

WIOA Regional and Local Area Plan Guide

This guide, templates, and other supporting documents instruct the preparation, development, submission, and approval of program years (PY) 2025 – 2028 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) regional and local area plans. WIOA requires the creation of regional and local area plans every four years and modification two years after the respective effective dates. WIOA planning requirements seek federal investment alignment in job training and education, service delivery integration across programs, improvement in service delivery efficiency, and verification of the workforce system matching job creators with skilled individuals. Such planning cultivates development of more comprehensive and integrated approaches for addressing the needs of job creators and workers; it enables the system to provide a wider range of coordinated and streamlined services to their shared customers.

Workforce development systems in Pennsylvania invest in innovation, employer engagement, accountability structures and improved data to create a comprehensive workforce development system consistent with the governor’s strategic vision. Collaboratively developed plans are best positioned to accomplish Pennsylvania’s goals and transcend the fragmentation of workforce development programs.

This guide and all supporting documents can be found on the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry (L&I) website and are based largely on WIOA Sections 106, 107, and 108. For submission of planning related forms and required documentation, or to ask technical questions, email the Bureau of Workforce Development Administration (BWDA) resource account at RA-LI-BWDA-Policy@pa.gov.

I. Regional and Local Area Plan Composition Guidance.

Introduction. WIOA sets parameters for state, regional, and local workforce development systems throughout the country, mandating resource sharing and alignment of priorities across multiple systems, programs, partners, and providers to ensure a skilled workforce today and in the future. The regional and local area plans develop, align, and integrate the area’s job-driven workforce development systems, and provide the platform to achieve the area’s vision, strategic goals, and operational deliverables. These plans require a shared understanding of an area’s workforce development needs, a shared vision of how the public workforce development system can be designed to meet those needs, and a shared agreement on key strategies to realize this vision. While both plans identify and describe related subjects, WIOA regional and local area plans do so from notably different vantage points.

A region, used without further description, is an area identified by Pennsylvania in accordance with WIOA section 106(a). L&I’s designated workforce development regions are in alignment with the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development’s (DCED) ten Partnerships for Regional Economic Performance (PREP) regions. Pennsylvania has five planning regions and five single local area regions.

Planning Region. A planning region is a designated area that is comprised of two or more local workforce development areas (local areas) that are (collectively) aligned within a region. In Pennsylvania, there are five designated planning regions: Northeast, Northwest, South Central, Southeast, and Southwest.

Single Local Area Region. A single local area region is a designated area that is comprised of a single local area. In Pennsylvania, there are five such regions: Central, Lehigh Valley, North Central, Northern Tier, and Southern Alleghenies.

II. Planning.

A. Regional Planning

Note: Only “Planning Regions” are required to submit regional plans. Regional plans submitted by single local areas will not be reviewed.

Regional Partnerships. Workforce system stakeholders must consider increasing regional partnerships for general effectiveness. Regional partnership (including intra-regional collaboration) facilitates alignment of workforce development activities with regional economic development activities. It supports the execution and implementation of Sector Strategies and Career Pathways with the likelihood of increasing public returns on investment. Regional partnerships may also lower costs and increase effectiveness of service delivery to businesses spanning to more than one region’s local areas and to job seekers through coordination of shared services, processes, and operations. Regional partnerships must include the region’s collective core program partners and the required program partners throughout a planning region.

Regional Discussions and Planning Committees. The regional plan is essentially a discussion of the strategies within a planning region, in written narrative, focused on strategic alignment with coordinated and collaborative efforts. Workforce system stakeholders must establish a regional planning committee for the specific purpose of the regional planning process. Collaboration with applicable program partners and other stakeholders within the planning region is necessary to prepare, develop, and submit a WIOA regional plan.

Regional Plans. Each local workforce development board (local board) within a *planning region* must:

1. Use *Regional Plan Instructions* located on L&I’s website.
2. Prepare, submit, and obtain CEO(s) approval of a regional plan that:
 - satisfies the requirements of WIOA Section 106(c)(1)(A)-(H); 20 CFR Part 679 Subpart D; and L&I policy;
 - provides an opportunity for public comment consistent with *Section III: Public Comment Period* in this guide;
 - incorporates local plans for each of the local areas in the planning region; and
 - makes copies of the proposed regional plan (and subsequent modification as applicable) available to the public through electronic and other means, such as public hearings and local news media as described in 20 CFR § 679(b)(1).

B. Local Area Planning

Note: Each local board is required to submit a local area plan.

Local Partnerships. Local partnership (including core, required, and additional partners) facilitates alignment of workforce development activities within a local one-stop system. It better supports the execution and implementation of local strategies and initiatives with the likelihood of increasing public returns on investment. Local partnerships may also lower costs and increase service delivery effectiveness through the coordination of shared services, processes, and operation. Local workforce system stakeholders must consider increasing these partnerships for general effectiveness.

Local Discussions and Planning Committees. The local area plan is essentially a discussion of the implementation of cross-partner and cross-program strategies within the local area, in written narrative, focused on program alignment. Collaboration with the applicable stakeholders within the local area is necessary to prepare, develop, and submit a WIOA local area plan. Workforce system stakeholders must consider the development of planning committees for the specific purpose of the local planning process.

Local Area Plans. All local boards must:

1. Use *Local Area Plan Instructions* located on L&I's website.
2. Prepare, submit, and obtain CEO(s) approval of a local area plan that:
 - satisfies the requirements of WIOA Section 107(d)(3); WIOA Section 108; 20 CFR Part 679 Subpart D; and L&I policy;
 - supports, and is consistent with, the vision, goals and strategy as described in Pennsylvania's WIOA Combined State Plan or subsequent modification;
 - provides an opportunity for public comment consistent with *Section III: Public Comment Period* in this guide; and
 - make available copies of a proposed local plan (and subsequent modification as applicable) to the public through electronic and other means, such as public hearings and local news media as described in WIOA Section 108(d)(1).
3. Note: Item #3 only applies if a local area is designated as part of a *Planning Region*. Align with the regional plan (see *Regional Plan Instructions*) and be submitted as a regional plan component, if applicable.
 - Due to the nature of the regional plan prompts, the local area plan will occasionally request answers that are similar, if not the same, as what is required in the regional plan. The answer does not need to be duplicated in the local area plan. As such, *Local Area Plan Instructions* are edited to guide the "Planning Region" local area plan drafters when these instances occur.

III. **Public Comment Period.** Public comment and input provide an opportunity for interested stakeholders to participate actively, effectively, and transparently in the development of a plan. Therefore, local area plans, and the associated regional plan, if applicable, must be posted on the submitting local board's official internet site for a *30-day public comment period, beginning on the date on which the proposed plan is made available*. Notification of the posting must be made simultaneously to all relevant regional and local area stakeholders, interested parties, and L&I. To allow for adequate opportunity for such comment, local boards must:

1. Make copies of the proposed regional, if applicable, and local area plan (or subsequent review and modification) available to the public through electronic and other means such as public hearings and local news media;
2. Publish the proposed plans on the local board's website;
3. Ensure that proper public notice is provided;
4. Include an opportunity for comment by members of the public;
5. Provide a 30-day period for comment on the plan, or subsequent review and modification, before its *final* submission to L&I, beginning on the date on which the proposed plan is made available; and
6. Submit any comments that express disagreement and the action taken by the local board in response to the comments, along with the plan.

Section IV: *Plan Submission Requirements and Approval*, sub-section A: *Final Plan Submission Requirements*, includes further information on the public comment/notice verification process.

IV. **Plan Submission Requirements and Approval.** All regional and local area plan packages must be submitted electronically by a designated single point of contact (POC) to BWDA's Policy & Planning Coordination Services unit's resource account at RA-LI-BWDA-Policy@pa.gov. A copy of the email must be sent to all local board chairpersons and CEOs within a region or local area by close of business on the deadline indicated in this guidance.

A. **Final Plan Submission Requirements.** During the *final* plan submission, a local board must:

- Submit either the *WIOA Four-Year Plan Final Submission Form*, or if modification is necessary, the *WIOA Plan Review and Modification Form*. This form is signed and dated by the local board’s Executive Director, local board’s Chair, and the respective local area’s CEO. It is submitted with the final “clean copy” of the regional, if applicable, and local area plan(s).
- Provide an electronic copy (in Microsoft Word) of the plan and all supporting documents (in Microsoft Word). Each local area plan, and associated regional plan, if applicable, must be submitted to L&I as a unique, separate document. Due to L&I’s email system restrictions, the POC must ensure that any emails submitted must not exceed a maximum of 10 megabytes. Separate plan documents are not to exceed a maximum of 10 megabytes.
- Ensure the submitted plan uses the identified prompts provided in the regional (if applicable) instructions and local area plan instructions; and each page of the plan is numbered. When plan modifications are necessary, to ease the review burden and improve L&I feedback, use the Track Changes function in Microsoft Word, **unless** modifications are in a graph/table. If plan modifications are in a graph/table, use yellow highlight to indicate new narrative and the cross-out feature to reflect removed narrative.
- Provide documentation showing that the submitting local board published the public notice inviting public comment, and that the public notice is for the required 30 days, in accordance with WIOA Sec. 108 and 20 CFR Part 679. The public notice, at a minimum, must (1) summarize the plan, (2) provide the dates of the comment period, and (3) how to submit comments. Public notice must account for local area(s) affected by the plan creation and/or subsequent review and modification. Stakeholders and interested parties, including L&I agencies, must be notified of the public notice’s posting, and how the notice’s subject (i.e., the plan and supporting documents) may be accessed.

In alignment with WIOA sec. 108(d)(1) and 20 CFR § 679(b)(1), proposed plans must be made available to the public through *electronic and* other means, such as *public hearings and local news media*.

Local Boards must provide evidence of items described in **both** 1 and 2:

1. Electronic documentation:
 - A. a screen print of the online posting on the local board’s website and website information providing evidence of the first date the public comment period began; and
 - B. documentation of how and when stakeholders were informed of the public comment period (e.g., an e-mail to stakeholders and other interested parties).
 2. Public hearings (e.g., board meetings) and local news media documentation:
 - A. a copy of the advertisement from the physical newspaper of general circulation; and
 - B. a billing receipt showing dates of publication.
- Provide a copy of all public comments received and local board’s comment acknowledgements.

- Review and verify the *WIOA Plans Submission Checklist* is completed; refer to the checklist for additional direction.

B. Approval. Four-year regional and local area plans, and subsequently modified plans, will be reviewed and recommended for the Governor’s, or designee, approval based upon the requirements outlined in L&I policy, this guidance, and plan-specific documents. **The effective date of the PY 2025-2028 WIOA regional and local area plan is July 1, 2025.**

Regional and local area plan packages will be reviewed upon receipt. BWDA will notify the submitting local board’s POC when the initial plan submission is received. BWDA may request clarifying information or provide feedback to revise the plan. If the plan/modification(s) is approved, the submitter will be directed to provide a “clean” and final version of the approved plan to BWDA. BWDA will email either an approval letter or a denial letter notifying the submitting local board Executive Director, CEO, and local board Chair of the disposition of the plan and/or modification.

The submission deadline for the PY 2025-2028 WIOA Regional (if applicable) and Local Area plan is February 21, 2025.

Plan(s) submitted to L&I are considered approved if:

- L&I provides notification of approval (i.e., approval letter) to local area CEO and local board Chairperson; or
- At least 90 days have passed since the submission of the draft plan without the submitting local board receiving any communication from L&I.

L&I may choose not to approve a plan submission for any of the following reasons:

- Deficiencies in workforce investment activities are identified in the region or local area and the designated area has not demonstrated acceptable progress in implementing corrective actions;
- The plan does not comply with the applicable provisions of WIOA and its regulations;
- The plan does not align with the PA WIOA Combined State Plan and subsequent modification;
- The plan does not include local area plan submissions from the local board(s) within a workforce planning region; or
- Other reasons as L&I may determine appropriate.

Public Posting of Approved Plan: Each local board must publicly post the following items on their local board’s website within 90 days of L&I’s approval:

1. BWDA approval letter,
2. approved regional plan, if applicable, and
3. approved local area plan with supplemental plan information.

Required supplemental plan information includes:

- Attachment 1: Local Area WIOA Title I Performance Accountability template;
- Attachment 2: Local Workforce System Organizational Chart model; and
- Attachment 3: Local Workforce Development System Program Partner-Provider List template.

Note: Local boards are expected to make timely revisions to the supplemental plan attachments as needed. Therefore, if a supplemental plan attachment requires further updates after a local area plan (or a local area plan modification) is approved, an additional plan modification is not required.

- V. **Structure Exceptions.** Consistent with the *Local Governance* policy, those local areas that require a structure exception, must include such narrative within the local area plan. See *Local Area Plan Instructions; Prompt 3.1* for additional details.
- VI. **Plan Modification.** Given the multiyear nature of the regional and local area plans, reassessing the effectiveness and labor market relevance, and when needed, adjusting strategies to respond to the changing economic conditions and workforce needs must occur. WIOA requires modification anytime underlying conditions shift or if plan elements are no longer valid, as detailed in WIOA sections 102(c)(3) and 108(a); therefore, to be compliant with 20 CFR Part 679, all currently approved regional and local area plans must be reviewed, and appropriate modification completed, at least every two years after the respective effective dates.

To further clarify, and in accordance with 20 CFR §679.530(b) and 20 CFR §679.580(b), two years after a plan's effective date, each local board, in partnership with the appropriate CEO(s), must review and make modifications to the regional plan (if applicable) and local area plan which reflects changes:

- In the labor market and economic conditions; and
- Other factors affecting the implementation of the local area plan, including but not limited to:
 - significant changes in local economic conditions;
 - changes in the financing available to support WIOA Title I and partner provided WIOA services;
 - changes to the local board structure; and
 - the need to revise strategies to meet local performance goals.