare documentation to customer service to marketing.

Future workforce preparation must treat AI literacy as a foundational digital skill, on par with email or spreadsheets. This includes:

- Understanding AI capabilities and limitations
- Effective prompt engineering
- Critical evaluation of AI outputs
- Human-AI collaboration

This is not about training AI specialists—it's about ensuring every worker can leverage AI tools to augment their productivity while understanding what humans uniquely contribute. Training programs that fail to integrate AI readiness risk producing graduates unprepared for the actual labor market they'll enter, regardless of their technical field.

[Source: Environmental Scan and Forward-Looking Analysis]

1.5 The Human Dimension: Confronting the Barriers to Economic Mobility

The economic paradox of underemployment and a dual-tiered economy does not impact all residents equally. Its effects are most acute for specific populations that face a distinct, often interconnected set of barriers. While Bergen County's high median income of \$116,709 suggests universal prosperity, a closer look reveals a more complex reality. 20% of households earn less than \$50,000 annually, and deep-rooted challenges related to language access, the digital divide, credential attainment, and geographic access prevent thousands of residents from accessing career pathways. Addressing the needs of these populations is not just a moral imperative. It is an economic necessity to unlock the full potential of our entire workforce.

1.5.1 Meeting the Needs of Our Priority Populations

To bridge the gap between our two economies, the workforce system must provide targeted, partner-driven support to key populations facing the steepest climb to economic self-sufficiency. These include:

- **Individuals with Low Educational Attainment**, who face a 22% jobs deficit
- **English Language Learners**, who comprise a significant portion of our diverse community
- **Individuals with Low Incomes**
- **Justice-Involved Individuals**
- **Individuals with Disabilities** (an estimated 31,141 Bergen County residents aged 18-64)
- **Older Workers**
- **Displaced Homemakers**
- **Veterans** (24,300 Bergen County residents)
- **At-Risk Youth**

[Source: 2022 Local Plan, Lightcast Population Characteristics]

1.5.2 The Regional Reality: Migration, Commuting, and Economic Displacement

Bergen County operates not as an isolated labor market but as a dynamic participant in a highly integrated regional economy. This reality creates both opportunity and challenge, as our residents and employers compete with the entire New York metropolitan area for talent and jobs. Understanding these regional flows is essential to addressing the geographic and economic barriers that limit opportunity for many residents.

The Migration Challenge: Net Outflow Signals Affordability Pressures

Despite our county's economic strength, Bergen County experiences net outflows of 2,500 residents annually (2022). This outbound flow is primarily directed toward surrounding counties, with 4,420 residents leaving for Passaic County, 3,082 for Hudson County, and 2,232 for Morris County. Out-of-state migration includes 747 residents moving to Palm Beach County, Florida, and 474 to Miami-Dade County.

[Source: Lightcast Migration Data]

At the same time, Bergen County demonstrates significant drawing power, attracting 6,186 inbound migrants from Hudson County, 4,583 from Passaic County, 3,085 from

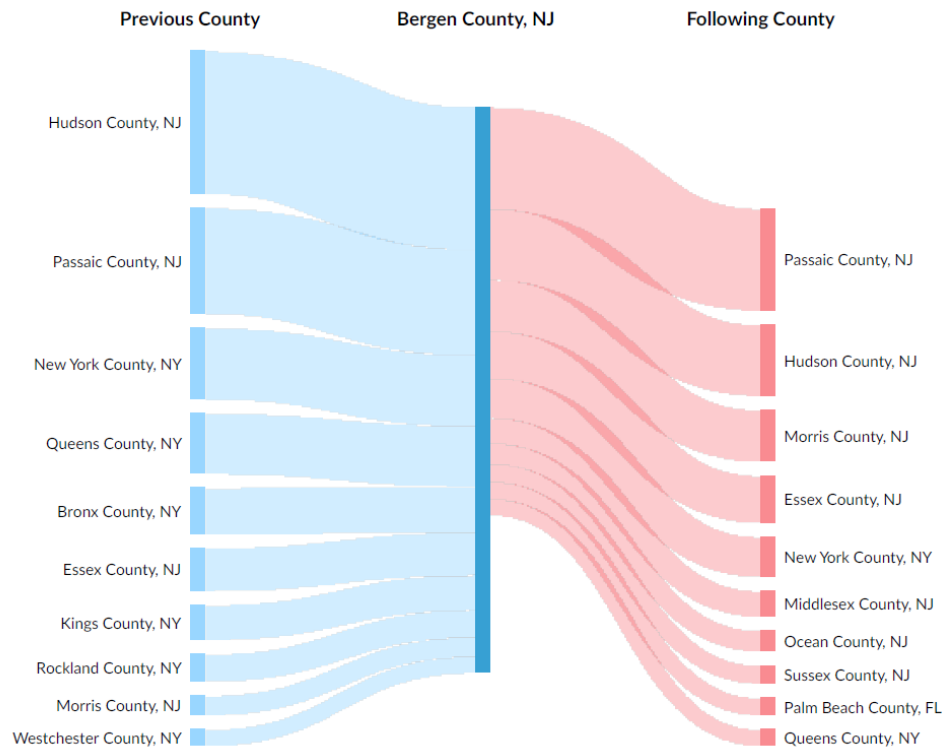
New York County (Manhattan), and 2,617 from Queens County. This bidirectional flow reveals a regional labor market where workers cross county lines daily in search of opportunity.

[Source: Lightcast Migration Data]

The net outflow, however, signals a troubling trend: **Affordability challenges are pushing residents—particularly younger workers and families—to seek lower-cost communities while maintaining employment ties to our regional economy.** This represents an economic barrier not just for those who leave, but also for employers who lose access to talent and for communities that lose the tax base and civic contributions of working families.

Inbound and Outbound Migration

As of 2022, 6,186 people have migrated from Hudson County, NJ to Bergen County, NJ. In the same year, 4,420 people left Bergen County, NJ migrating to Passaic County, NJ. The total Net Migration for Bergen County, NJ in 2022 was -2,500.



Top Previous Counties	Migrations
Hudson County, NJ	6,186
Passaic County, NJ	4,583
New York County, NY	3,085
Queens County, NY	2,617
Bronx County, NY	1,991
Essex County, NJ	1,856

The Commuting Reality: Jobs Inside, Opportunities Outside

Compounding migration pressures is a critical mismatch between where Bergen County residents work and where our county's jobs are located. While the number of jobs located *within* Bergen County has remained relatively flat since 2019, the number of *employed Bergen County residents* has grown by over 27,000 in the same period. This data provides the strongest possible evidence that **our residents' employment growth is happening in jobs outside the county**, solidifying our role as a bedroom community within a highly integrated regional labor market.

[Source: NJDOL Historical Data, Lightcast Economic Overview]

Approximately 27,000 Bergen County residents commute daily outside the county for work, seeking opportunities our local economy cannot provide—often to New York City, nearby New Jersey counties, or other regional employment centers. This outbound commuting flow reflects both the strength of our educated workforce (employers beyond our borders compete for our talent) and the limitation of our local job base (we cannot fully absorb the career aspirations of our highly credentialed population).

[Source: Lightcast Place of Work vs. Place of Residence]

Geographic Employment Concentration Creates Access Barriers

Within Bergen County, employment is highly concentrated in specific municipalities. Hackensack alone hosts 41,698 jobs—far exceeding its 25,308 resident workers—creating a 16,390-job surplus that requires massive daily inbound commuting. Paramus

follows with 32,402 jobs, while a secondary tier of employment hubs has emerged in Teaneck (18,291 jobs), Lyndhurst (17,856 jobs), and Fort Lee (17,708 jobs).

[Source: Lightcast Employment Location Data]

For job seekers, particularly those from lower-income communities and priority populations, this geographic concentration creates severe barriers:

Transportation Barriers: While public transportation access to Hackensack and Paramus—our primary employment centers—is relatively strong through NJ Transit bus routes and jitney services, **geographic employment dispersal across suburban municipalities with limited public transit connectivity** creates significant challenges. Residents seeking jobs in Fort Lee, Lyndhurst, outlying commercial corridors, or emerging employment nodes face sparse or nonexistent transit options, forcing them to rely on personal vehicles that many cannot afford.

Economic Burden: For entry-level workers earning \$15-18 per hour, transportation costs—whether vehicle ownership, insurance, fuel, and maintenance, or costly combinations of transit routes—can consume 15-20% of gross wages, making employment economically unsustainable even when jobs are available.

Childcare Access Challenges: The geographic distance between home, work, and affordable childcare creates insurmountable logistical challenges for working parents, particularly single parents. The time and cost of transporting children to care providers in communities distant from work sites forces many—especially women—out of the labor force entirely.

Time Poverty: Long commutes combined with family responsibilities create "time poverty," limiting workers' ability to pursue education, training, or career advancement. A resident commuting 90+ minutes each way to a job in New York City has limited capacity to attend evening classes or engage in professional development.

Strategic Implications for Workforce Policy

This regional reality demands workforce strategies that:

- **Target regional recruitment efforts** where Bergen County has demonstrated appeal: Hudson, Passaic, and New York City boroughs provide a clear roadmap for outreach campaigns, allowing us to compete effectively for talent already inclined toward Bergen County employment
- **Develop coordinated transportation solutions**, including employer-sponsored shuttle services to major employment hubs, subsidized public transit passes for low-wage workers through partnership with employers and county transit authorities, and advocacy for remote/hybrid work arrangements for positions that permit flexibility
- **Strategically locate training and supportive services** near major employment centers and transit hubs, recognizing that asking unemployed residents to travel to distant service locations creates the same barriers they face in accessing work
- **Engage employers on affordability and retention**, recognizing that wage levels insufficient to cover Bergen County's cost of living drive talented workers to employment outside the county or out-migration to more affordable regions
- **Leverage regional coordination through informal collaboration with neighboring county LWDBs and state-facilitated convenings** to coordinate strategies with neighboring counties facing similar challenges, creating a unified approach to talent attraction and retention

This fluid, cross-county movement means our local employers must compete with the entire metropolitan region for talent, while our residents must navigate a complex regional labor market to find opportunities that match their skills and career goals. The workforce system cannot eliminate these geographic and economic barriers, but strategic interventions can significantly reduce their impact on residents' ability to access family-sustaining careers.

1.5.3 Addressing the Cross-Cutting Barriers to Opportunity

The challenges faced by our priority populations are rarely isolated. They are a complex web of interconnected barriers. An effective workforce strategy cannot address these issues in silos. It must be holistic, partner-driven, and focused on providing integrated services that confront the multifaceted needs of Bergen County's residents.

A single mother with limited English proficiency may face simultaneous barriers related to language access, childcare, transportation, credential recognition, and digital literacy. A justice-involved individual may confront not only employer bias but also gaps in work history, limited professional networks, and restricted housing options that limit geographic job access. An older worker displaced by automation may struggle with both technological skills gaps and age discrimination, while possessing decades of valuable experience that employers overlook.

These intersecting barriers demand coordinated, wraparound approaches delivered through deep partnerships with community-based organizations, educational institutions, social service agencies, and employers willing to adopt inclusive hiring practices. The workforce system's role is not to provide every service directly but to serve as the strategic coordinator and advocate, connecting residents to the comprehensive support ecosystem needed to overcome barriers and achieve sustainable employment outcomes.

Section 4.0 Strategic Priorities articulates how the Bergen County Workforce Development Board will operationalize this barrier-elimination imperative through policy, partnerships, resource allocation, and innovation strategies focused on equity and accessibility.

1.6 The Bottom Line: The Living Wage Imperative as a Strategic North Star

1.6.1 Why the Living Wage Gap Matters

The Bergen County workforce system operates in a paradox. We have low unemployment, a highly educated population, and proximity to one of the world's most dynamic economic regions—yet more than one-third of our households cannot afford basic necessities despite working.

This is the defining challenge of our workforce development strategy.

The living wage gap—the difference between what jobs pay and what families need to afford housing, childcare, food, transportation, healthcare, and basic technology—is not an abstract economic concept. It is the daily reality for 127,032 Bergen County households (35.6% of all households) who fall below the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) threshold.

[Source: 2025 ALICE County Data]

These are not unemployed households. They are working families, employed in the very occupations our labor market data identifies as "in-demand": retail sales associates, food service workers, administrative assistants, transportation workers, and healthcare support roles. They show up to work every day, yet remain one emergency away from financial crisis.

The workforce development challenge is not merely connecting people to jobs—it is connecting them to jobs that lead to economic self-sufficiency.

1.6.2 The Living Wage Benchmark for Bergen County

The ALICE framework, developed by the United Way, provides a more realistic measure of economic security than the Federal Poverty Level. The ALICE Household Survival Budget calculates the bare minimum income required to afford:

- **Housing:** Rent or mortgage for safe, adequate housing
- **Childcare:** Licensed care enabling parents to work
- **Food:** Nutritious meals meeting USDA guidelines
- **Transportation:** Reliable vehicle or public transit to access employment
- **Healthcare:** Insurance premiums and out-of-pocket medical costs
- **Technology:** Basic smartphone and internet service (now essential for job search, remote work, and accessing services)
- **Miscellaneous essentials:** Clothing, household supplies, and other necessities
- **Taxes:** Payroll and income taxes

For Bergen County in 2023, the ALICE threshold represents:

- **\$65,928 annually** for a household with one adult and one child

- **\$73,824 annually** for a household with one adult, one child, and childcare expenses
- **\$99,132 annually** for a household with two adults and two children with childcare
- **\$42,252 annually** for a single adult household

[Source: 2025 ALICE County Data]

These thresholds align closely with the MIT Living Wage Calculator, which translates survival budgets into hourly wage requirements. For career counselors working with participants on Individual Employment Plans, these hourly benchmarks provide concrete targets when discussing occupational choices and training investments:

MIT Living Wage Requirements for Bergen County, NJ by Household Type

Wages

# Children	1 ADULT				2 ADULTS (1 WORKING)				2 ADULTS (BOTH WORKING)			
	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3
Living Wage	\$26.90	\$49.39	\$64.51	\$78.03	\$37.63	\$44.15	\$48.35	\$55.36	\$18.82	\$27.19	\$34.87	\$40.83
Poverty Wage	\$7.52	\$10.17	\$12.81	\$15.46	\$10.17	\$12.81	\$15.46	\$18.10	\$5.08	\$6.41	\$7.73	\$9.05
Minimum Wage	\$15.49	\$15.49	\$15.49	\$15.49	\$15.49	\$15.49	\$15.49	\$15.49	\$15.49	\$15.49	\$15.49	\$15.49

Typical Expenses

	1 ADULT				2 ADULTS (1 WORKING)				2 ADULTS (BOTH WORKING)			
	0 Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children	0 Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children	0 Children	1 Child	2 Children	3 Children
Food	\$1,695	\$2,199	\$10,723	\$14,242	\$6,375	\$11,155	\$14,349	\$17,525	\$6,375	\$11,155	\$14,349	\$17,525
Child Care	\$0	\$17,690	\$36,319	\$41,663	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$17,690	\$36,319	\$41,663
Medical	\$3,595	\$2,317	\$2,400	\$2,903	\$7,573	\$12,520	\$10,892	\$11,237	\$7,573	\$12,520	\$10,890	\$11,237
Housing	\$19,441	\$26,516	\$26,514	\$27,622	\$33,125	\$26,516	\$26,516	\$26,633	\$33,125	\$26,516	\$26,516	\$26,633
Transportation	\$2,185	\$10,898	\$13,252	\$19,372	\$12,886	\$13,980	\$15,373	\$17,254	\$12,886	\$13,980	\$15,373	\$17,254
Clothing	\$3,685	\$4,224	\$5,871	\$6,810	\$6,234	\$6,421	\$6,610	\$6,776	\$6,234	\$6,421	\$6,610	\$6,776
Internet & Mobile	\$1,416	\$1,416	\$1,416	\$1,416	\$1,268	\$1,268	\$1,268	\$1,268	\$1,268	\$1,268	\$1,268	\$1,268
Other	\$1,560	\$3,771	\$4,168	\$11,240	\$6,771	\$8,732	\$11,616	\$12,251	\$6,771	\$8,732	\$11,616	\$12,251
Required annual income before taxes	\$47,403	\$67,723	\$112,902	\$124,810	\$57,265	\$82,130	\$66,942	\$123,441	\$57,265	\$82,130	\$124,220	\$144,124
Annual taxes	\$4,447	\$10,927	\$21,275	\$27,440	\$13,810	\$11,704	\$11,621	\$12,754	\$13,810	\$11,704	\$12,754	\$12,793
Required annual income before taxes	\$55,951	\$102,720	\$134,161	\$162,290	\$73,275	\$94,832	\$102,564	\$143,195	\$73,275	\$102,983	\$143,242	\$159,664

Source: MIT Living Wage Calculator (<https://livingwage.mit.edu/>)

The convergence of ALICE and MIT data from two independent sources strengthens the evidence: Bergen County's cost of living demands substantially higher wages than federal poverty measures suggest.

How This Compares to Bergen County Wages

These living wage thresholds starkly contrast with the median wages in Bergen County's three largest occupational groups:

- **Office and Administrative Support:** \$48,150 median wage (60,119 jobs)
- **Transportation and Material Moving:** \$42,380 median wage (46,345 jobs)
- **Sales and Related:** \$45,200 median wage (44,497 jobs)

[Source: 2025 Top Occupations Emp & Wage]

Translation: A single parent working full-time in one of these occupations, representing 150,961 jobs or 31% of county employment, cannot afford Bergen County's cost of living without public or private assistance, even in occupations considered "in-demand."

This is why the living wage gap must serve as the strategic north star for Bergen County's workforce development investments. Every policy decision, every training investment, every employer partnership, and every career counseling session must be evaluated against this question: **Does this intervention move participants toward economic self-sufficiency, or does it simply perpetuate the cycle of working poverty?**

1.6.3 Implications for Workforce Strategy

Understanding the living wage gap transforms how we approach every aspect of workforce development:

For Career Counseling: Individual Employment Plans cannot simply match people to available job openings. Counselors must help participants understand the economic realities of occupational choices, identify pathways with potential for wage progression, and plan for stackable credentials that enable advancement. A job offer at \$15/hour

may feel like success in the moment, but if it leads nowhere, we have failed the participant.

For Training Investments: The Bergen County WDB must prioritize training programs in occupations with documented pathways from entry-level to family-sustaining wages within a reasonable timeframe. This doesn't mean every training must lead to immediate ALICE-threshold wages—many healthcare and skilled trades careers require progression through multiple credential levels. But the pathway must exist, be transparent, and be achievable within 2-3 years for participants who complete training and demonstrate competency.

For Employer Engagement: Employer partnerships must go beyond filling immediate vacancies. The WDB should engage employers in frank conversations about wage progression, career lattices, and transparency in advancement opportunities. Employers who offer clear pathways from entry-level to family-sustaining wages should be prioritized partners. Sectors and employers who offer only dead-end, survival-wage positions should not be the focus of workforce system resources.

For Performance Measurement: While WIOA requires measuring placement rates and retention, success cannot be measured solely by these metrics. The WDB must track and report average wages at placement measured against the ALICE threshold, monitor the percentage of participants placed in occupations with documented wage progression potential, and evaluate whether training investments are yielding living-wage outcomes.

For Equity and Access: The living wage gap disproportionately affects the populations WIOA directs us to serve: individuals with limited English proficiency, those with disabilities, justice-involved residents, displaced homemakers, and veterans. These populations face additional barriers to accessing living-wage careers and require intensive, coordinated services. The workforce system must provide not just job placement assistance, but comprehensive support addressing childcare, transportation, housing stability, and other barriers that prevent career advancement.

For System Integration: Closing the living wage gap requires coordination beyond the traditional workforce system. The WDB must partner with economic development to advocate for quality job creation, with housing authorities to address affordability barriers, with childcare providers to expand access, and with transportation planners to improve employment accessibility. Economic security is a systems challenge requiring systems solutions.

For our partners, understanding the living wage gap clarifies why traditional metrics feel insufficient. Placement into a \$14/hour retail job may meet a WIOA performance target, but if that individual remains below the ALICE threshold and is dependent on SNAP benefits and housing assistance, we have not achieved the Act's intent of self-sufficiency.

For our employers, this data provides context for talent attraction and retention challenges. Bergen County's high cost of living means that wages competitive in other regions may be insufficient here. Employers offering survival wages will face perpetual turnover as workers seek better opportunities or burn out from the stress of financial insecurity.

For our staff, this data is a powerful tool to ground career counseling in the economic realities of our county, empowering them to co-develop ambitious and realistic career plans with our residents.

Ultimately, by placing the living wage gap at the center of our plan, we ensure our resources are strategically aligned to address the most significant barrier to economic mobility for the people of Bergen County.

The Scale of the Challenge:

To quantify the living wage imperative, consider that:

- 59,400 underemployed residents earn below their skill level
- 29,600 high school graduates compete for insufficient entry-level jobs
- 150,961 workers (31% of employment) are in high-automation-risk occupations

- Median wages in the county's three largest occupation groups fall short of the living wage: Office/Administrative Support, Transportation, and Sales

Even without overlap (which certainly exists), these figures suggest that at least 100,000 Bergen County residents—roughly 20% of our labor force—face either current underemployment, imminent displacement risk, or wages insufficient for economic self-sufficiency. This is the population our workforce system must prioritize.

WIOA performance accountability measures placement and retention—critical metrics that Bergen County will continue to meet and exceed. However, **true success requires looking beyond these baseline measures**. Placement in a survival-wage job that perpetuates ALICE status is not success; it merely shifts struggling workers from unemployment to underemployment. The workforce system must prioritize placement quality alongside placement quantity. Individual Employment Plans should include frank discussions about post-exit career trajectories: What advancement opportunities exist? What additional credentials enable wage progression? How do participants move from entry-level to family-sustaining wages within 2-3 years? True success means participants exit our system not just employed, but positioned on pathways with realistic potential for economic self-sufficiency.

1.6.4 Economic Insecurity in Bergen County: The ALICE Reality

While Bergen County's median household income of \$123,715 suggests universal prosperity, a deeper analysis reveals a stark and growing divide. The ALICE framework—which measures Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed households—exposes the economic fragility hidden beneath our county's affluent veneer.

The Scale of Economic Insecurity

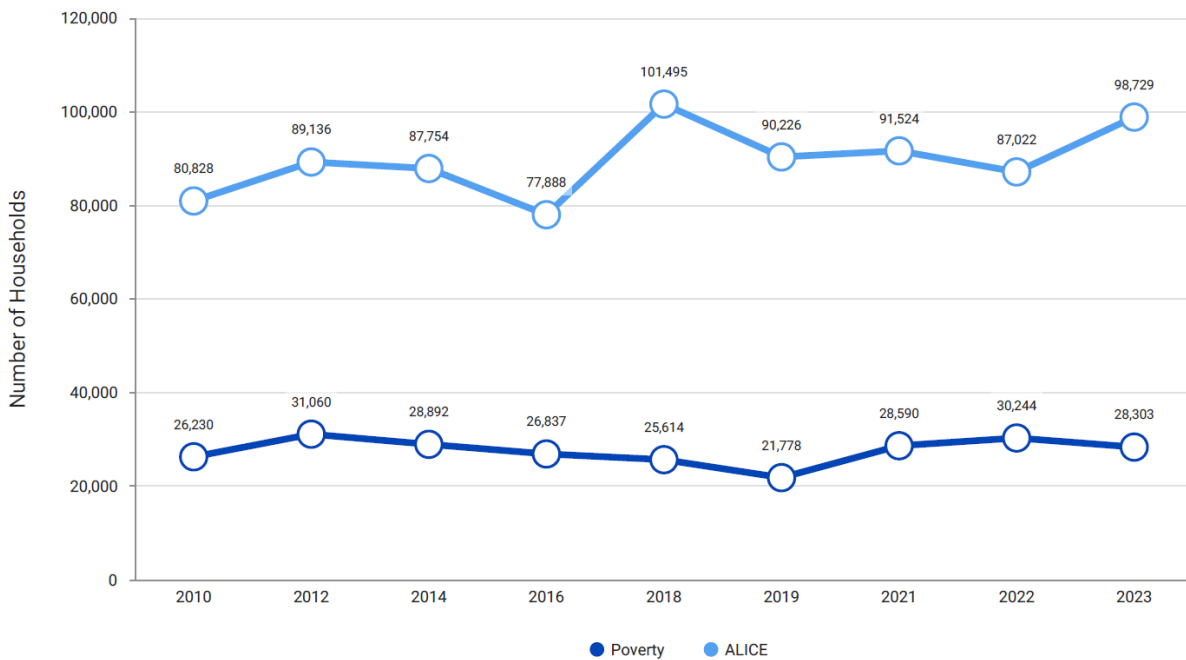
As of 2023, 127,032 Bergen County households (35.6% of all households) struggle to afford basic necessities despite our region's wealth:

- **Poverty Households:** 28,303 (7.9%) live below the Federal Poverty Level

- **ALICE Households:** 98,729 (27.7%) earn above poverty but cannot afford the county's actual cost of living
- **Above ALICE Threshold:** Only 229,406 households (64.4%) achieve true economic security

The ALICE threshold represents the bare minimum income required to afford housing, childcare, food, transportation, healthcare, and basic technology without public or private assistance. In Bergen County, this survival budget is well above the federal poverty line, reflecting our region's high cost of living.

Number of ALICE and Poverty-Level Households, New Jersey, 2023



A Troubling Trend: Economic Insecurity is Worsening

Rather than improving with the post-pandemic recovery, economic insecurity has intensified. Between 2010 and 2023:

- **ALICE households increased by 17,901 (+22.1%),** growing from 80,828 to 98,729 households
- **The share of struggling households rose from 32.1% to 35.6%**—a 3.5 percentage point increase affecting an additional 23,436 households
- **2023 saw the sharpest single-year increase,** with ALICE households jumping from 87,022 (2022) to 98,729 (2023)—an addition of 11,707 struggling households in just one year

This recent surge suggests that cost-of-living pressures—particularly housing, childcare, and healthcare—are outpacing wage growth even for working families. The "ALICE population" is not unemployed; they are the working poor and the working middle class who cannot achieve economic stability despite full-time employment.

Geographic Disparities: Municipal-Level Vulnerability

Economic insecurity is not distributed evenly across Bergen County. Municipal-level ALICE analysis reveals significant geographic variation in economic vulnerability, with some communities experiencing substantially higher rates of struggling households than the county average of 35.6%. These patterns reflect complex factors including local employment accessibility, housing costs, transportation infrastructure, and demographic composition.

Understanding these geographic disparities informs strategic resource allocation and partnership engagement. The WDB will share municipal-level ALICE data with One-Stop partners, training providers, and community stakeholders to:

- Guide targeted outreach and engagement strategies by partner organizations
- Inform decisions about satellite service locations and community-based partnerships
- Support coordination with municipal social services and community organizations
- Enable data-driven discussions with employers about workforce accessibility and local hiring

While the WDB does not conduct direct job seeker outreach, providing this geographic intelligence to system partners ensures that workforce services reach the residents who need them most. Detailed municipal-level ALICE data is included in Appendix [X] for partner planning purposes.

Strategic Implications for Workforce Development

The ALICE data fundamentally reframes our workforce challenge. The traditional measure of success—reducing unemployment—is insufficient when more than one-third of households cannot afford basic necessities despite having jobs. This reality demands that the Bergen County workforce system:

1. **Prioritize living wage outcomes** over simple job placement metrics
2. **Target services to ALICE communities** through data sharing with partners who conduct direct outreach
3. **Address whole-family barriers** (childcare, housing, transportation) that prevent career advancement
4. **Focus on career progression** from entry-level to family-sustaining wages within 2-3 years
5. **Partner with employers** to create wage progression pathways and stackable credentials

The living wage gap documented in Section 3.6.2, combined with the ALICE household trends shown here, proves that Bergen County's prosperity is not reaching a substantial portion of our residents. Closing this gap—moving 127,032 struggling households toward economic security—is the ultimate measure by which this workforce plan will be judged.

1.7 LMI Systems and Ongoing Analysis

This plan isn't meant to sit on a shelf. The Bergen County Workforce Development Board (BCWDB) is committed to keeping it alive and responsive through continuous data analysis and real-time intelligence gathering. We combine formal state-level labor

market information (LMI) with on-the-ground insights from our board members, committee participants, partners, and employers.

How We Track Labor Market Changes

The BCWDB has strengthened its analytical capacity by investing in a dedicated performance and monitoring staff position. This role develops more effective data-collection processes, produces quarterly performance dashboards, and works with our One-Stop Operator to consistently track outcomes across programs.

We don't analyze data randomly—we've built it into our governance structure:

- **Quarterly Committee Review:** Our standing committees (Youth, Abilities, WFNJ, etc.) meet quarterly to review LMI and performance data for their respective focus areas. Each committee receives tailored intelligence briefs on youth employment and education pipeline trends, outcomes for people facing barriers, and employer demand signals.
- **System-Wide Strategic Review:** Every quarter, the Operations Committee compiles findings from all standing committees to evaluate how well the system is working and how effective our partnerships are. They forward recommendations to the Executive Committee and then to the full Board for policy decisions and resource allocation.
- **Emerging Technology and Automation Monitoring:** Automation threatens 31% of county jobs—150,961 positions. We're establishing ongoing monitoring to track these risks using NJDOL data. This tracking will identify displacement patterns and reskilling needs **before** layoffs happen, not after. This early warning system will inform where we invest training dollars, which occupations we prioritize, and how we guide career counseling.

Where Our Intelligence Comes From

The BCWDB gathers intelligence through multiple channels working together:

The NJDOL Partnership: Our partnership with our dedicated Labor Market Analyst from the New Jersey Department of Labor (NJDOL) is the foundation of our formal LMI. This partnership gives us timely access to:

- Labor force statistics and industry/occupational employment updates
- Occupational projections and comprehensive wage data
- Job posting analytics, skills demand tracking, and automation risk assessments
- Customized reports on Bergen County trends and regional comparisons
- Technical help interpreting data and understanding statistical methods

We give back by sharing local context on employers and workforce dynamics, helping NJDOL understand what's really happening on the ground.

AI-Powered Analysis: The BCWDB now has access to AI-powered tools that enable us to analyze data in-house and share intelligence quickly. We can rapidly analyze trends, create visualizations, produce intelligence briefs that anyone can understand, and respond to time-sensitive questions. This positions Bergen County to serve as a workforce intelligence resource for the region.

Integrated Stakeholder Intelligence Network: Our most valuable asset is our people—Board and committee members, and workforce partners who represent a cross-section of the community. But we need to expand this network substantially in three critical areas:

- **Partner Program Intelligence:** Better data sharing with partners and stakeholders will give us a more complete picture of client journeys, needs, service gaps, and outcomes. Instead of viewing data in silos, we'll integrate intelligence from multiple program data systems, focus groups, surveys, and environmental scans to gain a broader view of system-wide performance.
- **Community-Based Organization (CBO) Engagement:** CBOs serving priority populations have ground-level knowledge of barriers, service gaps, and community needs that formal data can't capture. We need more CBO representation on committees and in strategic planning.

- Employer and Business Engagement:** We're actively expanding employer engagement to gain real-time insights into hiring challenges, skill gaps, work-based learning capacity, and emerging job requirements. Employer partnerships are vital for creating customized training, career pathways, and work-based learning opportunities—especially for people who face the most significant barriers: individuals with limited English proficiency, people with disabilities, those receiving public assistance, people with justice involvement, and older workers changing careers. These groups often face employer perception barriers that can only be overcome through direct employer education, collaboration, and demonstrated success. Our planned Employer Advisory Council (Priority 6), working alongside the Business Services teams, will create a structured approach to gather employer input and consistently advocate for employers. This employer intelligence and partnership are essential to ensuring that training investments match actual labor market demand—not assumptions—and that work-based learning pathways are accessible to all residents, not just those who are already job-ready.
-

1.8 Synthesis and Strategic Implications

The labor market analysis in this section reveals a Bergen County defined by paradox: exceptional education and economic output coexisting with economic insecurity, accelerating technological displacement, and persistent barriers to opportunity for priority populations.

1.8.1 The Economic Security Crisis

127,032 Bergen County households (35.6%) live below the ALICE economic survival threshold—they can't afford basic necessities despite the county's wealth. This represents a 22% increase in struggling households between 2022 and 2023, adding 11,707 families during what's supposed to be an economic recovery. A single adult needs \$42,252 annually (\$21.13/hour) just to survive; a family of four needs \$99,132 (\$49.57/hour). Yet the county's three largest occupation groups—Office and

Administrative Support, Transportation and Material Moving, and Sales—pay median wages that can't cover self-sufficiency. **41% of bachelor's degree holders work in jobs paying under \$50,000**, proving that credentials alone no longer guarantee economic security.

Strategic Implication: Job placement isn't enough when people need public assistance to survive in those jobs. The workforce system must shift from counting placements to ensuring progression—helping participants move from survival-wage jobs to family-sustaining careers. Training investments must prioritize pathways to living-wage occupations, and we must measure economic outcomes, not just employment outcomes.

1.8.2 The Automation Acceleration

31% of Bergen County jobs (150,961 positions) face a high or very high automation risk, concentrated in occupations that currently employ over 150,000 residents. This isn't theoretical future risk—displacement is happening now. Between 2022 and 2025, cashiers declined by 42% (from 9,920 to 5,726), laborers by 55% (from 7,620 to 3,421), and stockers by 53% (from 5,830 to 2,737). Technology is transforming occupations faster than the traditional planning cycles of the workforce system can keep pace.

Strategic Implication: Training for "in-demand" occupations today may produce graduates for obsolete jobs tomorrow. We must implement ongoing automation risk monitoring, prioritize training for automation-resilient occupations that require distinctively human skills, integrate automation risk assessment into career counseling, and develop rapid reskilling pathways for workers in declining occupations **before** layoffs occur, not after.

1.8.3 The Healthcare Dependency and Diversification Challenge

Healthcare dominates with 35% of employment (170,236 jobs), creating both opportunity and vulnerability. This concentration provides clear training pathways and deep employer relationships, but it exposes the economy to sector-specific shocks. The healthcare workforce is aging, facing chronic shortages, and offers career ladder

structures that enable progression from entry-level clinical support through registered nursing. Yet **27,000 Bergen County residents commute out of the county daily for work, signaling that** the local economy can't fully absorb our educated workforce across diverse sectors.

Strategic Implication: Healthcare must remain a workforce development priority given employment concentration, but we must simultaneously support economic diversification by building capacity in emerging sectors. Regional labor market integration requires coordination with neighboring counties on commuter patterns and cross-jurisdictional employer engagement. Healthcare career ladder development—with stackable credentials, prior learning assessment, and flexible scheduling—can serve as a model for other sectors while addressing immediate labor shortages.

1.8.4 The Educational Pipeline and Skills Mismatch

The K-12 educational pipeline has **declined by 6% over five years, foreshadowing future talent-supply** challenges. While 57% of residents hold an associate degree or higher (compared to 52% statewide), **educational attainment doesn't guarantee economic security**, as evidenced by high underemployment rates among degree holders. Meanwhile, skilled trades occupations offering living wages without four-year degrees face persistent stigma and recruitment challenges, despite wage parity with many bachelor-level careers.

Strategic Implication: The "college for all" paradigm must evolve to "credentials for careers," promoting multiple pathways to economic security. This requires sustained effort to educate counselors, parents, and students about the realities of skilled trades wages; expand apprenticeship and earn-and-learn models that provide debt-free career entry; and coordinate with educational institutions on career pathway development aligned with labor market demand rather than enrollment-driven program offerings.

1.8.5 The Barrier Population Challenge

WIOA priority populations—individuals with limited English proficiency, disabilities, justice involvement, veterans, displaced homemakers, older workers, and low-income adults and youth—face interconnected barriers that simple job placement services can't

address. The **loss of SCSEP funding eliminates critical services for residents 55+**, while the **elimination of Workforce Learning Link funding removes the county's in-house basic skills and employment ESL program**. Long waiting lists for remaining ESL services create bottlenecks, preventing new workers from entering the workforce.

Strategic Implication: Barrier elimination must be embedded throughout system design, not treated as a separate programming effort. Every policy, procedure, and vendor contract must be evaluated through an equity lens. We must strengthen partnerships with organizations serving barrier populations; implement more robust data-collection protocols that capture barrier population characteristics and outcomes; advocate for the expansion of ESL and basic skills provider capacity; and ensure accessibility (physical, digital, linguistic) becomes the norm, not an aspiration.

1.8.6 The System Capacity and Partnership Imperative

The WDB's small-team model means that system transformation depends on vendor capacity, partner coordination, and strategic convening. While current partnerships with DVRS, Veterans Services, and Title II providers are strong, we have opportunities to expand community and employer engagement capacity and improve data sharing across partners to create an integrated view of client journeys and system performance.

Strategic Implication: No single entity can address Bergen County's workforce challenges on its own. The system must evolve from operational coordination to a strategic partnership infrastructure focused on shared challenges and collective capacity building. This requires establishing formal mechanisms for employer input (an advisory council), convening training providers on stackable credentials and prior learning assessment, facilitating coordination among ESL providers, and implementing data-sharing agreements to enable holistic client services. Board and committee composition must expand to include more employers, community-based organizations, program participants, and partner program representatives, ensuring governance reflects community diversity and emerging sector needs.

1.8.7 The Intelligence and Continuous Improvement Foundation

The investments in performance and monitoring capacity, NJDOL partnership, AI-powered analytical tools, and committee-based governance structure provide a foundation for data-driven decision-making. However, intelligence gaps limit our strategic agility.

Strategic Implication: Intelligence infrastructure isn't an end in itself—it's an enabler of effective strategy. Enhanced LMI capacity must produce actionable intelligence—quarterly briefs translating data into implications for resource allocation, policy decisions, and priority refinement. We must transition from purely lagging indicators (what already happened) to incorporating leading indicators (what's emerging), enabling proactive rather than reactive responses. Bergen County can position itself as a workforce intelligence hub, sharing analytical data with stakeholders while benefiting from partner intelligence sharing.

1.8.8 The Path Forward

These findings reveal that incremental improvement isn't enough. The convergence of economic insecurity affecting over one-third of households, accelerating automation displacing traditional middle-wage occupations, persistent barriers excluding priority populations, and system capacity constraints demands strategic transformation.

The six priorities established in the next section emerge directly from this analysis and stakeholder input:

- **Priority 1 (Living Wage Pathways)** addresses the economic security crisis
- **Priority 2 (Automation Resilience)** confronts technological displacement
- **Priority 3 (Barrier Elimination)** ensures equitable access for priority populations
- **Priority 4 (Earn-and-Learn Scaling)** deploys the most effective intervention model
- **Priority 5 (Intelligence Hub)** builds the analytical foundation for evidence-based strategy
- **Priority 6 (Partnership Infrastructure)** creates the collaborative capacity transformation required

Success isn't measured by perfecting current operations but by fundamentally reorienting the system toward measurable economic outcomes—for Bergen County residents—such as living-wage attainment, automation resilience, and barrier elimination. The following section details how these priorities will be operationalized through governance, partnerships, resource allocation, and innovation.

SECTION 2.0: STRATEGIC PRIORITIES (2025-2027 UPDATE)

Introduction: From Analysis to Action

On the surface, our economy looks strong. Unemployment sits at just 3.86%. Nearly \$100 billion flows through our regional economy. But dig deeper and you'll find a different story.

More than 127,000 Bergen County families go to work every day, yet can't afford necessities—housing, food, childcare, and healthcare. That's 35.6% of our households. These families have jobs but still struggle to make ends meet. In just one year (2022-2023), another 11,707 families joined this group—a 22% increase.

The challenges go beyond wages. Technology threatens to eliminate over 150,000 jobs in the coming years. Young people face unemployment rates nearly triple the county average. And traditional training programs often prepare people for low-wage jobs rather than for careers that support families.

These problems demand more than minor improvements. They require strategic leadership—setting clear priorities, bringing people together, and holding the system accountable for results that actually matter. The Board also recognizes the core operational challenge in this work: **the tension between the need for rapid job placement and the goal of achieving high-quality, living-wage careers.** Our strategy is built to manage this tension by focusing on long-term sustainability.

The Bergen County Workforce Development Board provides this leadership. We don't deliver job training directly. Instead, we set the strategy, bring partners together, monitor performance, and ensure the system helps residents achieve economic security while meeting employers' needs for skilled workers.

This section presents six strategic priorities that will guide Bergen County's workforce system through 2027. These priorities come from three sources: rigorous analysis of labor market data, extensive stakeholder conversations, and alignment with federal, state, and regional workforce requirements.

Our priorities focus on what matters most—not only how many people complete programs, but whether they get jobs that pay enough to support their families. Not just equal access for everyone, but fair results for people who face extra barriers. Not short-term training fads, but long-term career sustainability.

2.1 Strategic Framework: The Bergen County Workforce Imperative

Bergen County's economy appears impressively strong. We have nearly \$100 billion in economic activity, highly educated residents, and unemployment at just 3.86%. Yet beneath these numbers lie serious challenges that demand action.

The workforce system must respond to these realities:

Economic Security Crisis

That 22% increase in struggling households tells an important story. Low unemployment doesn't mean people earn enough to live on. Many Bergen County residents work full-time yet still struggle to pay rent, buy groceries, and afford childcare. We call these workers ALICE—Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed. They have jobs but not economic security.

Automation Acceleration

Technology is rapidly changing, which jobs will continue to exist and which will transform. By 2032, we expect cashier jobs to decline by 42%, laborer positions by 55%, and stock clerk roles by 53%. When we help someone train for a career, we need to consider whether that job will still exist in five or ten years. Career counselors must help people make informed decisions about the long-term sustainability of their employment.

Credential-Employment Mismatch

Here's a puzzling pattern. More than half of job postings (53%) require bachelor's degrees, but 57% of Bergen County residents lack four-year degrees. At the same time,

41% of people with bachelor's degrees work in jobs paying under \$50,000 annually. Clearly, credentials alone don't guarantee good wages. We need to focus on career pathways with actual wage growth, not just degrees and certificates.

Barrier Population Challenges

Some groups face extra obstacles to good employment. Young people experience unemployment at 15.7%—nearly triple the overall rate. English language learners, people with disabilities, formerly incarcerated individuals, and others face systemic barriers that standard job programs don't address.

Educational Pipeline Gaps

New Jersey's total postsecondary (college and university) enrollment is estimated to be almost 10% lower in 2024–2025 than in 2018, with community college enrollment falling more sharply (by about 13–25% below 2018 levels, by some estimates). Meanwhile, earn-while-you-learn programs (apprenticeships, on-the-job training, paid internships) remain underused even though research shows they work.

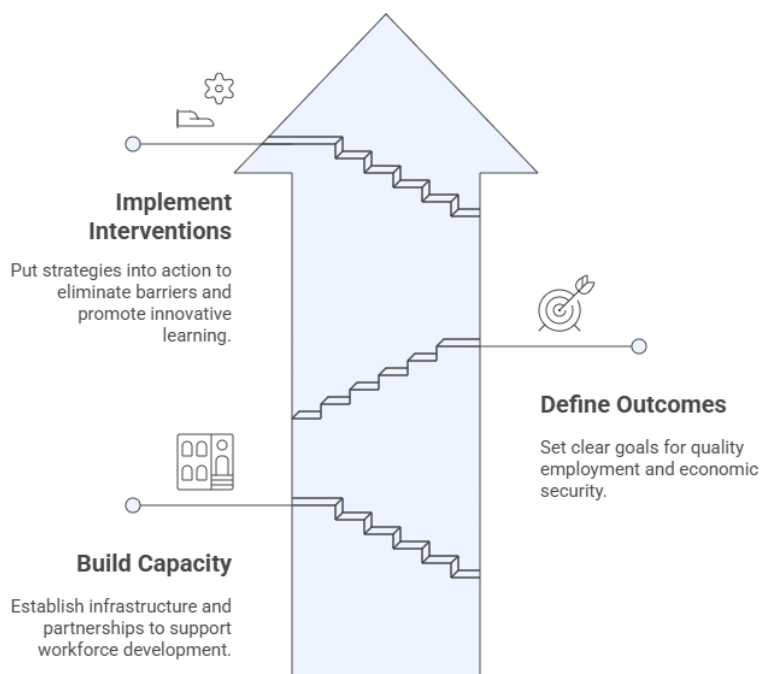
Now is the time for bold action.

We have new board leadership, stronger partnerships, new service vendors, more staff capacity, and better data tools than ever before. Our connections with employers, schools, community organizations, and government give us real capacity to make change. These priorities align with federal, state, and regional workforce goals while addressing Bergen County's unique challenges.

Strategic Priority Framework: How the Priorities Work Together

Our six strategic priorities form an integrated system. Think of it like building a house. You need a strong foundation before you can build walls and add a roof. The priorities work the same way.

Achieving Quality Employment



TIER 1: FOUNDATION (Building System Capacity)

- Priority 1: Strategic Partnership Infrastructure
- Priority 2: Regional Workforce Intelligence Hub

↓ *enables*

TIER 2: OUTCOMES (Defining Quality Employment)

- Priority 3: Living Wage Gap & Economic Security
- Priority 4: Automation-Resilient Career Pathways

↓ *put into action through*

TIER 3: INTERVENTIONS (Making Strategy Real)

- Priority 5: Barrier Elimination & Equitable Access
- Priority 6: Earn-and-Learn Models & Alternative Pathways

Four cross-cutting themes will guide the implementation of all priorities:

- **Equity:** Ensuring all decisions and outcomes are fair and inclusive.
 - **Data-Driven:** Using evidence, not assumptions, to make strategic choices.
 - **Partnership:** Acting as a convener to achieve collective impact.
 - **Innovation:** Encouraging creative solutions and new service models.
-

The foundation priorities (1-2) build system capacity. Priority 1 builds partnerships so everyone works together rather than separately. Priority 2 develops better data and intelligence so we make decisions based on evidence, not guesswork. These enable everything else.

The outcome priorities (3-4) define what success looks like. Priority 3 says employment should provide economic security—wages that actually cover living costs. Priority 4 says careers should be sustainable in the long term, not vulnerable to automation. These set the standard we measure against.

The intervention priorities (5-6) make the strategy real. Priority 5 eliminates barriers so people facing extra challenges can access and complete programs. Priority 6 scales up earn-while-you-learn models so people don't have to choose between training and paying bills. These turn strategy into action.

Together, these priorities translate Bergen County's workforce challenges into concrete plans. They hold the board and our partners accountable for real progress toward economic security for all residents.

2.2 PRIORITY 1: Build Stronger Partnerships

The Challenge

No single organization can solve Bergen County's workforce problems alone. Employers know what skills they need, but can't find trained workers. Training schools

want to prepare people for good jobs but don't always know which skills matter most. Community groups work with job seekers who face barriers but lack connections to employers.

Success requires everyone working together—not just occasionally, but systematically.

What the Board Will Do

The board acts as the connector. We bring together employers, schools, community organizations, and government agencies. We help them coordinate their work. And we hold everyone accountable for results.

Strategic Actions

Create an Employer Advisory Council

Right now, employers informally share their needs with us. We need something more systematic. Beyond our board members, the council gives more employers a regular seat at the table to guide our priorities, connect businesses with training programs, open doors for people with barriers, and champion earn-while-you-learn programs. This work is directly supported by our vendor's contractual goal to **engage 300 regional employers annually**.

Strengthen Board Committees & Capacity

Board committees do the detailed work that makes governance effective. We will strengthen our internal capacity by:

- Developing a **Board Skills Matrix** to identify functional expertise gaps (like data analysis, finance, or marketing).
- Using this matrix to drive **targeted board recruitment** to ensure we have the right expertise to govern this new strategy.

Formalize Educational Partnerships

We're strengthening collaborations with our education partners and other institutions to build "stackable credential pathways," allowing clients to step in and out of education as

needed, build upon their existing skills, and gain industry-recognized credentials that lead to better job opportunities.

Expand Community Organization Partnerships

We need deeper relationships with organizations that already serve our priority populations. This includes:

- Creating clear referral processes so people get connected seamlessly.
- Establishing an **ESL provider network coordination** to align the county's fragmented language services and connect them to career pathways.

Enhance Public Engagement

Partnership extends to the public. We will enhance our public-facing role by:

- Investing in modern **online engagement tools, including our website and social media**, to make services more accessible to job seekers and employers.

Leverage the One-Stop Operator Role

Federal law requires a One-Stop Operator to coordinate all the partners in our career centers. This role ensures partners work together smoothly and that the customer experience is high-quality.

How We'll Measure Success

We'll track partnership effectiveness through both activities and results:

Partnership Development:

- Employer Advisory Council was established with active participation from key industries.
- Committee attendance consistently above 75%, with members actively filling our Board Skills Matrix.
- Formal partnership agreements (MOUs) were signed for key partner initiatives.

Partnership Impact:

- **Convening an Annual Partner Summit** for strategic alignment and system-wide accountability.
 - Employer input directly influences training investment decisions.
 - Service delivery gaps (like ESL access) are identified and addressed through new partnerships.
 - Achieving our vendor metric of **engaging 300 regional employers**.
-

2.3 PRIORITY 2: Build Better Workforce Intelligence

The Challenge

Good decisions require good data. Right now, workforce information is scattered across different systems and partners. This makes it hard to spot emerging trends or measure whether our strategies work. We need comprehensive, timely labor market intelligence that's easy to understand and use.

What the Board Will Do

Build data systems and analytical capacity that enable evidence-based decisions. Then share that intelligence with partners so everyone makes better strategic choices.

Strategic Actions

Develop Comprehensive Labor Market Intelligence

Our vendor is now contractually motivated to produce a **Local Labor Market Environmental Scan**. This report will serve as our real-time dashboard, tracking employment trends, automation risk, and career pathway data.

Create Accessible Intelligence Products

Raw data doesn't help anyone. We'll transform this complex information into valuable insights through:

- **Quarterly Workforce Briefings** highlighting emerging trends and what they mean for strategy—delivered in plain language.
- As our capacity matures, these briefings may expand into an **Annual State of the Workforce Summit**.
- Priority occupation profiles providing detailed analysis of high-demand, high-wage careers.

Share Intelligence Internally and Externally

Bergen County shouldn't work in isolation. We'll position ourselves as a regional workforce intelligence hub by:

- Coordinating with neighboring counties to share data and analysis.
- Providing **training for our own Board and Committee members** on how to interpret and use this new labor market intelligence for effective, data-driven governance.
- Engaging employers systematically to gather real-time intelligence.

Use Predictive Analytics

New AI-enabled tools let us move from reactive to proactive planning, forecasting occupational trends, and identifying skill gaps before they become crises.

How We'll Measure Success

Intelligence is only valuable if people use it to make better decisions:

Intelligence Development:

- **Quarterly Workforce Briefings** are published and distributed to stakeholders.
- **Local Labor Market Environmental Scan** and **Strategic Action Reports** approved by the Board.
- Priority occupation profiles developed for the top 20 high-demand careers.

Intelligence Impact:

- Training investment decisions explicitly citing labor market data in justification.

- Partner organizations use workforce briefings to inform their strategic plans.
 - Board and Committee meeting minutes reflecting the use of LMI in policy-making.
-

2.4 PRIORITY 3: Focus on Jobs That Pay Enough to Live On

The Challenge

Traditional workforce programs measure success by placement rates. But getting a job isn't enough if it doesn't pay enough to cover basic living expenses. In Bergen County, 127,032 households—more than one in three families—are employed but can't afford necessities.

Employment alone is insufficient. We need to prioritize jobs that provide real economic security.

What the Board Will Do

Reframe workforce success from job placement to economic security. Use living wage thresholds to measure quality employment. Prioritize training investments toward careers that offer paths to family-sustaining wages, while respecting participants' right to choose their own career path.

Strategic Actions

Adopt Economic Security Standards

We're implementing ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) thresholds as our standard for quality employment. These represent the bare minimum for stability. We'll evaluate training investments and program performance against these standards.

Prioritize Careers With Living-Wage Pathways

Not all training opportunities are equal. We're shifting resources toward occupations that offer family-sustaining wages and advancement opportunities (such as healthcare, tech, and skilled trades).

- The board establishes policy directing **at least 60% of discretionary training dollars toward occupations that have a documented living-wage pathway**, even if the entry-level wage is a training wage.

Require Career Advancement Planning

Getting someone a first job is just the beginning. We're moving beyond initial placement to long-term career sustainability by:

- Career mapping showing realistic pathways from entry-level to advanced positions.
- Tracking wages over time, not just at placement. We will explore **piloting voluntary "alumni engagement" strategies** to track long-term **wage sustainability**.

Integrate Economic Security Into Counseling

Career counseling must transparently address wage adequacy, using economic security calculators and family budget planning to help participants make informed choices.

How We'll Measure Success

We measure success through economic security outcomes, not just employment numbers:

Training Investment Patterns:

- At least 60% of discretionary training dollars are directed toward occupations with documented **living-wage pathways**.
- Increasing alignment between training investments and high-wage, high-demand occupations.

Participant Outcomes:

- Average entry wages at placement are increasing annually.
- Percentage of participants placed in jobs meeting economic security thresholds.
- Wage progression was documented at 6-month and 12-month follow-up.

System Changes:

- All career counselors are trained on economic security concepts and using them in participant interactions.
 - Career advancement planning was documented in at least 80% of participant files.
-

2.5 PRIORITY 4: Prepare People for Jobs That Won't Disappear**The Challenge**

Technology is rapidly affecting which jobs exist and which jobs disappear. Bergen County could lose more than 150,000 jobs to automation. Training someone for a career that won't exist in five years sets them up for future displacement.

What the Board Will Do

Integrate automation risk assessment into career counseling. Ensure participants understand which careers are at high risk of displacement. Prioritize training toward automation-resilient occupations. Focus on developing skills that are hard to automate.

Strategic Actions**Integrate Automation Risk Assessment**

Every occupation has a different level of automation vulnerability. We're making this information transparent in career counseling, including risk scoring for each occupation and identifying alternative, resilient pathways that match a participant's skills. This is supported by the Department of Labor's Automation Index, which analyzes technological trends affecting the workforce.

Focus on Skills That Are Hard to Automate

We're emphasizing capabilities that machines can't replicate:

- Complex problem-solving and critical thinking.

- Emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills.
- Adaptive learning and creativity.

Champion Hybrid Roles and Emerging Careers

The future is about working *alongside* technology. We're prioritizing:

- Technology-adjacent positions (e.g., robotic system operators).
- Emerging hybrid roles (e.g., healthcare informatics specialists).
- Green economy pathways in renewable energy and sustainability.

Build Technology Literacy as a Foundation

Every participant should develop baseline digital skills, including software proficiency, digital communication, data literacy, and AI collaboration skills.

How We'll Measure Success

We track automation resilience through training patterns and career sustainability:

Training Investment Patterns:

- Declining investment in high-automation-risk occupations.
- Increasing investment in automation-resilient careers.
- All clients have access to technology literacy.

Career Counseling Integration:

- Automation risk information was presented to 100% of participants during career exploration.
- Career counselors are trained on automation trends.
- Our vendor's **Internal Quality Assurance Process** will be used to audit case files and ensure these counseling conversations are happening.

Participant Outcomes:

- Declining placements in occupations are projected for significant job loss.
- Increasing placements in occupations projected to grow or remain stable.

2.6 PRIORITY 5: Remove Barriers to Success

The Challenge

Federal law prioritizes serving people facing significant employment barriers—young people, older workers, low-income individuals, English language learners, people with disabilities, formerly incarcerated individuals, veterans, and displaced homemakers.

Without targeted support, these groups remain locked out of opportunity.

What the Board Will Do

Set equity standards. Monitor outcomes broken down by demographics to spot disparities. Hold program vendors accountable for comprehensive support that addresses barriers. Encourage innovation in serving these populations.

Strategic Actions by Population

Young People (Ages 16-24)

Youth face unemployment at 15.7%—nearly triple the overall rate. They need targeted help:

- **Comprehensive youth program elements** delivering all 14 components required by federal law, not cherry-picking easy ones. This includes tutoring, work experience, financial literacy, leadership development, adult mentoring, and more.
- **Focusing on out-of-school youth** who face the most significant challenges— young people not in school and not working, often called "disconnected youth."
- **Emphasizing paid work experience** so that young people build employment history while earning money. First jobs matter enormously for long-term career trajectories.
- **Providing mentorship and leadership development**, addressing soft skills through relationships. Many young people haven't had professional role models.

- **Supporting educational attainment**, enabling credential completion alongside employment.

Older Workers (Age 55+)

Older workers bring valuable experience but face distinct challenges:

- **Helping translate skills** so workers can articulate how their experience applies to different roles or industries.
- **Addressing technology gaps** through patient, respectful training, recognizing that older workers didn't grow up with digital tools but can absolutely learn them.
- **Providing career transition counseling** for navigating industry shifts and role changes when previous careers become obsolete.
- **Advocating with employers** against age discrimination, highlighting the reliability, experience, and work ethic older workers offer.
- **Creating phased retirement pathways** enabling continued contribution with flexibility as people transition from full-time work.

Low-Income Individuals

Economic insecurity creates multiple interconnected barriers:

- **Transportation assistance** addressing mobility barriers. People can't get to work or training without reliable transportation.
- **Childcare coordination** ensures parents can participate in programs.
- **Emergency financial support** prevents crises from derailing progress. A car repair or medical bill shouldn't end someone's training.
- **Benefits counseling** helps navigate public assistance during the transition to employment.
- **Work supports** providing necessary tools and resources—appropriate clothing for interviews and work, and required equipment.

English Language Learners

Language barriers compound employment challenges:

- **Integrated English and vocational training** builds language skills in work context, not abstract classroom settings.
- **Industry-specific language instruction** focusing on workplace communication needs—the vocabulary and expressions used in healthcare, manufacturing, and hospitality.
- **Credential recognition assistance** helps navigate foreign credential evaluation.
- **Culturally responsive service delivery** ensuring respectful, practical support from staff who understand immigrants' experiences.
- **Multilingual career services** provide guidance in participants' primary languages.

People with Disabilities

Disabilities create unique accommodation and accessibility needs:

- **Individualized accommodation planning**, identifying what workplace supports someone needs to succeed—assistive technology, schedule flexibility, and physical accommodations.
- **Providing assistive technology** enabling participation in training and employment.
- **Educating employers** on addressing misconceptions about disability employment.
- **Navigating disability benefits**, understanding work incentives and supports, so employment doesn't automatically mean losing healthcare or income support.
- **Facilitating peer mentorship** connecting participants with successfully employed people with disabilities who can share firsthand experience and encouragement.

Formerly Incarcerated Individuals

Criminal records create significant employment barriers:

- **Record expungement assistance** helps people clear eligible convictions from their records when legally possible.

- **Advocating "ban the box" policies**, encouraging employers to evaluate candidates' qualifications before asking about criminal history.
- **Specialized job development** connecting people with second-chance employers who hire based on current capabilities, not past mistakes.
- **Coordinating reentry services** linking participants with housing, mental health, substance abuse treatment, and other supports affecting employment success.
- **Providing long-term retention support** addressing challenges that arise post-placement.

Veterans

Military service provides valuable training but requires translation to a civilian context:

- **Translating military skills** helping veterans articulate how their capabilities apply to civilian jobs.
- **Securing civilian credentials** for military training. Veterans often have extensive technical training that should count toward civilian certifications.
- **Connecting with military-friendly employers** who understand veteran culture and value what veterans offer.
- **Addressing transition challenges** from military to civilian work culture.
- **Coordinating VA benefits** ensuring veterans access all resources available to them through the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Displaced Homemakers

People returning to work after extended caregiving absence face unique challenges:

- **Assessing transferable skills** identifying capabilities from managing households, raising children, volunteering, or caring for aging parents.
- **Building confidence** addressing concerns about employment readiness after time away from formal workplaces.
- **Offering flexible training** accommodating ongoing family responsibilities.
- **Expanding career exploration** introducing people to opportunities beyond what they previously considered.

- **Educating employers** highlighting the value of mature, motivated workers with strong organizational and interpersonal skills.

Cross-Cutting Equity Strategies

Monitor Outcomes by Demographics

When data points are available, we'll track results broken down by age, race, ethnicity, gender, etc., to determine whether specific groups experience worse outcomes and require intervention. This is supported by vendor requirements to **map the job seeker experience** to find and fix "significant 'pain points'".

Implement Career Readiness Coaching

To improve success and reduce dropouts, we will implement pre-training support to ensure participants are genuinely prepared *before* enrollment, addressing internal barriers such as motivation and workplace expectations.

Provide Retention and Advancement Coaching

Success doesn't end at placement. We will provide post-placement support, including counseling, for at least 6 months to help participants navigate workplace challenges and ensure long-term success.

Pilot Innovative Service Models

We will encourage innovation by testing new, proven models, such as:

- **Peer mentorship programs** for barrier populations.
- **Employer "returnship" programs** for older workers or displaced homemakers re-entering the workforce.
- "Navigator" roles to guide clients through complex systems.

Deepen Community Partnerships

We collaborate closely with organizations already serving these populations—immigrant resource centers, disability advocacy groups, reentry programs—rather than duplicating their work.

How We'll Measure Success

We measure equity through proportional access and comparable outcomes:

Enrollment Patterns:

- Barrier population enrollment is proportional to area demographics.
- Increasing enrollment of older workers, English language learners, people with disabilities, and other priority populations year-over-year.

Service Quality:

- Comprehensive wraparound support (transportation, childcare, etc.) documented in participant files.
- Implementation of career readiness and retention coaching.
- **WFNJ TANF Participation Rate** is performing at or above the statewide median.

Outcome Equity:

- **95% of eligible WFNJ clients** have a completed Individual Employment Plan (IEP).
- Comparable completion, placement, and wage rates across demographic groups (gaps ≤ 10 percentage points).

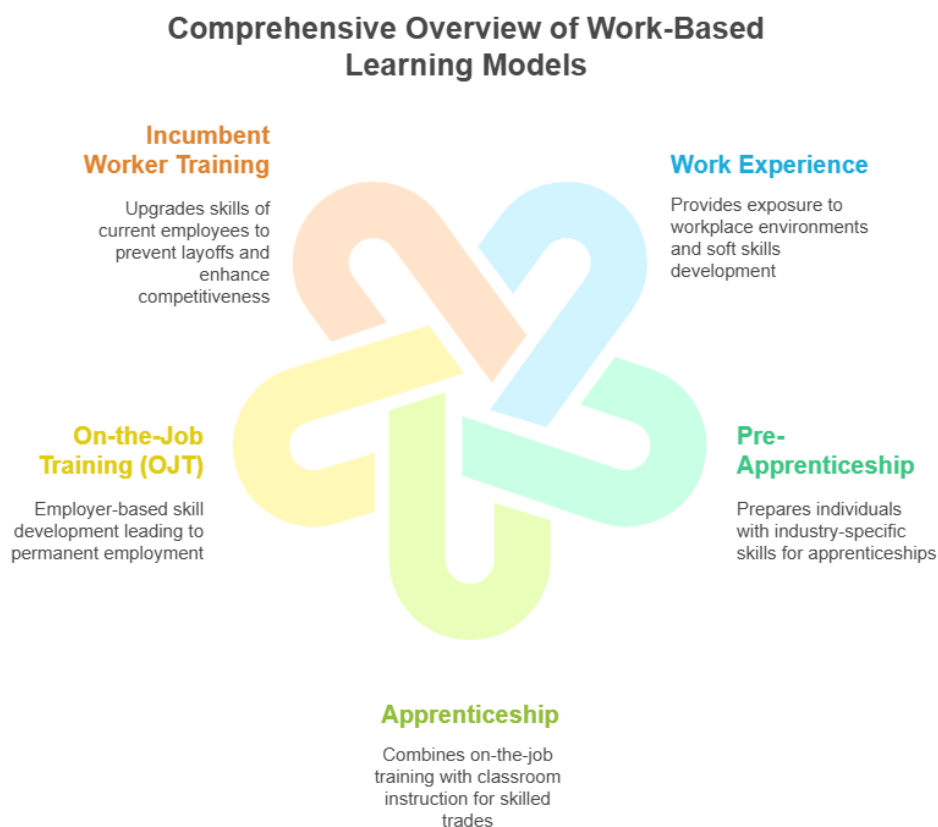
2.7 PRIORITY 6: Expand Earn-While-You-Learn Opportunities

The Challenge

Traditional training follows a "learn first, work later" model. This creates financial barriers for many people. Earn-while-you-learn models—apprenticeships, on-the-job training, paid internships—flip this approach. People earn wages while building skills. Despite proven effectiveness, these models remain underused.

What the Board Will Do

Scale work-based learning through clear policy expectations and system capacity development. This includes **incentivizing vendors** to use their existing business services staff and budgets to meet contractual WBL expansion goals.



Strategic Actions

Expand Apprenticeship Programs

We will enhance access to apprenticeships by:

- Partnering with established **Registered and Non-Registered Apprenticeship** programs.
- Building relationships with **labor unions, sponsors, and state/county apprenticeship coordinators** to serve as a pipeline, not a replacement.
- Supporting pre-apprenticeship programs to prepare people for entry.

Scale On-the-Job Training (OJT)

OJT programs subsidize employer costs while new employees gain skills. We will:

- Educate businesses about OJT benefits and simplify administration.
- Pilot innovative career ladder models. For example, a participant might first use an ITA to complete foundational classroom training for an initial occupation. After certification, they could then be "leveled up" into a progressive, higher-wage role with an employer using an OJT for that new, distinct skillset.

Increase Paid Internships and Work Experiences

Particularly critical for young people and career changers, we will expand paid opportunities for skill-building in real workplaces, such as **Youth Work Experience and the WFNJ Community Work Experience Program (CWEP) sites**.

Develop Credential Pathways That Build on Each Other

Training programs should connect.

We will:

- Map credential pathways from entry-level to advanced certifications.
- Enable **strategic co-enrollment** with partners like Vocational Rehabilitation, TANF, and SNAP E&T to maximize resources and support for participants.
- Recognize prior learning to accelerate progress.

Address Employer Barriers

We will reduce administrative burdens, provide risk mitigation, and offer financial incentives to make it easier for employers to participate.

How We'll Measure Success

We track work-based learning expansion through placements, employer engagement, and sustainability:

Work-Based Learning Growth:

- **Executing 40 On-the-Job Training (OJT) contracts** per year.
- **Developing 40 new Community Work Experience Program (CWEP) sites** for WFNJ participants.
- Exceeding **Youth Work Experience** requirements.

Employer Engagement:

- **Engaging 300 regional employers** in services annually.
- **Creating 175 new job postings** directly from employers for our clients.
- 75%+ of participating employers continue partnerships year-over-year.

Participant Outcomes:

- Work-based learning participants showing higher completion, placement, and retention rates than classroom-only training.

2.8 Implementation Framework and Board Accountability

Strategic priorities don't implement themselves. They require systematic execution. The board makes strategy real through governance structures, vendor accountability, continuous improvement, and transparent communication.

2.8.1 Governance and Oversight

Board Committees Drive Implementation

Each committee is responsible for monitoring relevant priorities, reviewing quarterly performance data, and recommending solutions.

Vendor Accountability and Performance Management

Vendor contracts explicitly incorporate strategic priorities. We now have additional **contractual benchmarks**, including:

- Employer engagement and OJT creation.
- IEP completion rates and WFNJ participation rates.

- Developing and executing an **Internal Quality Assurance Process**.
- Mapping and optimizing the **Job Seeker Experience**.
- Producing the **Labor Market Environmental Scan**.

We meet with vendors regularly to analyze outcomes, identify challenges, and provide support.

Stakeholder Engagement and Communication

The board operates transparently through public meetings, regular communication of performance data, accessible reporting on workforce intelligence, and systematic stakeholder input.

2.8.2 Timeline and Phasing (2025-2027)

Year 1 (2025-2026): Foundation Building

- Establish Employer Advisory Council with charter and initial convenings
- Develop board skills matrix and initiate targeted recruitment
- Implement quarterly workforce intelligence publications
- Establish 2025 baselines for all key metrics
- Pilot ITA-OJT career ladder model with strict policy criteria
- Formalize apprenticeship coordinator partnerships
- Launch career readiness coaching requirements
- Develop initial career pathway maps for 3 priority occupations
- Expand youth services toward mandate compliance

Year 2 (2026-2027): Capacity Expansion

- Achieve 75%+ committee attendance with documented policy recommendations
- Convene inaugural annual partner summit
- Expand work-based learning placements 50% over baseline
- Develop stackable credential pathways for 5+ occupations
- Implement retention coaching for 60%+ of placements
- Achieve 60% of training dollars directed toward living-wage pathways
- Implement barrier-specific services for 4+ priority populations

- Expand OJT partnerships toward benchmarks through innovative approaches

Year 3 (2027-2028): Sustainability and Scale

- Achieve 80%+ employment readiness and retention coaching coverage
- Sustain work-based learning growth trajectory
- Evaluate ITA-OJT career ladder pilot and determine expansion
- Expand workforce intelligence capacity, potentially to a summit/webinar format
- Achieve living-wage pathway training investment target
- Demonstrate measurable improvement in barrier population service rates
- Document system-level outcomes demonstrating strategic priority impact

2.8.3 Success Indicators and Accountability

The board measures success through:

Governance Effectiveness:

- Board and committee attendance and engagement.
- Policy recommendations developed and implemented.
- Board composition reflecting diversity and skills matrix.
- Employer Advisory Council's influence on board decisions and innovation.

System Capacity:

- **Annual Partner Summit** convened.
- **Quarterly Workforce Intelligence** products are published and used by the Board.
- Partnership agreements formalized with educational institutions and community organizations.

System-Level Outcomes:

- Training investment distribution across occupational wage bands.
- Work-based learning participation rates across modalities.
- Average entry wages at placement.
- Barrier population service rates across categories.

Vendor Accountability:

- **300+** employers engaged annually.
- **40** OJT contracts executed.
- **175** new internal job postings created.
- **95%** IEP completion rate for WFNJ clients.
- **TANF Participation Rate** above the statewide median.

2.8.4 Continuous Improvement and Adaptation

The board commits to continuous improvement through:

Regular Evaluation:

- Quarterly committee reviews identify emerging issues
- Semi-annual board strategic discussions
- Annual comprehensive evaluation with stakeholder input
- Ongoing labor market intelligence monitoring

Adaptive Strategy:

- Willingness to adjust priorities based on data
- Pilot testing of innovations before full implementation
- Learning from implementation challenges
- Responsive to emerging economic conditions

Stakeholder Engagement:

- Regular input from the Employer Advisory Council
- Partner feedback through surveys and dialogues
- Participant voice through feedback mechanisms
- Community engagement on workforce needs

Transparency and Communication:

- Public posting of board meeting materials and minutes
- Regular communication of performance data

- Accessible reporting of workforce intelligence
- Clear accountability for outcomes

2.9 A Governance Framework for Economic Opportunity

2.9.1 WIOA Governance Areas Alignment

WIOA highlights 14 areas around which CEOs and LWDBs share governance responsibilities. Bergen County's six strategic priorities align with and operationalize these governance mandates as follows:

1. Local and Regional Planning

- **Priority 1 (Partnership):** Partnership coordination frameworks
- **Priority 2 (Intelligence):** Data-driven planning processes
- **Priority 3 (Living Wage):** Economic security focus
- **Priority 4 (Resilience):** Future-oriented analysis
- **Priority 5 (Barriers):** Equity planning standards
- **Priority 6 (Earn-and-Learn):** Earn-and-learn expansion strategy

2. Labor Market Information

- **Priority 1 (Partnership):** Employer intelligence through Advisory Council
- **Priority 2 (Intelligence):** Intelligence hub establishment
- **Priority 3 (Living Wage):** Wage progression data
- **Priority 4 (Resilience):** Automation risk monitoring
- **Priority 5 (Barriers):** Disaggregated outcome data
- **Priority 6 (Earn-and-Learn):** Work-based learning demand signals

3. Convening, Brokering, Leveraging

- **Priority 1 (Partnership):** Partner summits, MOUs, coordination
- **Priority 2 (Intelligence):** Data-sharing agreements
- **Priority 3 (Living Wage):** Training provider collaboration
- **Priority 4 (Resilience):** Employer dialogue on technology

- **Priority 5 (Barriers):** Wraparound service networks
- **Priority 6 (Earn-and-Learn):** Employer-training provider connections

4. Employer Engagement

- **Priority 1 (Partnership):** Employer Advisory Council establishment
- **Priority 2 (Intelligence):** Employer input on intelligence
- **Priority 3 (Living Wage):** Quality job creation dialogue
- **Priority 4 (Resilience):** Technology adoption insights
- **Priority 5 (Barriers):** Barrier population hiring advocacy
- **Priority 6 (Earn-and-Learn):** OJT, apprenticeship, work experience partnerships

5. Career Pathways Development

- **Priority 1 (Partnership):** Educational pipeline collaboration
- **Priority 2 (Intelligence):** Pathway mapping data
- **Priority 3 (Living Wage):** Living-wage career ladders
- **Priority 4 (Resilience):** Resilient occupation pathways
- **Priority 5 (Barriers):** Accessible pathway design
- **Priority 6 (Earn-and-Learn):** Stackable credentials, earn-and-learn integration

6. Proven and Promising Practices

- **Priority 1 (Partnership):** Partnership best practices
- **Priority 2 (Intelligence):** Predictive analytics adoption
- **Priority 3 (Living Wage):** Career pathway mapping
- **Priority 4 (Resilience):** Automation risk assessment protocols
- **Priority 5 (Barriers):** Wraparound coordination models
- **Priority 6 (Earn-and-Learn):** ITA-OJT career ladders, simplified templates

7. Technology

- **Priority 1 (Partnership):** Online engagement (website, social media)
- **Priority 2 (Intelligence):** AI-assisted analytics, dashboard systems
- **Priority 4 (Resilience):** Automation monitoring tools

- **Priority 5 (Barriers):** Remote service delivery technology
- **Priority 6 (Earn-and-Learn):** Work-based learning tracking systems

8. Program Oversight

- **Priority 1 (Partnership):** One-Stop Operator accountability
- **Priority 2 (Intelligence):** Performance monitoring systems
- **Priority 3 (Living Wage):** Training investment oversight
- **Priority 4 (Resilience):** Vendor sustainability guidance
- **Priority 5 (Barriers):** Barrier population service monitoring
- **Priority 6 (Earn-and-Learn):** Work-based learning vendor accountability

9. Local Performance Accountability Measures

- **Priority 1 (Partnership):** Partnership effectiveness indicators
- **Priority 2 (Intelligence):** Dashboard reporting, committee reviews
- **Priority 3 (Living Wage):** Wage outcome tracking
- **Priority 4 (Resilience):** Career advancement monitoring
- **Priority 5 (Barriers):** Disaggregated outcome review
- **Priority 6 (Earn-and-Learn):** Work-based learning placement metrics

10. Infrastructure Costs (N/A)

11. Selection of One-Stop Operators and Career Service Providers

- **Priority 1 (Partnership):** Coordination requirements in contracts
- **Priority 2 (Intelligence):** Data reporting requirements
- **Priority 3 (Living Wage):** Living-wage pathway standards
- **Priority 4 (Resilience):** Automation assessment mandates
- **Priority 5 (Barriers):** Barrier elimination service standards
- **Priority 6 (Earn-and-Learn):** Work-based learning development requirements

12. Coordination with Education Providers

- **Priority 1 (Partnership):** ESL provider network, educational partnerships
- **Priority 2 (Intelligence):** Training provider data-sharing

- **Priority 3 (Living Wage):** Curriculum alignment with high-wage occupations
- **Priority 4 (Resilience):** Resilient occupation training
- **Priority 5 (Barriers):** Pre-apprenticeship, barrier-specific programs
- **Priority 6 (Earn-and-Learn):** Stackable credentials, related technical instruction

13. Budget and Administration

- **Priority 1 (Partnership):** Resource allocation for convenings
- **Priority 2 (Intelligence):** Intelligence system investment
- **Priority 3 (Living Wage):** Training investment prioritization
- **Priority 4 (Resilience):** Sustainability analysis resources
- **Priority 5 (Barriers):** Supportive services, barrier-specific funding
- **Priority 6 (Earn-and-Learn):** Work-based learning budget accountability

14. Accessibility for Individuals with Disabilities

- **Priority 1 (Partnership):** Abilities Committee, inclusive recruitment
- **Priority 2 (Intelligence):** Disaggregated disability outcome data
- **Priority 3 (Living Wage):** Accessible living-wage pathways
- **Priority 4 (Resilience):** Career sustainability for disabled workers
- **Priority 5 (Barriers):** Disability-specific services, accommodations
- **Priority 6 (Earn-and-Learn):** Accessible work-based learning opportunities

2.9.2 The Governance Challenge We Accept

These six strategic priorities represent the Bergen County Workforce Development Board's commitment to fulfilling its governance mandate: establishing strategic direction, convening stakeholders, monitoring system performance, and holding partners and vendors accountable for results.

The framework recognizes our unique position—**not as a service provider, but as a strategic architect** ensuring the workforce system produces outcomes that matter:

- Participants achieving economic security, not just employment
- Employers accessing skilled talent to meet their needs

- People facing barriers accessing real opportunity, not just programs
- Our regional economy is strengthened through workforce development

Success requires the board to operate effectively in its governance role: Setting clear policy. Establishing robust partnerships. Demanding data-driven decisions. Monitoring performance rigorously. And holding the system accountable for results.

The board commits to this governance standard. We recognize that Bergen County's workforce and economic future depend on strategic leadership that translates labor market analysis into action, challenges into opportunities, and workforce services into pathways to economic security.

Workforce Development Success Framework



Three years from now (2028), success means:

For Participants:

- 60% of training investments directed toward **living-wage pathway occupations**.
- Increased average entry wages at placement.
- Participants receiving **career readiness** support *before* training and **retention coaching** *after* placement.
- Measurable improvement in barrier population service rates and outcomes.

For Employers:

- Active Employer Advisory Council influencing board policy.
- **40+** new OJT contracts and **40+** new CWEP sites annually.
- **300+** employers actively engaged with the system each year.
- Reduced talent pipeline challenges in priority occupations.

For the System:

- **Annual Partner Summit** driving system alignment.
- **Quarterly Workforce Intelligence** briefings informing stakeholder decisions.
- Formalized partnerships with ESL providers, apprenticeship coordinators, and community organizations.
- Sustainable vendor performance meeting clear contract standards.

For the Community:

- Demonstrable progress reducing the 127,032 ALICE households.
- Increased regional coordination on workforce intelligence.
- Enhanced equity in outcomes for barrier populations.
- Recognition as effective governance model.

The measure of this plan's success won't be its length or technical sophistication. Success means the workforce system demonstrably improves its capacity to help residents achieve family-sustaining wages, employers access skilled workers, and communities thrive economically.

That is the governance challenge the Bergen County Workforce Development Board accepts, and the accountability we embrace.

Section 3.0: One-Stop Career Center Operations

Bergen County's One-Stop Career Center system is the hub of our regional talent development strategy. It is our primary engine for connecting job seekers with opportunities and employers with skilled talent.

This operational framework is designed to be customer-centered, partner-integrated, and data-driven. It directly addresses Bergen County's core economic challenges, including creating pathways to living-wage careers for over 127,000 ALICE families and building a resilient workforce prepared for automation.

This section outlines our Center's service delivery model, our operational priorities, and the deep partnership network that makes it all possible.

Section 3.1: One-Stop Service Delivery and Flow

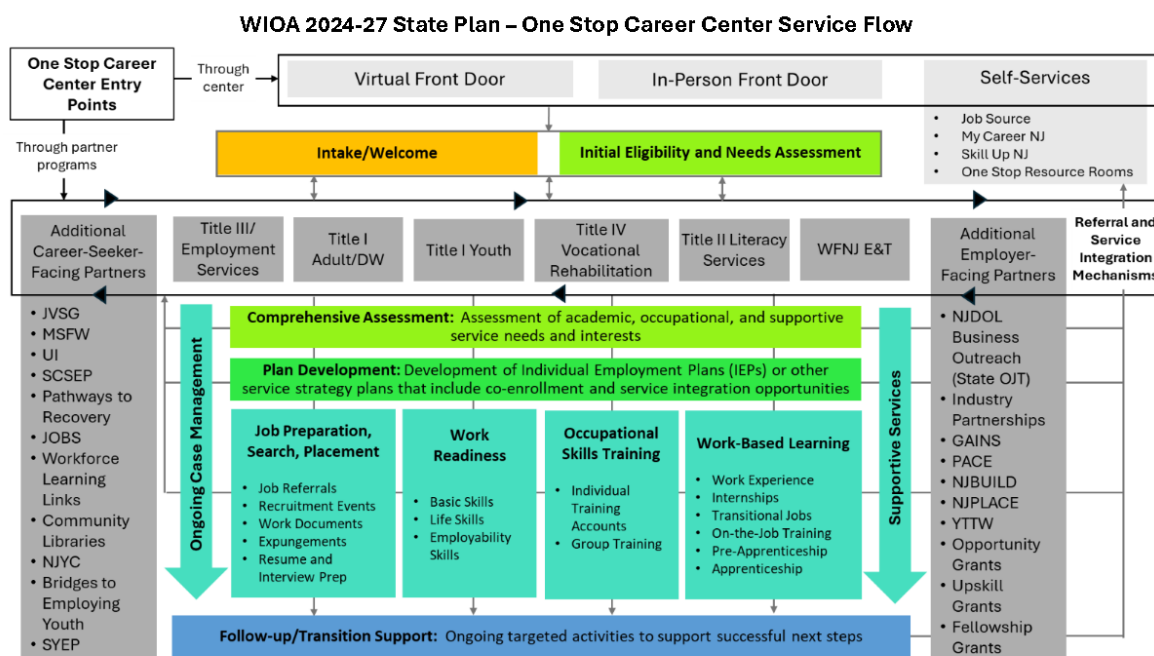
A "No Wrong Door" Customer Pathway

We operate a "no wrong door" system, ensuring every resident can access our full suite of services, regardless of how they connect with us. A person's journey can begin at our **physical front door** at the Bergen County Job Center in Hackensack, through our **virtual front door** on platforms like *My Career New Jersey*, or through one of our valued **community partners**, such as the local library.

Regardless of the entry point, their journey follows a clear, personalized pathway:

1. **Welcome & Orientation:** It begins with a welcoming orientation where our team greets them, understands their immediate needs, and connects them to the right resources.
2. **Assessment:** This leads to a comprehensive assessment to identify their skills, career interests, and any barriers to employment.
3. **Individualized Employment Plan:** Using those results, they co-create an Individualized Employment Plan or Service Strategy. This is a strategic map for their career, drawing on resources from all relevant programs.

4. **Service Engagement:** They then engage in services, which could include career coaching, skills training, work-based learning, or specialized workshops.
5. **Transition Support:** Our commitment continues with follow-up services for at least 12 months to support their success as they transition into employment and advance in their careers.

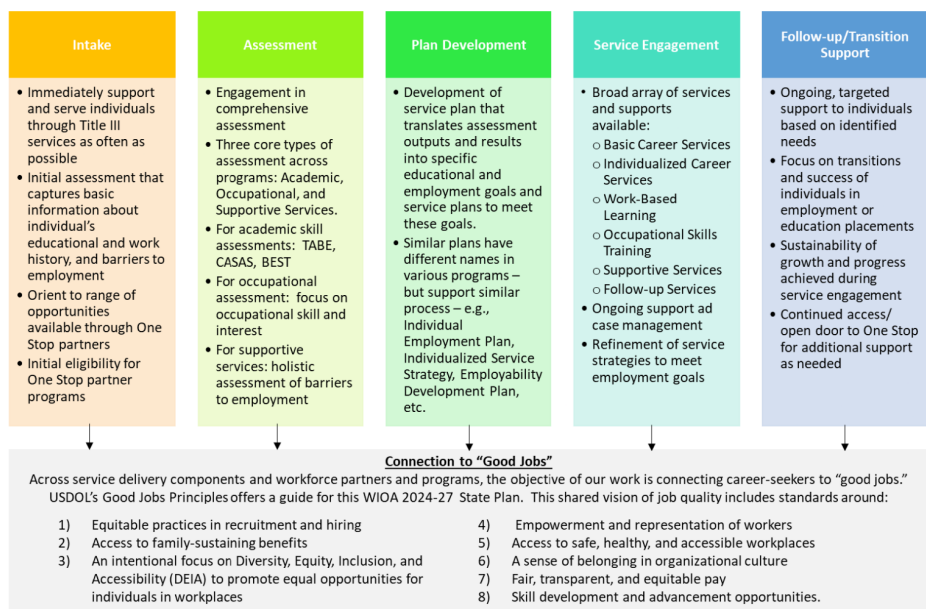


An Integrated Team Approach

To make this pathway seamless, we organize our staff into **functional teams** built around the customer's journey (e.g., Welcome, Assessment, Career Planning, Skills Development), and we cross-train them.

This structure ensures that all program staff can coordinate services across multiple programs—from adult education to public assistance. This approach includes **systematic referrals** and "warm handoffs" at every stage. Our universal intake process screens for eligibility across all major programs at the first point of contact, reducing duplication and ensuring customers get the maximum support available.

WIOA 2024-27 State Plan - Universal Service Delivery Components



A Spectrum of Support

We offer a spectrum of support, allowing customers to engage at the level that best suits their needs:

- **Self-Service Resources:** For those who prefer to work independently, we offer universal access to career exploration tools, labor market data, job search platforms, and resume software through our resource rooms and online portals.
- **Basic Career Services:** This level provides foundational support, including eligibility determinations, orientation, job search assistance, and referrals to our network of partners.
- **Individualized Career Services:** For customers needing more in-depth support, we offer comprehensive assessments, one-on-one career counseling, the development of an employment plan, and coordination of work experiences.
- **Training Services:** These are our most significant investments in a person's future. They include occupational skills training through providers on the state's Training Explorer, On-the-Job Training (OJT) with local employers, and Registered Apprenticeships.

- **Follow-Up Services:** To ensure long-term success, we provide counseling, career planning, and peer support for at least 12 months after a customer starts a new job.

Core Operational Principles

The following principles guide our daily operations:

- **Priority of Service:** In line with federal and state regulations, we proudly provide priority of service to **Veterans and eligible spouses**, as well as to **low-income individuals** and individuals with **basic skills deficiencies**.
- **Technology & Coordination:** Our core case management platform, America's One-Stop Operating System (AOSOS), is shared by our WIOA Title I, Wagner-Peyser, and Work First New Jersey partners. This shared system streamlines service for many of our customers. While other key partners, like Adult Education (Title II) and Vocational Rehabilitation (Title IV), use separate state-managed systems, our functional teams coordinate services through regular communication and joint case conferencing to ensure a seamless customer experience.
- **Continuous Engagement:** We view workforce development as an ongoing process, not a one-time transaction. Customers can re-engage at any point, access multiple programs simultaneously, and return for new services to support their career advancement over time.

Section 3.2: Operational Priorities

To translate our vision into daily practice, seven core priorities guide our One-Stop Career Center operations. These commitments ensure our system is integrated, accountable, and focused on delivering real-world results for Bergen County's residents and employers.

3.2.1 Creating a Seamless, Customer-Centered System

Our primary goal is to ensure every customer experiences a single, easy-to-navigate system. We are breaking down internal silos between programs and partners, organizing our teams around the customer's needs, not our own funding streams. This unified approach is guided by a shared vision and coordinated leadership, ensuring that every partner works toward the same goal: connecting Bergen County residents to living-wage careers.

3.2.2 Ensuring Strategic Governance and Accountability

The Bergen County Workforce Development Board (WDB) provides the strategic oversight and fiscal stewardship for our entire system. We ensure accountability to the public by using a competitive procurement process to select our One-Stop Operator and other service providers. This process ensures our partners are selected for their quality, effectiveness, and ability to deliver the best possible value and outcomes for our community.

3.2.3 Focusing on Customer Success and Innovation

We measure our success not just by the number of people we enroll, but by the number of people who achieve meaningful outcomes: sustained employment, wage gains, and industry-recognized credentials. We foster a culture of continuous improvement, empowering our staff and partners to test creative solutions, adapt to changing economic conditions, and implement evidence-based practices that truly support our customers' long-term career advancement.

3.2.4 Committing to Equitable Access and Opportunity

We are committed to building pathways to prosperity for all residents. Our operational priority is to identify and remove barriers for populations who have historically faced challenges in the labor market. This includes dedicated strategies for individuals with disabilities, residents with low literacy or basic skills, public assistance recipients, justice-involved individuals, older workers, and English language learners.

3.2.5.Expanding High-Impact Career Pathways

We are expanding the breadth and depth of our services to build "automation-resilient" careers. This means prioritizing high-impact, earn-and-learn models that lead directly to employment. We are actively expanding access to work-based learning such as On-the-Job Training (OJT) and Apprenticeships, which combine paid work with structured skill development, providing a direct bridge to in-demand occupations.

3.2.6 Empowering Jobseekers with Data

Residents can make the best decisions for their own careers when they have clear, transparent information. We empower job seekers by providing accessible data on training provider performance. Through career counseling, we help residents interpret information on program costs, completion rates, and average earnings after graduation, enabling them to make informed investments in their skills and future.

3.2.7 Using Data and Technology to Drive Strategy

We leverage technology and labor market data to be a true workforce intelligence hub for the region. Our operational teams use real-time data on employment trends and skills gaps to inform our strategies and investments. This data-driven approach ensures we are aligning our training programs with the immediate and future needs of Bergen County's employers.

Section 3.3: Service Expansion and Accessibility

Our operational model is not static; we are actively expanding services that remove barriers and build direct pathways to employment. We are focused on three key areas: expanding "earn-and-learn" opportunities, providing holistic support, and ensuring universal accessibility.

3.3.1 Expanding "Earn-and-Learn" Career Pathways

We are prioritizing work-based learning as our most effective strategy for building automation-resilient careers. These programs allow residents to earn a wage while they learn new skills, providing a direct bridge from training to employment.

Our efforts focus on two main areas:

- **Career Exploration:** For youth and career changers, we can offer industry tours, job shadowing, and work-based experiences to provide invaluable exposure to in-demand fields.
- **Career Building:** We are aggressively expanding On-the-Job Training (OJT), partnering with employers to cover a portion of a new hire's wages during their training period. Our primary goal is to create a pipeline of certified, highly skilled professionals for Bergen County.

3.3.2 Removing Barriers Through Holistic Support

We recognize that challenges outside the workplace often block a person's path to employment. While our primary role is employment and training, our Job Center serves as a critical connection point to a vast network of community partners.

- **Supportive Services:** Our career coaches are trained to identify barriers during the assessment process. We then facilitate "warm handoffs" to our partners for essential supports such as **childcare, transportation, housing assistance, legal aid, and financial counseling.**
- **Career Coaching:** We are deepening our coaching services to support customers for the long term. This includes **pre-employment coaching** (resume building, interview skills, professional communication) and **post-placement retention coaching.** This ongoing support for the first year of employment is critical for helping individuals navigate workplace challenges and secure future wage increases or promotions.
- **Basic Skills Integration:** For residents who need to improve literacy, numeracy, or English language skills, we partner closely with our Adult Education (Title II) providers. We prioritize innovative **Integrated Education and Training (IET)** models that allow residents to build basic skills *while* learning occupational skills, accelerating their path to a credential.

3.3.3 Ensuring Universal Accessibility

Our system is designed to be accessible to every member of our community. We conduct annual accessibility assessments of our physical facilities, digital platforms, and program policies to ensure compliance with all state and federal requirements.

Our Job Center is fully accessible and equipped with a wide range of assistive technologies to support individuals with disabilities. Our most vital accessibility tool is our partnership with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) and the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CBVI). These partners provide specialized expertise, accommodations, and customized employment strategies to ensure individuals with disabilities have an equal opportunity to thrive in the workforce.

Section 3.4: Detailed Partnership and Service Integration

Our strength lies in our partnerships. Bergen County's workforce system is not a single entity but a strategic alliance of required partners from workforce development, education, social services, and economic development. This integration is the key to providing holistic, comprehensive support to our customers.

3.4.1 The Partnership Framework (MOU/IFA)

Our collaboration is formalized by a **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**, signed by all required partners. This MOU is our "rules of the road"—a shared agreement that outlines each partner's roles, responsibilities, and commitment to our unified service delivery model.

The MOU is supported by an **Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA)**. This is a transparent cost-sharing model that ensures all on-site partners contribute their proportional share to the operations and maintenance of our shared One-Stop Career Center system.

3.4.2 The Role of the One-Stop Operator

The competitively-selected **One-Stop Operator** serves as the functional leader and day-to-day manager of the Job Center. The Operator is the "convener," responsible for coordinating all partner programs under one roof. They manage facility operations, facilitate our functional teams, and ensure the entire system works seamlessly for both job seekers and employers, as directed by the Workforce Development Board.

3.4.3 Integrating Services for Customer Success

Our primary integration strategy is **co-enrollment**. We "braid" funding and services to wrap support around the customer. For example, a resident may be co-enrolled in a WIOA training program, Work First New Jersey for supportive services, and an Adult Education program to improve their math skills—all coordinated through a single Individual Employment Plan and one career coach.

A combination of technology and teamwork powers this coordination:

- **Shared Technology:** Our core partners (WIOA Title I, Wagner-Peyser, and Work First New Jersey) use the shared **AOSOS** case management system, which provides a unified record for many customers.
- **Team-Based Coordination:** Other vital partners, like Vocational Rehabilitation (Title IV) and Adult Education (Title II), use separate state-managed data systems. Our functional teams bridge these technological gaps through daily communication and joint case conferencing, ensuring the customer always receives coordinated care.

3.4.4 Our Integrated Partner Network

Our network of partners provides comprehensive support.

- **Core Employment & Training Partners:** This is the foundation of our system, including our **WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth** programs, the state's **Wagner-Peyser Employment Service** (Title III), and our **Work First New Jersey (WFNJ)** partners who provide employment services for public assistance recipients.

- **Education Partners:** These partners build our talent pipeline. They include the **Adult Education and Literacy** (Title II) consortium (Bergen Community College, Bergen County Technical Schools, and Greater Bergen Community Action) and **Postsecondary Career and Technical Education** partners.
 - **Specialized Workforce Partners:** We work in lockstep with partners serving specific populations, including **Vocational Rehabilitation** (Title IV) for individuals with disabilities, **Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG)**, and programs for justice-involved individuals (Second Chance Act).
 - **Community & Support Partners:** This group provides a critical safety net and specialized support, including employment and training services through the **Community Services Block Grant (CSBG)** and programs administered by the Office of Transitional Workforce Services (OTWS).
-

Section 3.5: Employer Engagement as Economic Development

Our workforce system serves two equally important customers: **job seekers** pursuing careers and **employers** seeking skilled talent. Our employer engagement strategy is a core component of Bergen County's economic development, ensuring our local businesses have the human capital they need to thrive and grow.

3.5.1 A Coordinated Business Services Team

We provide a single, coordinated point of contact for every business in Bergen County. Our Business Services Teams act as strategic talent consultants, not just recruiters.

- **Single Point of Contact:** An employer makes one call to our team. That team then conducts a comprehensive needs assessment to understand their specific talent challenges.
- **Leveraging State & Local Resources:** Our local team coordinates seamlessly with state-level partners, including the NJDOL Business Outreach Team and Vocational Rehabilitation business specialists. This allows us to assemble a customized solution for each business, connecting them to the right resources,

such as On-the-Job Training contracts, apprenticeship grants, or disability hiring consultations.

3.5.2 Sector-Based Talent Pipelines

We focus our engagement on **in-demand strategic sectors** that drive Bergen County's economy. This sector-based approach enables our teams to develop deep industry expertise and build coordinated talent pipelines tailored to each industry's specific needs.

Our priority sectors are:

- Healthcare
- Technology and Information Services
- Professional and Business Services
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Finance and Insurance
- Construction and Skilled Trades

By partnering with employers in these key sectors, we align our training investments directly with in-demand skills, ensuring our job seekers are prepared for resilient, high-growth careers.

3.5.3 A Comprehensive Menu of Employer Solutions

We offer a full suite of solutions designed to help businesses recruit, train, and retain a high-quality workforce.

- **Talent Recruitment:** We provide customized candidate recruitment and pre-screening, coordinate targeted hiring events (virtual and in-person), and offer access to our interview facilities.
- **Training & Development Investments:** We co-invest in our local workforce through:
 - **On-the-Job Training (OJT):** Providing wage reimbursements to employers to help cover the costs of training new hires.

- **Incumbent Worker Training:** Offering grants to help companies upskill their existing employees to keep pace with new technology and industry demands.
- **Customized Training:** Designing training programs specifically tailored to an employer's unique skill needs.
- **Apprenticeship Development:** Our team provides technical assistance to help companies design, register, and recruit for Registered Apprenticeship programs—our premier "earn-and-learn" solution.
- **Financial Incentives:** We help businesses navigate and access financial tools, such as the **Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)** for hiring individuals from specific target groups (such as veterans), and the Federal Bonding Program.
- **Workforce Reduction Assistance (Rapid Response):** In the event of a layoff, our team provides immediate, on-site services to both the company and its affected workers. We offer consultation on layoff aversion strategies and coordinate career counseling, job search assistance, and Unemployment Insurance information for impacted employees.

3.5.4 Integrating with Economic Development

Our employer engagement strategy is fully integrated with our county and regional economic development partners. We ensure that workforce talent is central to every business-attraction, retention, and expansion conversation. By understanding the talent needs of companies looking to move to or grow in Bergen County, we can proactively build the skilled workforce they need to succeed, ensuring our community's long-term economic vitality.

SECTION 4.0: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS

4.1 Local Workforce Development Area Structure

Bergen County's workforce system is built on a clear and effective partnership between strategic leadership and operational excellence.

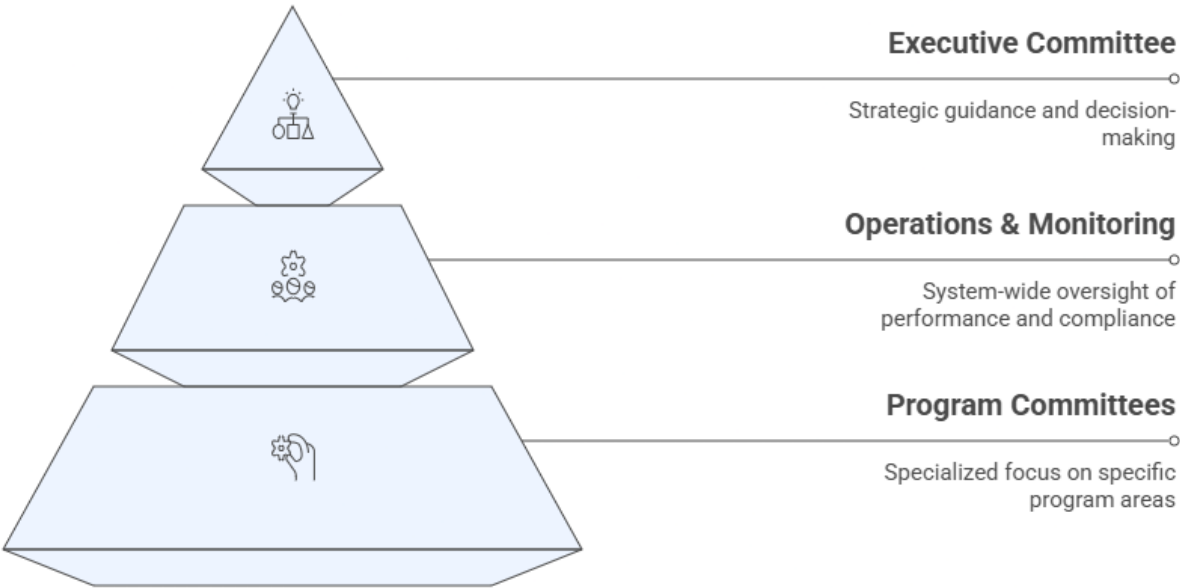
The Bergen County Executive and the Workforce Development Board (WDB) partner to provide strategic direction, vision, and fiscal integrity. This leadership team appoints our WDB, which, under WIOA, must have a majority (at least 51%) of members from the business community who possess "optimum policy-making or hiring authority." This business-led structure is balanced by robust (at least 20%) representation from our partners in labor organizations, community-based organizations, education, and other priority partners.

The Board's primary role is not to run programs, but to function as the county's workforce strategist and convener. It designs a system that connects the needs of our employers with the potential of our residents. This governance model allows the Chief Elected Official (CEO) and Board to share responsibility for the 14 key functions required by WIOA—from strategic planning and employer engagement to career pathway development.

Focused committees, including the required Youth, Literacy, Disability, and One-Stop Partners Committees drive this work. This structure ensures our policies are guided by direct insight from the front lines of our economy and community, leading to real-world jobs. The Board sets the strategy, and a network of expert service providers, selected through a competitive process, delivers day-to-day services.

This entire governance structure is supported by the Bergen County Executive and Treasurer, who serves as our designated Fiscal Agent, and a four-person WDB staff (Executive Director, Business Manager, and specialists in Fiscal & Contracting and Monitoring & Performance) who execute the Board's strategic vision.

Committee Structure Hierarchy



4.2 Procurement of Operator and Services

To ensure Bergen County residents and businesses receive best-in-class services, we utilize a competitive procurement process to select all service providers, including our One-Stop Operator.

This process is built on transparency, accountability, and strict conflict-of-interest firewalls. The recent procurement of a new One-Stop Operator and service provider network, along with the designation of a new Fiscal Agent, has established a clear separation between the Board's strategic oversight and operational delivery, ensuring objective accountability and allowing our partners to be laser-focused on delivering results.

4.3 Oversight and Monitoring

Effective oversight is not just about compliance; it's about learning and adapting. Our monitoring approach is designed for continuous improvement and is rooted in a culture of continuous feedback and dialogue.

We use real-time data from state (AOSOS, FutureWorks) and local fiscal (SAGE/IGX) systems to identify trends and measure progress against our negotiated performance goals. Our monitoring process includes provider budgets, training contracts (like Individual Training Accounts and On-the-Job Training), overall system accessibility, and the formal American Job Center (AJC) certification process. This active approach allows us to spot challenges early and partner with our providers to offer technical assistance *before* issues become systemic.

This monitoring extends to fiscal accountability as well. We understand that performance outcomes and strategic spend-down go hand in hand. Our oversight ensures that funds are not just spent to meet targets, but are invested *wisely* in programs that align with our strategic priorities and deliver a measurable return for our residents and businesses. This ensures we maximize the impact of every dollar and maintain the public's, our state's, and our federal partners' confidence.

A commitment to public transparency anchors this entire process. All local plans, partnership agreements, and meeting minutes are made publicly available to ensure community trust and accountability.

4.4 Performance Measures and Accountability

The Story Behind Our Data

Our analysis of performance from Program Years 2022-2024 (see performance attachments) reveals a clear narrative: our system demonstrates a high potential for excellence but also shows variability that we are strategically addressing.

While our programs serving adults and dislocated workers have shown periods of exceptional success (exceeding all 10 primary goals in PY23), we identified a persistent

challenge in achieving skill-building and credentialing goals for our youth population. This is not just a statistic; it's a call to action.

This data story is the **why** behind our new strategic priorities. Instead of just reporting past numbers, we are using this analysis to drive a system-wide "reboot" of our youth service model, invest in new provider partnerships, and implement proactive contract management to ensure we meet the needs of every resident.

Beyond the Numbers: Measuring What Matters

Federal WIOA measures are our foundation, but they don't tell the whole story. To capture our true impact, we also track local goals tied directly to our strategic priorities, including:

- **Living Wage Outcomes:** Moving beyond simple placement to track the percentage of participants placed in jobs that offer a true family-sustaining wage.
- **Career Pathway Progression:** Measuring how many residents advance in their education or secure higher-wage employment after completing a program.
- **Business Engagement:** Tracking the number of new employer relationships, repeat business customers, and incumbent worker training programs.
- **Work-Based Learning:** Measuring the expansion of work experiences, paid "earn-and-learn" opportunities like internships, On-the-Job Training (OJT), and apprenticeships.

4.5 Strategic Board and Partner Development

A high-performing workforce system requires a strategic and engaged board. We are committed to a formal Board Development Plan to ensure our members are equipped with the knowledge and skills to deliver on the innovative strategies in this plan.

Our development process is strategic, not generic. We use a **board matrix** to map our current skills and identify recruitment opportunities, ensuring the Board always reflects the diverse mix of skills, backgrounds, and community representation needed.

Board member training includes a comprehensive orientation on the **14 areas of WIOA governance** and "self-discovery activities" that align their unique skills with our

committee work. We use surveys, self-assessments, and monitoring tools to drive continuous improvement for our members and our system.

This commitment to capacity building extends to all our partners:

- **Board and Fiscal Staff:** Engage in professional development focused on procurement, performance measurement, and grant management.
- **Partner and Provider Staff:** Participate in joint training on integrated service delivery, customer-centered design, and best practices for serving populations with barriers to employment.

4.6 Regional and Local Plan Development

This strategic plan is a living document, not a report that sits on a shelf. It was developed through robust engagement with business leaders, education partners, labor representatives, and community organizations to ensure it reflects the real-time needs of Bergen County. To ensure full transparency, this plan update was made available for public comment from November 3 to December 2, 2025.

While the formal North Jersey Partners regional consortium has dissolved, we still collaborate with our counties in the northern region and throughout the state as a member of the Garden State Employment and Training Association (GSETA). We actively coordinate with neighboring workforce areas to share best practices, address common labor market challenges, and build regional partnerships that connect our residents to broader opportunities.

CONCLUSION

From Analysis to Action

This plan confronts a fundamental tension in Bergen County's economy: we possess remarkable assets—educational attainment, proximity to New York City, diverse industry base, strong fiscal capacity—yet economic security remains elusive for more than 127,000 working families. That paradox defines both our challenge and our opportunity.

The sections above used data, not just talk, to show this reality. We've laid out clear strategies to address the problems we face and a governance structure to ensure we stay on track. This is our plan to turn these ideas into action.

Now comes the hard part: implementation.

What Success Requires

Our Strategic Focus

Our strength is our strategic focus. We are built to be agile and efficient. Our small, expert staff doesn't run programs directly. Instead, we leverage our unique role as a convener, strategist, and accountability partner. Success requires us to focus on what we do best—guiding the system—and empowering our expert service providers to do what they do best: deliver results for job seekers and businesses.

Sustained Partnership Commitment

No single organization creates transformation alone. To bridge the living-wage gap for 127,000 families and prepare our workforce for automation, we must all share ownership of the results. The strategies in this plan—from scaling apprenticeships to eliminating barriers for priority populations—are not WDB-exclusive directives; they are system-wide goals that depend on shared commitment from business, education, labor, and community partners.

Continuous Adaptation

The labor market in 2026 will not be the same as the one in 2025. This plan is not a rigid set of instructions; it is an adaptive strategy. It establishes the priorities that will guide our decisions, the partnerships that will enable our work, and the data we will use to measure progress. We will monitor labor market intelligence, pilot innovative solutions, and continuously adjust our approach to meet the real-time needs of our economy.

Building Our Foundation for the Future

This plan is not just about next year; it's about building a stronger foundation for the future. The innovative steps we take now—like launching the Employer Advisory Council, building our workforce intelligence hub, and creating new "earn-and-learn" pathways—are the investments that will help make Bergen County more resilient and prosperous for years to come. This update is the launchpad for that long-term success.

What This Plan Represents

This plan is more than a required federal document. It is a series of promises to our community.

- It promises that our Board will focus on the "big picture"—guiding the strategy and ensuring results—while trusting our expert partners to run the day-to-day services.
- It promises a relentless commitment to equity. This is how we ensure the 27,000 entry-level jobs lost to automation don't leave those workers behind. Equity isn't treating everyone identically. It's ensuring everyone has genuine access to opportunity. It is an economic imperative essential for long-term regional prosperity.
- It promises that decisions will be driven by evidence. For too long, workforce development has relied on assumptions and anecdotes. This plan commits the WDB to measuring outcomes that matter—such as living-wage attainment and industry-credential attainment—and to holding our system accountable for achieving them. This plan provides the governance and analytical foundation for that work.

An Invitation Forward

This plan is a starting point, not an end point. Its implementation requires active, sustained, and broad-based stakeholder engagement across Bergen County. The Employer Advisory Council will need engaged employer representatives. Committee work requires stakeholder expertise. Customer Voice requires client feedback. Partnership initiatives depend on organizational collaboration. Innovation pilots need willing partners willing to experiment.

This is your workforce development system. These are your public resources. This plan succeeds or fails based on whether the people it's meant to serve—jobseekers, workers, employers, training providers, community organizations—see themselves in it and choose to engage with it.

Bergen County faces complex workforce challenges that have no simple solutions. Economic security paradoxes don't resolve through programs alone. Technological disruption requires adaptation, not resistance. Equity gaps demand systemic change, not incremental adjustment.

But complexity isn't impossibility. It's an invitation to approach workforce development with strategic clarity, collaborative commitment, honest acknowledgment of constraints, and sustained focus on outcomes that genuinely matter: careers offering economic security, businesses accessing skilled talent, and communities creating broadly shared prosperity.

That's what this plan represents. That's what we're inviting you to help achieve.

Let's build something extraordinary—together.

Bergen County Workforce Development Board

60 State Street, Hackensack, NJ 07601

View the plan at bergenjobcenter.com

Public Comment Period: November 3 – December 2, 2025 (12 Noon)

Submit feedback: localplan@bergenjobcenter.com

ATTACHMENTS