

**The Greater St. Louis Metropolitan
WIOA Regional Plan**

Program Years 2020-2023
Revised 3-2022

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 Section 107(d) requires local WIOA areas that make up an economic region develop and submit a Regional Plan in collaboration with other local areas. This Plan will align service delivery, direct investments, apply job-driven strategies and enable the building of a skilled workforce across the metropolitan area.

The St. Louis Planning Region for the WIOA is comprised of the following Missouri Local Areas: St. Louis City, St. Louis County, St. Charles County and Jefferson/Franklin Counties. The St. Louis Planning Region also includes the Illinois Counties of Madison and St. Clair.

As a foundation to this Regional Plan, each Local Workforce Development Area's (LWDA) response to the requirements stated in WIOA Section 108(b)(1)-(22) can be found in their Local Plan which is attached to this document. The responses from each Local Plan to the requirements were taken into consideration and incorporated into the development of this collaborative regional effort.

Regional Planning Outcomes/Deliverables

There are eight Outcomes/Deliverables required of Regional Plans. The following sections (A) through (H) fulfill this requirement for the St. Louis Metropolitan Region:

A) “Contain each of the Local Plans within the regional planning area that meets the intent of the law”

As stated above, each local WIOA Area's Plan is attached to this Regional Plan. Additionally, the narrative explaining Regional planning is included in each of those Local Plans

B) “Establish regional service strategies, including use of cooperative service delivery agreements”

The Directors of the St Louis Metropolitan Statistical Area (SLMSA) formed a group called the St. Louis Regional Workforce Development Board (WDB) Directors' Consortium.

The St. Louis Regional WDB Directors Consortium was designed to create a

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forum of workforce development professionals to collaborate and focus on issues related to the economic development and the workforce systems that impact the greater St. Louis Metropolitan Service Area (SMSA), including the Illinois counties of St. Clair and Madison.

The St. Louis Regional WDB Directors Consortium was created in February 2012 and is comprised of the WDB Directors for St. Louis City, St. Louis County, St. Charles County, Jefferson / Franklin Counties in Missouri and Illinois counties of Madison and St. Clair. Other participants include; Deputy Directors and Wagner Peyser Regional Managers. The consortium schedules quarterly meetings and are hosted by each region on a rotational basis.

In 2017, the Association expanded to include members of the Business Services Team from each of the regional workforce agencies. This helped increase the flow of communication and planning. In 2022 the Committee also agreed to elect a Co-Chairs (one from each state) for one-year terms, with the goal of having the group's leadership rotate throughout the region on an annual basis. Elections are to be held at each December meeting for the coming year.

The vision of the consortium:

- Create a forum designed to promote proactive and effective collaborations and communications among the Workforce Development professionals and other stakeholders in the greater St. Louis MSA.
- To collaborate and develop partnerships for the implementation of regional projects/initiatives which would allow for joint applications for Federal grants.
- To ensure the workforce development activities/services meet the needs of employers and support economic growth in the region by; enhancing communication, coordination, and collaboration among employers, economic development entities and service providers.
- To develop and implement strategies for meeting the employment and skill needs of workers and employers such as; establishing industry and sector partnerships. To fully engage businesses in this endeavor.
- To promote 'value-added' training of the workforce that meets the demand and expectation of businesses, significantly enhancing the skills and abilities of job seekers, and ultimately strengthening the regions' economy.
- To better coordinate and when possible synchronize regional planning of special workforce events including major job fairs, Annual Manufacturing Day, apprenticeship initiatives and other WIOA services to job-seekers and employers.

The following regional service strategies have been developed as a result of the WDB Directors Consortium:

Business Service Strategy

The Business Teams from each area meet regularly at the Directors' Consortium meetings to exchange current efforts in working with employers that seek services across the Region.

Additionally, each area uses email blasts to send notice of upcoming recruitment events to others in the St. Louis Region. These notices may then be shared in local Job Centers, local area's web sites and social media posts.

The Business Teams in the Region also work with the State's Employment Transition Team to coordinate State Business services with local Job Center services.

The Regional Workforce Directors or their designee work with the Greater STL and other economic development groups such as the Missouri Partnership and Missouri Economic Development Council (MEDC) to better coordinate efforts between workforce and economic development agencies and professionals.

Serving those with Disabilities

The six WDBs of the region originally coordinated a regional disability initiative called, Accommodations for Success, in August 2015. The intent of this committee was to engage companies to understand the requirements of the new American with Disabilities Act and how public workforce agencies around the region could work with them to fulfill their obligations. A kick-off event, Accommodations for Success – Next Level was planned and successfully held in August 2016.

This has become an annual event and is now held every August and is moved around the region, allowing each Job Center to play a special role in hosting and formatting this successful event.

Referrals of Jobseekers between areas

In the past the Workforce Regions shared a formal referral process including referral forms. However, technology and a shared data system no longer require paper forms. Staff record the services provided to each jobseeker into the

shared case management system. If the individual visits a Job Center in a different area, staff in the new area can see what has already occurred and coordinate services to ensure no duplication of service or expenditure occurs.

The Region has developed a Cooperative Service Delivery Agreement to serve as an umbrella agreement to all these initiatives. See Attachment 1.

C) “Develop and implement sector initiatives for in-demand industry sectors or occupations for the region”

Background:

The development of WIOA-focused sector strategies for the St. Louis Region began in meetings of the Directors’ Consortium. Strategy development continued at the Sector Strategy Kickoff hosted by the State Division of Workforce Development (DWD) in the fall of 2015. The first two sectors selected as a Regional focus were Advanced Manufacturing and Healthcare.

A formal Regional Sector Strategy was developed and submitted to OWD as required. The six LWDAs collaborated with a regional effort spearheaded by the St. Louis Partnership (an Economic Development agency) to address the needs of advanced manufacturing throughout the entire Metropolitan Region. Several collaborative initiatives resulted and continue from this effort.

Currently:

The Region re-affirms their continued commitment to Advanced Manufacturing, Information Technology and Healthcare sector initiatives.

D) “Collection and analysis of regional labor market data (in conjunction with the State)... for the purpose of regional planning”

For statistical data and analysis of the entire region’s labor market see the following:

Greater STL 2030 Jobs Plan: <https://www.greaterstlinc.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/2030-Jobs-Plan.pdf>

Missouri Workforce 2021 St. Louis Region from Sept of Higher Education & Workforce Development: <https://meric.mo.gov/media/pdf/st-louis-economic-and-workforce-report>

Attachment 2: 2021 State of St. Louis Workforce Report to the Region

Data from these reports and discussion with area business and partners guided the LWDA in developing this Regional Plan.

To see how this analysis breaks out into the local areas see, “Section 7. Labor Market Analysis” of each areas’ local plan attached to this document.

E) “Establish administrative cost arrangements, including the pooling of funds for administrative costs, as appropriate, in order to meet the Region’s needs”

At this time the establishment of administrative cost arrangements, including the pooling of funds for administrative costs is not appropriate or needed for the St. Louis Region.

F) “The Regional Plan will address the coordination of transportation and other supportive services, as appropriate, for the region and must address how individuals will be served given differing local Supportive Service policies”

Supportive service awards, whether for adult, dislocated worker, or youth participants are intended to enable enrolled individuals to participate in workforce-funded programs and activities to secure and retain employment. Based on individual assessment and availability of funds, supportive services such as transportation, childcare, dependent care, and needs-related payments, may be awarded to eligible participants on an as-needed basis according to the administering Area’s Supportive Service Policy.

Local Areas may call other Areas within the Region when funds are limited to collaborate on providing supportive service. For instance, if a participant from one Area is offered an On the Job Training position at an employer located in another Area, the two Areas may work together to provide the training and/or supportive service.

Local Areas agree to note services provided to each participant, including Supportive Service, in the State’s case management system. This ensures no duplication of service.

G) “The coordination of services with regional economic development services and providers....”

The six LWDAs are collaborating with the following to coordinate services with regional economic development services and providers:

The Greater STL, East-West Gateway Council of Governments, St. Charles County Chambers, St. Louis Economic Development Partnership, the Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois, EDC Business & Community Partners St. Charles County, St. Louis Development Corporation and the Missouri Partnership.

The LWDAs participate in planning meetings and regional economic development events. LWDAs use data, analysis and reports from such economic planners as those mentioned above in Section D of this document to insure service and expenditure Plans address the coordination.

- H) “Establish an agreement concerning how the planning region will collectively negotiate and reach agreement with the Governor on local levels of performance for and report on the performance accountability measures described in Section 116(c) for the local areas or the planning region....”**

The St. Louis Region has collaboratively developed a negotiation agreement for the Planning Region. In accordance with and allowed in OWD Issuance 09-2019, the Local Boards in this region elect to negotiate and report performance independently.

The St. Louis Metropolitan Regional Directors' Consortium

Coordination Strategy

The six individual WIOA local regions that make up the St. Louis Metropolitan Region agree to the following service strategies:

- 1) Act as regional steering committee made up of at least the Local Area WIOA Directors.
 - The Committee will meet on a regular basis to share information on new initiatives, as well as, challenges found in the Region.
 - This committee will provide a forum for local areas to solve problems of common concern, develop and implement joint strategies and/or policies.
- 2) Build consensus around broad goals and strategies.
 - Shared goals to be discussed may be to increase the proportion of households in the region earning a family-supporting wage, decreased long-term reliance on income subsidies or to address the specific skill and talent needs of local industries/sectors
 - The Region originally selected manufacturing and healthcare as the first sectors in our joint sector strategy initiative as required by WIOA. Recently, the Region has added Information Technology (IT) as its third sector initiative. The strategies developed to address the workforce needs of the two original sectors will continue to be implemented and updated. The Region will work together to develop new initiatives to meet the expanding needs of the IT sector in the St. Louis Metropolitan Region.
 - The regional collaboration will provide a clearinghouse for labor market information by linking existing resources, researching information gaps and marketing local assets.
 - The Region has begun to accomplish this by sharing workforce events in a calendar format, email blasts and through social media.
 - The Region conducts meetings of business team representatives across the Region to coordinate services to employers and avoid duplication of effort.
 - The Region also has a Disability committee that crosses several local areas and invites all areas to participate, as appropriate, in service to this population.
 - Build closer alliances with local, regional and state economic development agencies to create more integration between business recruitment/retention efforts and workforce issues.
- 3) Develop a shared understanding of the region's customer base.
 - Work together to collect industry sector analysis throughout the Region
 - Each area will report how local businesses are meeting their workforce needs
 - Identify skills, talents and aptitudes of the local workforce areas
 - Identify skill gaps as well as gaps in local systems to address the training needs
 - Collect information on common barriers to skill attainment and employment

- 4) Forge linkages between workforce development and other work-related systems
- Identify resources outside the workforce system that can address individuals' barriers to employment
 - Identify resources outside the workforce system that can affect the growth or decline of local industries
 - Invite outside entities to collaborate on initiatives across the Region.
 - Work to influence and align educational curriculum and career preparation between K-12, college, and vocational institutions with the workforce needs of growing business sectors in our region.



When St. Louis Community College first created the *State of the St. Louis Workforce* report in 2009 we expected that—if the project lasted long enough—we would be able to observe and analyze a full economic cycle: from recession to growth and back again. However, we certainly did not foresee the rapid and broad economic disruption caused by a once-in-a-generation global pandemic. Last year, we were somewhat surprised to observe the high level of optimism employers retained a few months into the massive COVID-19 economic disruption. Our report this year shows that this result was not a fluke and that employers are even more bullish about a strong recovery.

At the same time, we are well aware of how many individuals, many of whom are our students, suffered because of the pandemic. People of color and women—and the businesses they run—were impacted at a higher rate than the general population. In this, our 13th *State of the St. Louis Workforce* report, we seek to understand how employers view the regional workforce and, more importantly, to investigate what St. Louis needs to do to ensure that the next economic cycle leaves fewer of our friends and neighbors behind.

As in years past, the report is divided into three sections. The *St. Louis Economy* compiles publicly available labor market information as well as data gathered through proprietary analytical tools. The *Employer Survey* is based on a telephone survey of 516 employers across 16 employer categories representing a composite of the region's economy. Finally, our narrative section *Equitable Recovery, Equitable Opportunity, Equitable Growth* takes a look at how we can ensure that those most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic—many of the same individuals and groups who did not benefit from the pre-COVID economic boom—can share in the recovery with quality jobs and increased opportunity.

The St. Louis Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) consists of a diverse economy with a labor force of over 1.3 million. At 16% of total employment, health care and social assistance is one of the largest and most crucial industry sectors, with over 20% growth in the number of employees from 2010 to 2020. This sector is followed closely by wholesale and retail trade, which makes up 15% of total employment. The St. Louis economy added over 95,000 employees in the last 10 years, amounting to roughly 8% growth.

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Due to the effects of COVID-19, national unemployment rates peaked at levels unseen since data collection began in 1948; St. Louis was no exception. Our regional peak of unemployment was 11.6% in April and May 2020, but this dropped significantly to 4.7% in April 2021. This is lower than the 6.1% national rate but higher than the Missouri

rate of 4.1%, consistent with the trend over the past few years.

Unemployment rates vary greatly with age and sex. Younger workers, particularly men under age 22, had 2019 unemployment rates at or above 10% in the St. Louis MSA. Men in the 16-19 age range had the highest rate at 11.5%. While there is a large disparity in unemployment rates between males and females in younger age groups, rates were similar in the 35-54 age groups. Interestingly, men over age 75 had the lowest unemployment rate of all groups at 0.7%, while women over the age of 75 had a rate of 6.8%.

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Jobholders ages 35-44 represented the slight majority at 21.6% of the workforce, with the 25-34 age group immediately following at 21.5%. Workers aged 14-21 made up only 7.4% of the workforce. From 2009 to 2019, the share of St. Louis workers aged 45-54 has declined 5% while those 55-64 have increased 4%.

Forty-eight percent of the population 25 and older have a high school diploma but no post-secondary degree, lower than the state rate of

53% and slightly higher than the national rate (47%). Forty-five percent have an associate degree or greater, higher than both the state rate (38%) and the national rate (42%).

The massive, pandemic-fueled reduction in workforce we saw last year continued in 2021, with 31% of companies cutting employees during the last 12 months. Decreases were more than double the pre-pandemic rate and were slightly higher than results reported last year (29%). Just as we saw in 2020, some companies continued to hire during this timeframe and a greater percentage (7.4%) increased employment significantly when compared to last year (6.5%). Unsurprisingly, nearly two-thirds of employers (65%) that reported significant changes in employment levels attributed them to COVID-19, down slightly from the 2020 results.

Companies were even more optimistic than last year about their plans to increase staffing over the next 12 months, with nearly two-thirds (63%) stating they would increase employment levels. Continuing a trend seen last year, traditional risk mitigation strategies such as hiring temporary workers or contractors were out of favor, with fewer than 15% of employers indicating they would hire in this manner. Instead, an astounding 80% of employers—the highest level we have recorded—said they would hire new full-time employees, while 65% reported they would hire part-time workers.

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A headwind to the future hiring optimism, employers reported a shortage of workers with knowledge or skills as the most common barrier to expanding employment, a position it has held since 2015. The labor market appears even more constrained than last year, with 58% of employers reporting this as a barrier, an increase of 17% from the 2020 report. Both economic conditions (40%) and government policies or regulations (36%) increased drastically compared to the 2020 results. While last year a shortage of workers was cited as the most important barrier, in 2021 employers were most concerned with government policies or regulations. This makes sense given the potential for future public health mandates or other COVID-related regulations. Shortage of workers with knowledge or skills was rated second-most important, with economic conditions following in third.

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We once again asked employers about the possible shortcomings they were seeing in applicants for available jobs. Leading the list as the most frequent response, as it has been since 2013, was poor work habits (65%). This was followed by lack of general business or industry knowledge (57%), lack of critical thinking and problem solving (56%), and lack of communication and interpersonal skills (53%). Perhaps surprisingly, given the focus on preparing young people for STEAM careers, less than half (45%) of employers cited lack of technical skills specific to the job, although this was a slight increase over previous years.

Skilled trades was once again the most in-demand business function of the seven categories we survey, with nearly three-quarters of those firms who employ skilled trades reporting a shortage of applicants. Patient care (67%) followed in second place. As with skilled trades and patient care, we saw sharp increases in applicant shortages

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this year for manufacturing/maintenance (55%), customer service (45%), business management (27%), and information technology (27%). While the shortages in information technology applicants were reported at a higher rate than 2020, this result still appears significantly lower than the anecdotal narrative around the shortage of IT workers in St. Louis.

Results last year that indicated fewer jobs for those with no experience or those with short-

term training appear to have been a COVID-related blip, as these responses both returned to historical norms. More than half of employers reported having at least some jobs requiring no experience, while over three-fourths (78%) said they had positions available for those with short-term training, the highest percentage recorded.

Barriers to employment for justice-involved individuals remain. The vast majority of employers said their willingness to hire a justice-involved individual depends on the felony (50%) or they would hire such candidates only for some jobs (17%). Slightly less than one-fifth of employers (18%) said they would not consider an applicant convicted of a felony offense at all. This tracks with the results from 2020 and 2015. However, 16% of employers said they would consider the applicant for any job they were qualified for, which is the highest level reported since we began asking this question in 2015.

We asked employers to rate the importance of future business concerns using a five-point scale. While last year the COVID-19 pandemic was top of mind for most of the employers surveyed, this year concerns about COVID ranked eighth, a strong sign that

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most employers believe they have figured out how to navigate the COVID economy. Employers are much more concerned about normal business cycle issues such as attracting or retaining talent (averaging 3.95 on a 1 to 5 scale), financial impacts on operations (3.73), and supply chain disruptions (3.71).

Just as we saw last year, St. Louis employers are not sold on remote work. While last year 61.3% of employers had people working remotely, only 22.9% reported this in 2021. This reduction occurred even though fewer employers reported challenges working

remotely than they did last year. This trend away from remote work looks set to continue: 41% of employers with currently remote employees plan to reduce the

number of those workers during the next 12 months, and only 10.3% indicated that they will increase remote workers.

Finally, a move towards increased workforce resiliency and a focus on employee well-being seem to have broadened after surfacing last year. When asked which workforce policy changes employers were considering, a full 72% of employers stated they are considering cross-training and knowledge transfer, up from 42% last year. Nearly two-thirds (65%) reported reskilling or upskilling employees to new ways of working, while 70% reported increased employee care and engagement, and over half (54%) said they were considering flexible working conditions. Only one initiative lost favor compared to 2020—remote working—which tracks with the results previously noted.

COVID-19 shut down restaurants, travel and hotels—industries in which women and people of color hold a larger share of the jobs. And while recessions historically impact economically disadvantaged groups in disproportionate ways, the COVID-19 disruption was in many ways worse than the Great Recession. New research from Washington University in St. Louis' Olin Business School found that Black women lost 42% more job-months than white workers while Hispanic women fared even worse, with a 60% loss.

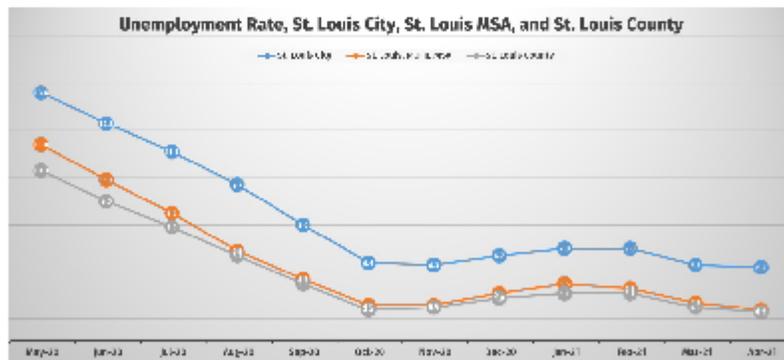
Our narrative section, entitled *Equitable Recovery, Equitable Opportunity, Equitable Growth*, looks at ways that St. Louis can ensure that those historically left out of the job market—and those who have been most affected by the pandemic—get back into the workforce in better shape than they were before COVID-19. We study aspects of the recently released *STL 2030 Jobs Plan* with two of its authors, Greater St. Louis, Inc. Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer Valerie Patton, and author and New Localism Associates Co-Founder Bruce Katz. Our conversation explores a number of challenging and timely issues such as the definition of a “quality job,” how employers and civic leaders can build the pipeline to equitable opportunity, and the role employers, institutions and individuals can play in helping our region become a talent engine and magnet for workers living in St. Louis.

2021 A Closer Look: St. Louis MSA Unemployment Rate

Unemployment Rate, St. Louis Metropolitan Area and Its Component Counties, Not Seasonally Adjusted

	May 2020	Jun 2020	Jul 2020	Aug 2020	Sep 2020	Oct 2020	Nov 2020	Dec 2020	Jan 2021	Feb 2021	Mar 2021	Apr 2021
Bond (IL)	12.7	11.0	9.2	7.0	5.8	4.7	4.4	5.1	6.0	5.3	4.9	4.4
Cathou (IL)	14.2	12.3	9.3	6.7	5.4	4.3	4.3	6.0	6.5	6.1	5.2	5.0
Clinton (IL)	11.4	8.8	7.3	5.3	4.4	3.5	3.6	4.2	4.6	4.2	3.7	3.3
Jersey (IL)	13.3	11.7	9.6	7.0	6.1	4.9	4.7	5.9	6.0	5.1	4.7	4.5
Macoupin (IL)	11.9	10.6	9.0	6.7	5.6	4.5	4.3	5.6	6.2	5.3	5.0	4.7
Madison (IL)	13.8	12.6	10.9	8.1	6.8	5.5	5.1	6.0	6.3	5.3	5.3	5.1
Monroe (IL)	10.3	9.1	7.5	5.3	4.5	3.5	3.3	3.9	4.2	3.7	3.3	3.2
St. Clair (IL)	15.6	14.5	12.9	9.9	8.6	6.9	6.4	6.9	7.6	6.6	6.7	6.5
Crawford (MO)	9.3	8.4	7.7	6.2	4.8	4.1	4.5	4.9	5.8	6.4	5.3	4.2
Franklin (MO)	10.8	8.5	7.3	5.7	4.4	3.8	4.1	4.4	5.0	5.4	4.2	3.5
Jefferson (MO)	10.1	8.4	7.1	5.9	4.7	3.9	4.0	4.6	5.1	5.3	4.4	3.7
Lincoln (MO)	11.1	7.9	6.7	5.3	4.3	3.6	3.8	4.2	4.9	5.6	4.3	3.6
St. Charles (MO)	9.3	7.4	6.0	4.8	3.8	3.2	3.3	3.7	4.0	3.9	3.4	3.0
St. Louis (MO)	10.3	9.0	7.9	6.7	5.5	4.4	4.5	4.9	5.1	5.1	4.5	4.3
Warren (MO)	9.7	7.4	6.6	5.5	4.2	3.5	3.8	4.2	4.6	5.1	4.0	3.4
St. Louis City (MO)	13.6	12.3	11.1	9.7	8.0	6.4	6.3	6.7	7.0	7.0	6.3	6.2
St. Louis MSA	11.4	9.9	8.5	6.9	5.7	4.6	4.6	5.1	5.5	5.3	4.7	4.4

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics. Current Employment Statistics, St. Louis, Mo.-Ill., Metropolitan Area Data Tables.



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