



**PEE DEE REGIONAL PLAN**  
**Workforce Innovation &**  
**Opportunity Act (WIOA)**

**Program Years 2024 - 2027**  
**(2024-2028)**

**Submitted by:**  
**Bridgette Coates, Pee Dee Local Area**  
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**Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act  
Regional Plan  
July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2028**

**Planning Region Name:** Pee Dee Region

**Local Workforce Development Areas within the Planning Region:** Pee Dee, Santee-Lynches, Waccamaw

**Local Workforce Development Area Administrators and Contact Information:**

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## Attachment A: Regional Plan Requirements

The regional plan serves as an action plan to develop, align, and integrate service delivery strategies and resources among multiple local workforce development areas (LWDAs) within a region. Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) and chief elected officials (CEOs) in each planning region are required to engage in a regional planning process that results in the preparation and submission of a single regional plan. Regional plans must incorporate the local plans for each LWDA within the planning region. The following guiding principles must be considered priorities and included in responses throughout the document:

- Partnership and collaboration,
- Increased access to resources and services through the use of technology, and
- Innovation and cost efficiencies.

The regional plan must include the following:

- 1. A description of how each LWDA within the region was afforded the opportunity to participate in the regional planning process, along with a description of the planning process undertaken to produce the regional plan. The description must include how the CEOs and LWDBs were involved in the development of the plan.**

Each local area played a significant role in the development of the regional plan. Conference calls and Zoom meetings were held for the planning process. Information to be included in the regional plan was also shared with individual local boards to gather their input and support.

The Santee-Lynches LWDA was able to provide labor market information and data from JobsEQ (CHMURA) through 2024 Q1 to assist with the data analysis for the regional plan. In an effort to validate the data labor market information provided as part of the planning process and to identify in-demand occupations within industries with more specificity, various local board members, who represented sectors being targeted for this region, economic development and education and training institutions, were asked to provide first-hand knowledge of the needs and demands of the targeted industries.

Input from chief elected officials (CEOs) was obtained in the following ways:

In the Pee Dee Local Workforce Development Area, an email including an Executive Summary and a copy of the complete regional plan was presented to the six county councils for comment/input and consideration. The Workforce Director offered to present, if necessary. Each county council clerk provided emails/statement regarding its council's consideration and/or a copy of the council's minutes following the meetings that indicated that the county council members had received the proposed plans. Any comments received were included in documentation to SC Department of Employment and Workforce.

In the Santee-Lynches Local Workforce Development Area, a five-page Executive Summary, along with a copy of the regional plan was presented to the four-county council chairmen for review and comments and for presentation to their council members. The Executive Summary included information on key sections of the 4-year plan:

1. Workforce and Economic Analysis, to include employment and education information for the region as a whole;
2. Regional Partnerships and Investment Strategies;
3. A brief highlight of

strengths and weaknesses for the region, and 4. Economic Development efforts. All chief elected officials acknowledged receipt, review and submission to their respective county council members. No or any comments received were included as an attachment to the plan.

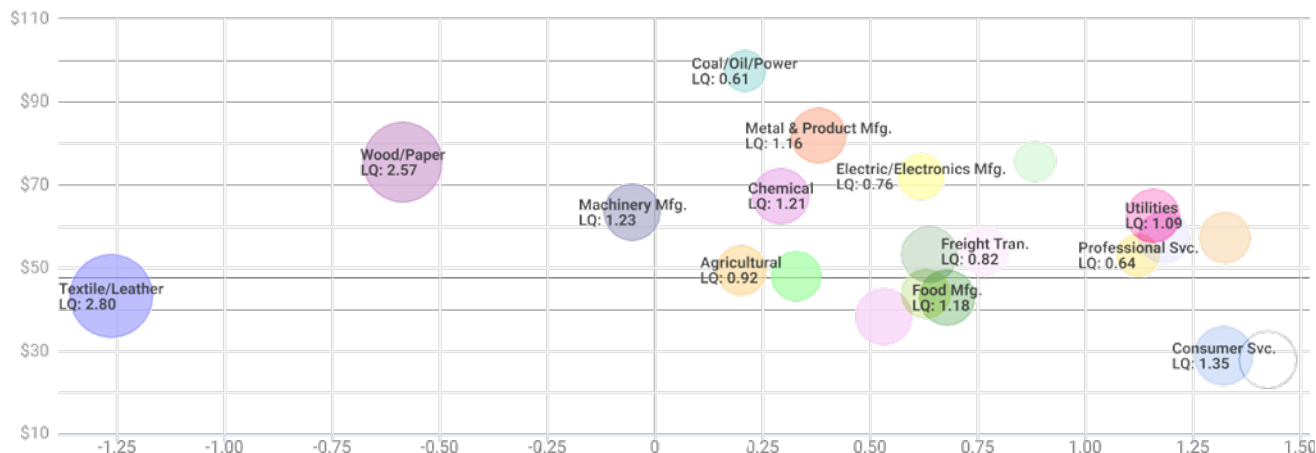
In the Waccamaw Local Workforce Development Area, an email was sent to the three county council chairs detailing the regional plan purpose and the process required by SCDEW for approval. Attached to the email was the complete regional plan with a request for their review and input. After the public comment period (no comments received), a request for approval was sent to all three of the council chairs. All submitted a detailed letter indicating review and approval.

**2. An analysis of regional labor market data and economic conditions, to include existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations, and the employment needs of employers in those existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations. The analysis must include the following:**

- The knowledge and skills necessary to meet the employment needs of the employers in the region, including those in in-demand industry sectors and occupations;
- An analysis of the current workforce in the region, including employment and unemployment data, labor market trends, and the educational and skill levels of the workforce, including individuals with barriers to employment; and
- An analysis of workforce development activities in the region, including available education and training opportunities. This analysis must indicate the strengths and weaknesses of workforce development activities necessary to address the education and skill needs of job seekers, including individuals with barriers to employment, and the employment needs of employers in the region.

Data reports and labor market information have always been the driving force for workforce planning in the Pee Dee region. Additional data and information shared by the state and other sources are analyzed to determine in-demand industry sectors and occupations that the Boards should target for workforce and economic growth within the local area. The Industry Clusters data chart supports Health Care as being one of the most in-demand (growth rate and average wages) sectors for the regions.

Industry Clusters for Greater Pee Dee Region as of 2024Q2



Data reviewed and analyzed included the following data:

- Existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations
- Employment needs of employers
- Knowledge and skills necessary to meet employment needs
- Current workforce of the local area
- Education and training opportunities

### Existing and Emerging In-demand Industry Sectors and Occupations

#### **Industry Snapshot**

Based on 5 years of historical data, the largest sector in the Pee Dee - Complete Region (WIOA) is Healthcare and Social Assistance, employing 57,744 workers with an average wage of \$57,324. Based on a 1-year forecast, this sector is expected to grow annually by 1.3%. The next largest occupation groups in the region is Retail Trade, employing 57,034 workers. Its average annual wages are \$33,927, with a projected .5% annual growth rate. The third largest sector is Accommodation and Food Services (54,999 workers). Analysis of industry comparisons and clusters clearly supports the healthcare sector as an existing and emerging in-demand industry sector. This analysis included an analysis of the Pee Dee Region data report, which documents significant job growth and occupations that would be attainable by the targeted populations of agencies and the needs of employers in the region. There is a prevalence of healthcare as a demand industry in all parts of the region. Healthcare is the only industry with growth in all three local workforce areas. While Accommodation and Food Services is number one in terms of employment for the Waccamaw region, Health Care is number three. For the Pee Dee and Santee-Lynches local workforce areas, Healthcare is number one. It is important to note though that for the Waccamaw local workforce area, Health Care has the highest projected Annual Growth percentage. Validation can be provided by healthcare representation on Local Boards, along with Technical Colleges' validation of the demand for healthcare training in the region, and all three local workforce areas' validation of healthcare growth and demand across the region.

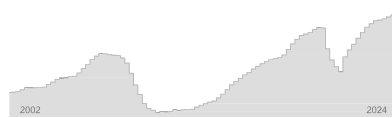
Greater Pee Dee Region, 2024Q2<sup>1</sup>

NAICS	Industry	CURRENT		5-YEAR HISTORY			1-YEAR FORECAST					
		Empl	Avg Ann Wages	LQ	Empl Change	Trend	Ann %	Total Demand	Exits	Transfers	Empl Growth	Ann % Growth
62	Health Care and Social Assistance	57,744	\$57,324	0.97	5,131		1.9%	6,408	2,571	3,071	766	1.3%
44	Retail Trade	57,034	\$33,927	1.45	3,178		1.2%	8,087	3,274	4,525	288	0.5%
72	Accommodation and Food Services	54,999	\$24,787	1.58	18		0	10,526	4,176	5,628	722	1.3%
31	Manufacturing	37,504	\$66,592	1.18	-1,471		-0.8%	3,775	1,391	2,386	-2	0
61	Educational Services	27,547	\$48,746	0.86	-454		-0.3%	2,736	1,169	1,413	154	0.6%
23	Construction	23,577	\$57,050	0.99	1,305		1.1%	2,303	745	1,274	283	1.2%
56	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	22,969	\$39,727	0.94	-696		-0.6%	2,844	1,044	1,570	231	1.0%
92	Public Administration	21,743	\$51,914	1.17	548		0.5%	2,133	799	1,195	139	0.6%
81	Other Services (except Public Administration)	17,813	\$30,899	1.05	356		0.4%	2,210	829	1,198	183	1.0%
48	Transportation and Warehousing	16,426	\$49,934	0.83	3,394		4.7%	1,923	722	1,061	140	0.9%
54	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	12,991	\$68,418	0.45	1,513		2.5%	1,235	389	660	186	1.4%
71	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	9,613	\$25,742	1.18	521		1.1%	1,577	566	854	157	1.6%
52	Finance and Insurance	9,345	\$77,454	0.59	-389		-0.8%	855	296	476	83	0.9%
42	Wholesale Trade	8,625	\$64,880	0.58	375		0.9%	923	321	540	62	0.7%
53	Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	8,064	\$51,667	1.14	231		0.6%	878	342	431	105	1.3%
11	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	4,649	\$49,916	0.95	-619		-2.5%	571	269	300	2	0
51	Information	3,316	\$67,933	0.43	-288		-1.7%	314	105	183	26	0.8%
55	Management of Companies and Enterprises	2,531	\$88,614	0.41	-105		-0.8%	239	80	134	26	1.0%
22	Utilities	2,161	\$98,493	1.05	-104		-0.9%	194	70	119	5	0.3%
21	Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	390	\$84,953	0.27	165		11.6%	41	12	24	5	1.2%
99	Unclassified	1	\$57,688	0	1		n/a	0	0	0	0	0.6%
-	<b>Total - All Industries</b>	<b>399,040</b>	<b>\$47,782</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>12,609</b>		<b>0.6%</b>	<b>46,992</b>	<b>17,860</b>	<b>25,536</b>	<b>3,596</b>	<b>0.9%</b>

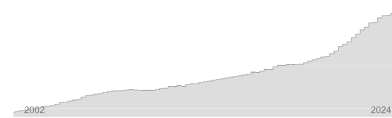
Source: JobsEQ®  
Data as of 2024Q2  
Note: Figures may not sum due to rounding.  
1. All data based upon a four-quarter moving average.  
Exits and transfers are approximate estimates based upon occupation separation rates.

**Industry Snapshot (Pee Dee Region)**

**EMPLOYMENT**



**WAGES**

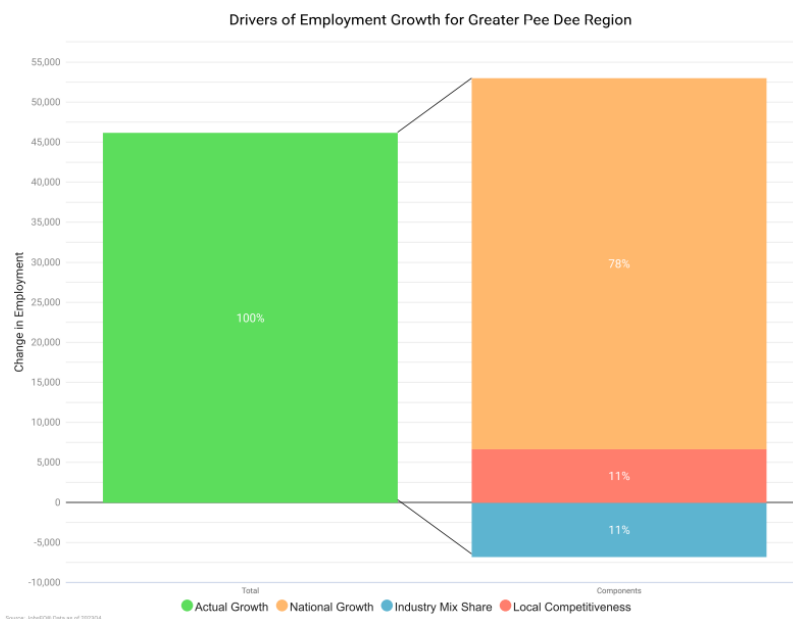


2-Digit Industry	Empl	Avg Ann Wages	LQ	5yr History	Annual Demand	Forecast Ann Growth
Health Care and Social Assistance	57,744	\$57,324	0.97		6,408	1.3%
Retail Trade	57,034	\$33,927	1.45		8,087	0.5%
Accommodation and Food Services	54,999	\$24,787	1.58		10,526	1.3%
Manufacturing	37,504	\$66,592	1.18		3,775	0.0%
Educational Services	27,547	\$48,746	0.86		2,736	0.6%
Construction	23,577	\$57,050	0.99		2,303	1.2%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	22,969	\$39,727	0.94		2,844	1.0%
Public Administration	21,743	\$51,914	1.17		2,133	0.6%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	17,813	\$30,899	1.05		2,210	1.0%
Transportation and Warehousing	16,426	\$49,934	0.83		1,923	0.9%
Remaining Component Industries	61,686	\$66,887	0.64		6,827	0.9%
<b>Total - All Industries</b>	<b>399,040</b>	<b>\$47,782</b>	<b>1.00</b>		<b>46,992</b>	<b>0.9%</b>

Based on the analysis of all data, healthcare is expected to grow across all areas in this region at a higher rate than other industries.

### Drivers of Employment Growth (Pee Dee Region)

Over the ten years ending 2023, employment in Total - All Industries for the Greater Pee Dee Region added 46,206 jobs. After adjusting for national growth during this period and industry mix share, the part of this employment change due to local competitiveness was a gain of 6,651 jobs, meaning this industry was more competitive than its national counterpart during this period.



### Employment Growth Pee Dee Region

The largest sector in the Greater Pee Dee Region is Healthcare and Social Assistance, employing 57,744 workers. The next-largest sectors in the region are Retail Trade (57,034 workers) and Accommodation and Food Services (54,999).

Total Workers for Greater Pee Dee Region by Industry



Source: JobsEQ®  
Data as of 2024Q1  
Note: Figures may not sum due to rounding.

Greater Pee Dee Region, 2024Q2<sup>1</sup>

NAICS	Industry	CURRENT		5-YEAR HISTORY			1-YEAR FORECAST					
		Empl	Avg Ann Wages	LQ	Empl Change	Trend	Ann %	Total Demand	Exits	Transfers	Empl Growth	Ann % Growth
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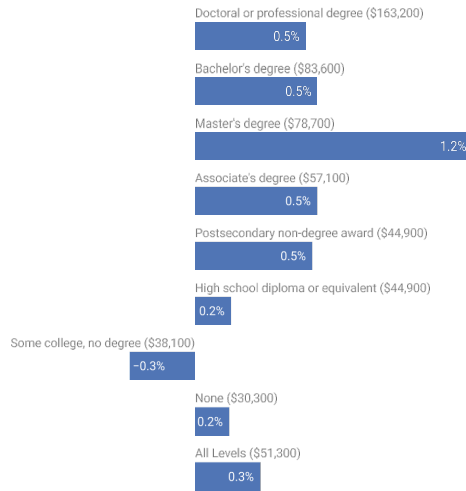
Source: JobEQ®  
Data as of 2024Q2  
Note: Figures may not sum due to rounding.  
1. All data based upon a four-quarter moving average.  
Exits and transfers are approximate estimates based upon occupation separation rates.

- **The knowledge and skills necessary to meet the employment needs of the employers in the region, including those in in-demand industry sectors and occupations;**

Expected growth rates for occupations vary by the education and training required. While all employment in the Greater Pee Dee Region is projected to grow 1.0% over the next ten years, occupations typically requiring a postgraduate degree are expected to grow 1.4% per year, those requiring a bachelor’s degree are forecast to grow 1.3% per year, and occupations typically needing a 2-year degree or certificate are expected to grow 1.3% per year as well.



Annual Average Projected Job Growth by Education Levels



Most individuals hired by employers in the Pee Dee Region tend to have a high school diploma or equivalent with no college studies (24,405 active job ads). The next level of education required for active job ads is bachelor's degree (10,127). The top 6 educational requirements reflected in job postings are reflected below. Most of the openings require a high school diploma. For the Pee Dee Region, this is the highest percentage of individuals in the region who have only a high school but would meet the minimum qualifications for employment. The data also shows that a very large percentage of the population did not disclose their education level, or it doesn't fall within these top categories. The absence of such information could impact such individuals applying for these jobs that do require a specific minimum education level.

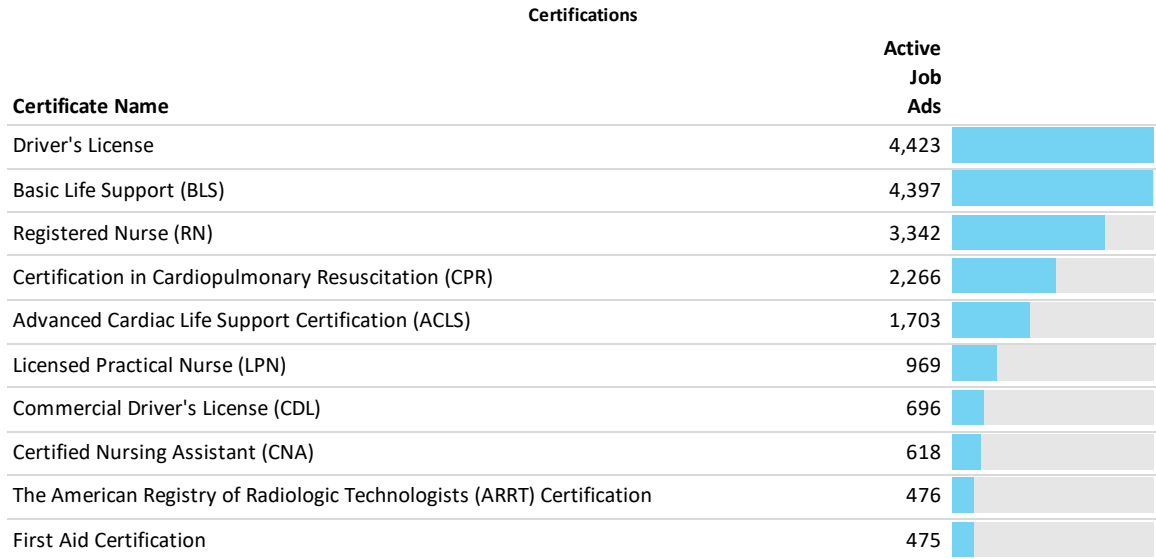
**Openings by Education Levels (Pee Dee Region)**

Minimum Education Level	Active Job Ads
High school diploma or equivalent	24,405
Bachelor's degree	10,127
Associate's degree	4,013
Master's degree	2,067
Doctoral or professional degree	583
Unspecified/other	60,418

Source: [JobsEQ®](#)  
 Data reflect online job postings that were active from 12/01/2023 to 12/01/2024

The top 10 certifications employers look for when hiring in our region are listed below. The number represents how many times the certification shows up in active job postings/job ads.

**Openings by Certifications (Pee Dee Region)**



Source: [JobsEQ®](#)

The following chart shows the number of Openings by Programs for the region. Based on the data, Nursing is the top program with active job ads. This supports the other data that indicates that Healthcare is an in-demand occupation.

**Openings by Programs (Pee Dee Region)**

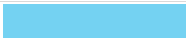


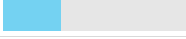

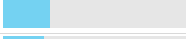
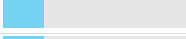
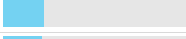
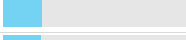
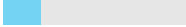
**Openings by Programs**



Source: [JobsEQ®](#)

The lists below also identify the top 10 soft and hard skills that employers are looking for in employees. The requirement for these skills is included in job ad postings. All these soft skills are being addressed through various workshops held through WIOA, SC Works, the technical colleges, the school districts, workforce collaborations and more. Likewise, individuals are encouraged to take classes at their local Adult Education Center, Technical college or Community Center that may offer classes in Microsoft Office, to include Excel and Outlook at no to little cost where possible to address hard skills requirements.

### Openings by Soft Skills (Pee Dee Region)

Soft Skills		Active Job Ads
Skill Name		
Communication (Verbal and written skills)	43,516	
Customer Service	22,521	
Cooperative/Team Player	22,480	
Organization	13,103	
Detail Oriented/Meticulous	10,574	
Adaptability/Flexibility/Tolerance of Change and Uncertainty	10,540	
Supervision/Management	9,142	
Self-Motivated/Ability to Work Independently/Self Leadership	9,104	
Interpersonal Relationships/Maintain Relationships	8,664	
Problem Solving	8,461	

Source: [JobsEQ®](#)

### Openings by Hard Skills (Pee Dee Region)

Hard Skills		Active Job Ads
Skill Name		
Microsoft Office	5,951	
Ability to Lift 41-50 lbs.	5,524	
Ability to Lift 51-100 lbs.	5,245	
Microsoft Excel	5,190	
Sales	3,518	
Cash Handling (Cashier)	3,140	
Retail Sales	3,100	
Ability to Lift 21-30 lbs.	2,930	
Manufacturing	2,510	
Microsoft Outlook	2,385	

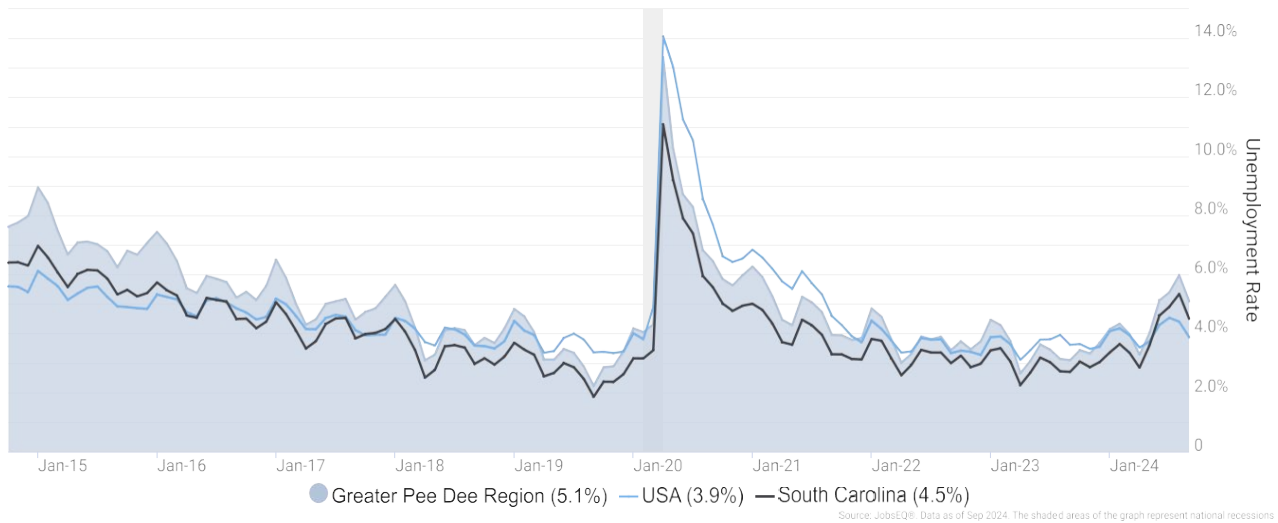
Source: [JobsEQ®](#)

- An analysis of the current workforce in the region, including employment and unemployment data, labor market trends, and the educational and skill levels of the workforce, including individuals with barriers to employment; and

Current Workforce in the Region

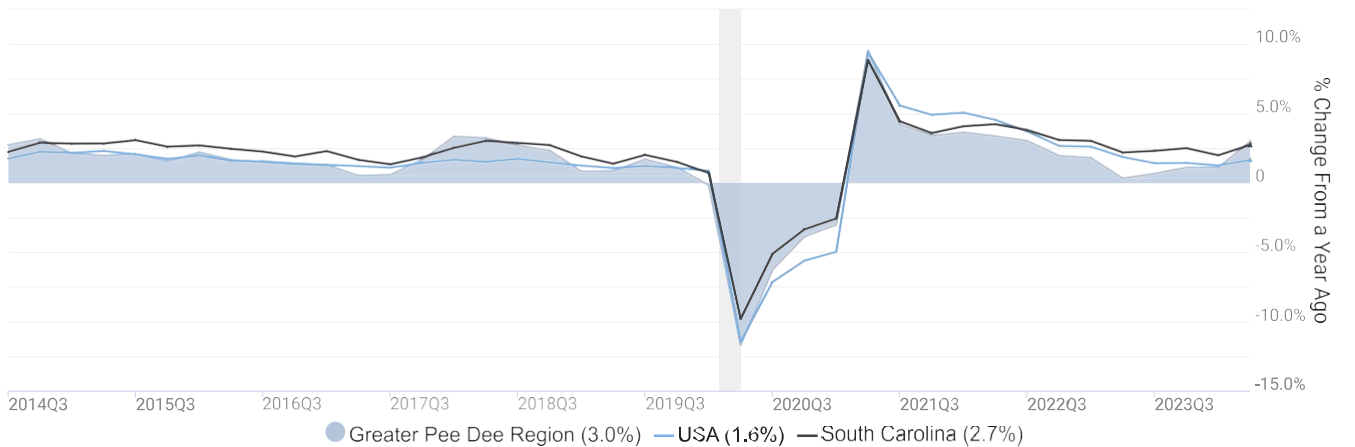
The unemployment rate for the Pee Dee - Complete Region (WIOA) was 5.1% as of September 2024. The regional unemployment rate was higher than the national rate of 3.9%. One year earlier, in September 2023, the unemployment rate in the Greater Pee Dee Region was 3.1%.

Unemployment Rate for Greater Pee Dee Region



Total employment for the Greater Pee Dee Region was 399,040 (based on a four-quarter moving average). Over the year ending 2024Q2, employment increased 3.0% in the region.

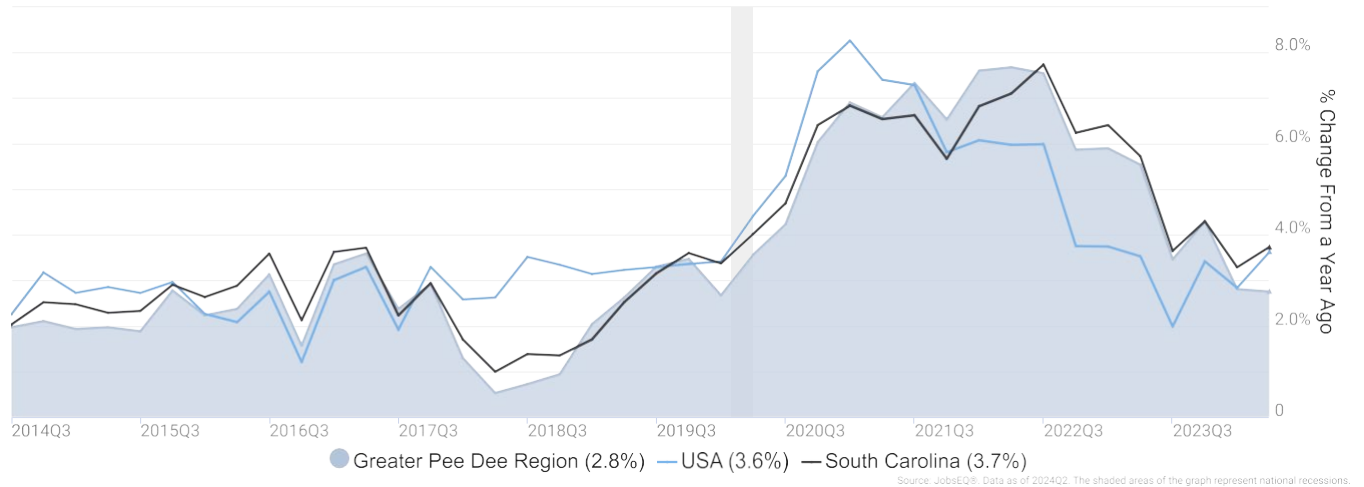
Employment for Greater Pee Dee Region



Employment data are derived from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and imputed where necessary. Data are updated through 2024Q1

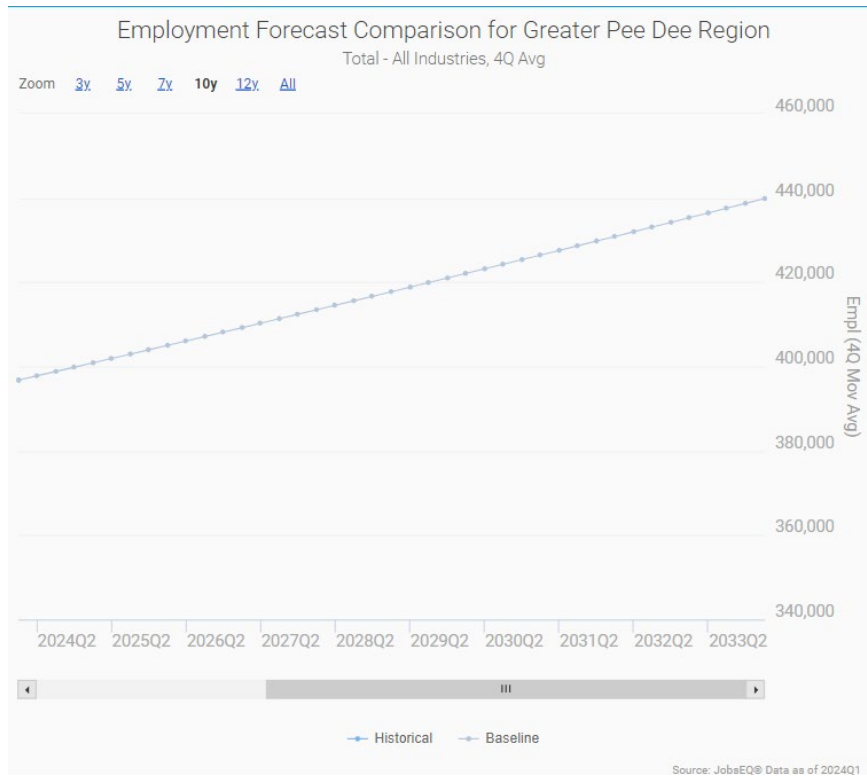
Likewise, the average worker in the Greater Pee Dee Region earned annual wages of \$47,782 as of 2024Q2. Average annual wages per worker increased 2.8% in the region over the preceding four quarters. For comparison purposes, annual average wages were \$72,405 in the nation as of 2024Q2.

Average Annual Wages for Greater Pee Dee Region

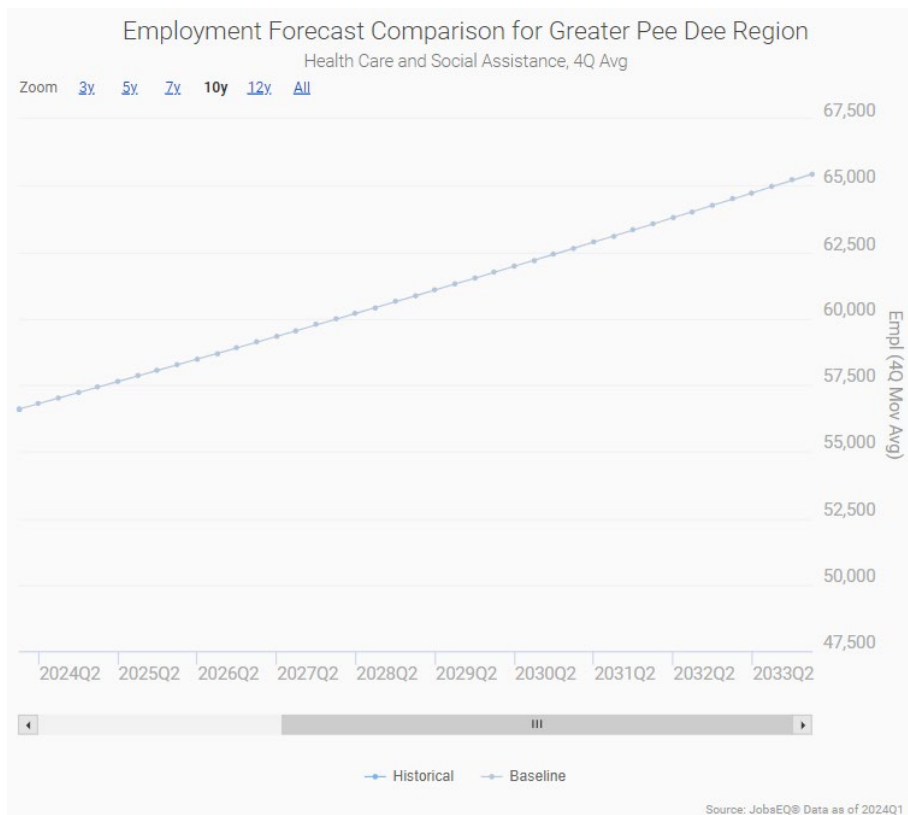


The number of Area Job Openings in the local workforce area has fluctuated slightly over the past year but continues to be significantly less than the number of unemployed individuals in the area. Therefore, it is important that additional employment opportunities are created within the local workforce area.

Labor Market projections reflect a 10.85% positive change in projected employment from 2024 to 2034 across all jobs in the Pee Dee - Complete Region (WIOA).



The healthcare sector has a projected positive percent change of 15.18% (8,624 jobs) projected by 2034.



Educational Attainment data indicates that approximately 10.9% of individuals 25 - 64 years of age have received less than a high school diploma while 34.6% have graduated from high school. Approximately 21.2% have received some college education and 11% have received their associate's degree. Graduate trends for the region reflect more residents with a bachelor's degree (14.4%) than any other higher level post-secondary degree (7.9%).

	Percent Greater Pee Dee Region	Value Greater Pee Dee Region
<b>Demographics</b>		
<b>Educational Attainment, Age 25-64</b>		
No High School Diploma	10.9%	53,799
High School Graduate	34.6%	171,385
Some College, No Degree	21.2%	105,227
Associate's Degree	11.0%	54,562
Bachelor's Degree	14.4%	71,246
Postgraduate Degree	7.9%	39,028

Source: [JobsEQ®](#)

### Barriers

The Pee Dee Region has many residents who face one or more barriers to employment. Different population groups may need more tailored services to address their training and employment needs. Data shows that 5,186 individuals were released in SC thus far in 2024 and approximately 31.16% of those were in the Pee Dee WIOA Region. In the state, the average age of an inmate was 38 years old, 57% did not have a HS/GED.

<b>EX-Offenders</b>	
Pee Dee WIOA Region	1,616
State Total	5,186
% of state total	31.16%

Source: SC Department of Corrections

At 8.2%, the Pee Dee Region holds a high percentage of people with disabilities and the highest labor force participation rates (LFPR) for individuals with disabilities at approximately 3%, just above the State's average of 2.8%. Also, for the 18–34-year-old range, cognitive abilities hold the highest percentages. Mobility (ambulatory difficulty) is the highest percentage for all regions in the 18-64 year-old range.

<b>Disability</b>			
	Pee Dee Total	With a Disability	Percent with a Disability
Total Civilian Noninstitutionalized Population	997,377	81,467	8.2%

Source: [JobsEQ®](#)  
American Community Survey 2018-2022

Data shows that 167,755 people in the Pee Dee Region have incomes below the poverty level. The Pee Dee region represents 23.4% of SC's population who live in poverty.

Poverty			
	Pee Dee WIOA Region	SC Total	% of Population
Income in the past 12 months below poverty level:	167,755	717,849	23.4%

Source: Source: JobsEQ®  
American Community Survey 2018-2022

Approximately 28% of SC's homeless population are located in the Pee Dee Region. Data also shows that the majority of the 1165 homeless individuals are males. 17% of these individuals are unsheltered and 32% are adults with a substance abuse disorder. This is a very difficult group to reach since they often do not have any means of transportation, communication (ex. cell phone) or permanent address where they can be reached.

Homeless (2023)	
Pee Dee WIOA Region	1,165
South Carolina	4,053
% of state's homeless	27.6%

The data was collected by US Interagency Council of Homelessness

Approximately 21% of Youth aged 16-24 are not in school and are not high school graduates in the Pee Dee Region. A large portion of this population are considered hard-to-serve due to possessing multiple barriers such as: high school dropout, pregnant/parenting teen, offender, runaway youth, homeless, etc.

Youth Not in School (16-24)	
# of Youth Not in School Pee Dee WIOA Region	1,784
# of Youth Not in School South Carolina	8,424
% of state's youth not in school	21.2%

Source: JobsEQ®  
American Community Survey 2018-2022

- **An analysis of workforce development activities in the region, including available education and training opportunities. This analysis must indicate the strengths and weaknesses of workforce development activities necessary to address the education and skill needs of job seekers, including individuals with barriers to employment, and the employment needs of employers in the region.**



❖ Available Education and Training Opportunities for the Pee Dee Region

Greater Pee Dee Region for Total - All Programs (00.0000)				
Title	Certificates and 2yr Awards	4yr Awards	Postgraduate Awards	Total Awards
Horry-Georgetown Technical College	2,288	0	0	2,288
Coastal Carolina University	0	1,885	286	2,171
Florence-Darlington Technical College	702	0	0	702
Central Carolina Technical College	682	0	0	682
Francis Marion University	0	522	157	679
Northeastern Technical College	481	0	0	481
Coker University	0	197	47	244
Miller-Motte College-Conway	205	0	0	205
University of South Carolina-Sumter	175	0	0	175
Williamsburg Technical College	155	0	0	155
Kenneth Shuler School of Cosmetology-Florence	135	0	0	135
Morris College	0	76	0	76
Strand College of Hair Design	63	0	0	63
LeGrand Institute of Cosmetology Inc	20	0	0	20
Academy for Careers and Technology	15	0	0	15
Personal Touch Beauty and Barber College	3	0	0	3
Galen Health Institutes-Myrtle Beach	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,924</b>	<b>2,680</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>8,094</b>

Source: JobsEQ®  
Data as of the 2022-2023 academic year unless noted otherwise; related occupation data as of 2024Q1.  
Note: Figures may not sum due to rounding.

Overall, the majority (41.7%) of people hired by employers in the Pee Dee region have a high school diploma or equivalent with no college studies. Approximately 14% have a bachelor's degree or higher. Job openings by education requirements reflect the majority of the jobs for those with a high school diploma or equivalent and those without a high school diploma or equivalent.

Openings by Education Levels

Minimum Education Level	Active Job Ads
High school diploma or equivalent	24,405
Bachelor's degree	10,127
Associate's degree	4,013
Master's degree	2,067
Doctoral or professional degree	583
Unspecified/other	60,418

## ❖ Strengths and Weaknesses

### Strengths

A strength of the region's workforce development activities is the many collaborations in place to help individuals with barriers to find employment that will lead to a self-sufficient wage.

For example, for ex-offenders, WIOA in Georgetown County has a partnership with the Georgetown Re-Entry Program. SCDEW has a partnership with SC Department of Corrections that allows Workforce Consultants to visit Palmer Pre-Release Center in Florence County, Lee Correctional Institution in Lee County and Evans Correctional Facility in Marlboro County on a monthly basis to provide workforce services to incarcerated individuals prior to re-entry. Such services include an introduction to WIOA, SCWOS and federal bonding. DJJ is a partner on the Boards' Youth Committees and its members offer expertise and collaboration on serving youth offenders. In Santee-Lynches, the Local Area partners with the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition to assist Ex-Offenders with obtaining the necessary skills to find self-sufficient employment.

In 2016, Northeastern Technical College (NETC) and Evans Correctional Facility applied and were approved for the Second Chance Initiative with the US Department of Education. The Second Chance Initiative allows these schools to offer Pell grants to people incarcerated in state or federal prisons, mostly targeting inmates who are likely to be released within five years. NETC instructors travel to the facility to work with the inmates. NETC encourages these inmates to stay in the community and take local jobs. President Kyle Wagner says that the college has worked with local industries to provide opportunities for the inmates after they are released. Research shows that access to postsecondary education in prison can reduce recidivism by up to 48%, which is the rate at which those convicted of a crime return to prison. On September 24, 2024, sixteen inmates graduated NETC with honors. Nine achieved a perfect 4.0 GPA. Together the class was awarded a total of 42 credentials, including six associates degrees.

One way that the region is assisting *individuals with disabilities* is through the Disabilities Committees created under the WIOA federal law. These committees are made up of Workforce Development Board Members and other experts in the community such as Vocational Rehab, Disabilities and Special Needs and other officials. Also, Vocational Rehabilitation is an active, vibrant partner in each local area, providing professional services to this population, to include job readiness training centers, comprehensive evaluation centers, substance abuse treatment centers and staff that serves clients at various itinerant sites such as SC Works, local high schools, and community mental health centers. The Pee Dee's Workforce System Coordinator is in conversation with Vocational Rehabilitation in Florence County as it is exploring delivering healthcare-related training in its VR training center. This training would be delivered by a local training provider on the Local Area's ETPL. It would be the LWDA's goal for many of the participants in the training to be co-enrolled in WIOA. SC Commission for the Blind offers individualized services for the blind and visually impaired and businesses that hire these individuals throughout the region. As a result of the grant received in 2018 in partnership with Santee-Lynches and Able SC, staff have continued its efforts with creating greater job access and opportunities for individuals with disabilities by promoting and advocating for workplace inclusion. These efforts help to facilitate independence for both youth and adult persons with disabilities. This grant helped to increase employer knowledge of the facts concerning people with disabilities and combating potential negative attitudes towards those with disabilities and laid the foundation for continuous and ongoing training with new employers. Quarterly training sessions are held for SC Works partners and staff to continue the momentum. The region continues to seek additional partnerships and opportunities to increase the number of individuals served with disabilities

through the WIOA program. The Waccamaw Disabilities Committee is dedicated to delivering efficient services to individuals with all types of disabilities. However, a key area of focus has been finding ways to support individuals with autism. The Autism Championship Network, a member of the committee, is providing valuable technical assistance in this effort.

Several grant opportunities are bringing additional funding to the region to help individuals with barriers find employment. The South Carolina Workforce Industry Needs Scholarship (SCWINS) is a statewide technical college scholarship program designed to address workforce shortages in South Carolina. The scholarship supplements Lottery Tuition Assistance to cover tuition and/or mandatory fees left after applying for other scholarships or grants. Also, using the Individual and Employer Training (IET) Grant from the State Workforce Development Board, The Pee Dee LWDA partnered with Honda of South Carolina and Florence-Darlington Technical College to cover tuition and an On-the-Job Training for 16 individuals who may not otherwise have been hired by Honda. In January 2021, the Pee Dee Regional Council of Governments received an H-1B Rural Healthcare Grant of \$2.27 million from the US Department of Labor to serve unemployed, underemployed and/or incumbent workers. (Upper Savannah Council of Governments is a partner serving participants to become EMTs and Paramedics.) The grant is to address the shortage of rural healthcare workers in occupations directly impacting patient care- Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA), Phlebotomists, Pharmacy Technicians, Certified Medical Assistants (CMA), Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN) and Registered Nurses (RN). The employer partner for the grant is McLeod Health which has hospitals and physicians' practices throughout the greater Pee Dee Region. The technical colleges in the Greater Pee Dee Region are providing training to H-1B recruits. The grant was to expire in January 2025; however, a no-cost extension is being pursued from USDOL in order to support nearly 30 nurses as they complete their training and enter employment by 09/2025.

Collaborations have been formed with private, non-profit organizations to help create employability skills boot camps that involve workshops, assessments, mock interviewing and referrals to other partner agencies that may be able to help those who are *low income*. For example, in Waccamaw workshops are held on site at SC Works centers as well as off-site locations such as Goodwill Job Centers and A Father's Place. Boot camp opportunities are also provided in the Santee-Lynches LWDA through partnering with the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition. Low income is defined as an annual income less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level. DSS is a viable partner and provides employment and training services to recipients of SNAP and TANF, such as resume assistance, soft skills development, job search assistance and referrals to employers and partner organizations. DSS' SNAP E&T employees are co-located in each of the comprehensive SC Works Centers across the State and in several affiliate centers. The SNAP E&T program provides training and employment opportunities to low income, working-age individuals to increase their income and ultimately lead to self-sufficiency. Partnership with WIOA Title I allows for co-enrollment and stretching of local dollars.

To assist the *homeless*, agencies have come together to provide housing, basic needs, and employability skills training which eventually lead to a job. Partnering together has proven to be a successful means of helping homeless individuals gain employment. In the Pee Dee Workforce Development Area, House of Hope, the Courtney McGinnis Graham Community Shelter and Lighthouse Ministries serve as catalysts to accomplish this collaboration for supportive service needs in Florence County. The Emmanuel Soup Kitchen in the Santee-Lynches area is a community beacon for the homeless assisting with Food and clothing. Also, partnering with the Sumter United Ministries to find funding to build pods for the homeless and ECHO (Eastern Carolina Housing Organization) in Sumter to address the needs of the homeless population, to include addressing supportive service needs to help eliminate other barriers, are avenues that will help to eliminate homelessness or significantly decrease it.

As noted, data indicates that in the region, approximately 11% of persons 25 years of age and older have received less than a high school diploma while roughly 34.6% have graduated from high school. Individuals without a HSD/GED are encouraged to enroll in Adult Education. Localized Adult Education programs offer online, on-site, and blended approaches to instruction for adult students with a broad range of literacy, numeracy, and language learning levels. Unfortunately, many individuals with a high school diploma are tested to be *basic skills deficient*, and there are many opportunities available through Adult Education for upgrading, which in many cases is coupled with development and certifications in areas of WIN academic skills' and WIN Essential Soft Skills. Adult Education instructional and testing services are also available to local employers to promote workforce literacy. The Adult Education Programs have developed Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs which combine education and job skills training for adults at all skill levels with the aim to enhance the learner's potential for greater success in school and in the workforce. The learners are concurrently enrolled in basic education and industry-recognized training, which results in a credential or certification on completion. The IET is a win-win for workforce development in the Pee Dee Region. Florence County Adult Education has a Health Care Pre-Apprenticeship. It is designed to prepare participants for success in registered apprenticeship programs and/or direct entry into health care occupations. The program is 30-hours, offered over a 6-week timeframe that engages participants, including ESL enrollees, in a supportive blended-learning experience. In the Santee-Lynches Local area, the local Adult Education Center in Sumter partnering with Central Carolina Technical college to develop short-term training programs in the healthcare field while the individual is co-enrolled to earn their high school diploma or GED. The Adult Education Center in Lee County partners with a private training provider to offer short-term healthcare courses for its students/graduates.

Five technical colleges are located in the Pee Dee WIOA Region (Northeastern, Florence-Darlington, Horry Georgetown, Central Carolina and Williamsburg) and along with the adult educations in each county, we have many institutions available to provide the necessary and required training to address the education and skill needs of job seekers. The Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing & Technology (SiMT), at FDTC, offers current, quality programs to employers in the Advanced Manufacturing sector, a key sector for the region. Its reputation extends beyond the region and state. The Central Carolina Advanced Manufacturing Technology Training Center in Sumter County houses mechatronics labs, robotics, logistics, orientation to manufacturing to address the needs of employers with entry level job openings, and computer sciences training programs. Central Carolina Technical College also has a Health Sciences Center that targets training in the healthcare field, to include licensed practical and registered nurses. Horry Georgetown Technical College has opened two new advanced manufacturing centers to house programs designed to fit the needs of industrial companies such as Mercedes, Boeing, Peddinghause and Conbraco. The new buildings house equipment for machine tool technology, welding and advanced welding, robotics, mechatronics, and other types of programs. The necessary supportive services designed to eliminate barriers to employment are in place and each local area has entered into memorandums of understanding with various partner agencies to facilitate job seeker access to those services. In addition, collaborative agreements are in place between employers and technical college institutions that allows for clinical training opportunities, etc. to be conducted at employer worksites to ensure that the proper training is provided to meet employer demands.

A tremendous strength for economic development in the Pee Dee Region continues to be the Inland Port Dillon which opened in 2018 with Harbor Freight Tool as its anchor tenant. It is located on I-95 near the North Carolina/South Carolina border and is positioned within the 3,400-acre Carolinas I-95 Mega Industrial Site. Using CSX rail to/from the Dillon market gives cargo owners the ability to control costs with maximum flexibility and minimal inland truck miles. According to SC Port's 2024 Annual Report, the economic impact of the ports has risen 37% since June 2023 to a total of \$87 billion contribution to South Carolina's economy. It supports 1 in 9 S.C. jobs. In the Pee Dee, SC

Ports says the economic impact is approximately \$9.7 billion in economic output, 28,939 total jobs and over \$1.9 billion in labor income. In April 2023, the Inland Port Dillon celebrated its five-year anniversary. March 2023 had been its busiest month on record with more than 4,300 containers handled, a 16% increase from the previous record set in December 2022.

Also, Business Partner Meetings are held in all three of the local areas which connect employers and workforce agencies, i.e., WIOA, SC Works, Vocational Rehab, technical colleges, DSS, Midlands Fatherhood Coalition, etc. These meetings are designed to enable some of the workforce agencies to provide information to employers on the types of services available to them such as OJTs, Work Experience, internships, apprenticeships, IWT funding when available, upcoming job fair opportunities and more; as well as providing them a pool of applicants qualified for open positions.

### **Weaknesses**

Although there are opportunities available in each local area to provide education and training opportunities, address the education and skill needs of job seekers and the employment needs of employers, more conversation is needed on how to replicate some of these programs regionally. The three local areas are aware of this and have started discussing how to “regionalize” some of these programs.

We agree with the SC Department of Employment and Workforce in the State WIOA Plan 2024-2027, that although there are lots of workforce programs, there is need for them to be better coordinated and for partners to better understand how to leverage their programs/resources with other programs. In addition, the Pee Dee Region is primarily “rural.” There are still areas that do not have broadband. Many cannot afford vehicles and rely on public transportation to get to work, healthcare and shopping. Pee Dee Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) reports that 60% of its ridership uses public transportation for workforce reasons. Lack of affordable, quality childcare and housing resources are also problems in the rural Pee Dee, in particular. While new routes have been created in the Santee-Lynches area by the Santee-Wateree RTA at local industries such as Continental Tires, there is still a great need for transportation assistance to get individuals to work. This pilot route (known as the 521 Express) is designed to determine a more permanent opportunity for workers in the entire region, to include a route to the new employer named eVAC Advanced Magnetic Solutions.

A weakness affecting the entire workforce system is that training providers, primarily public institutions, are resistant to track and report performance outcomes of its training programs as required by WIOA. The US Department of Labor did not issue a waiver allowing training providers on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL), [www.scpa.org](http://www.scpa.org), an exemption. This year in the Pee Dee and Waccamaw LWDA, both regional colleges have listed a reasonable number of courses. We are hopeful this upward trend will continue. While WIOA participants from Santee-Lynches are sent to training at technical colleges in the Pee Dee and Midlands local areas, Santee-Lynches is hopeful that the local technical college here will add courses to the ETPL for more local availability. Doing such would significantly reduce the transportation barrier that many experience when having to travel outside of the local area for training.

Any decrease in funding to the Greater Pee Dee Region is impactful across the board. PY '24 WIOA Title I allocations for the Pee Dee LWDA were reduced by 12.68%, Waccamaw experienced a .53% increase and Santee Lynches received a 16.64% increase which was the highest increase in the state. Reductions affect both the operations and delivery of workforce services in the rural region. While

Santee-Lynches did receive an increase for PY'24, it has experienced significant budget cuts over the past 4-5 years.

**3. A description of plans for the development and implementation or expansion of sector initiatives for in-demand industry sectors or occupations for the region. Regions should consider the following:**

- **Current in-demand industry sectors and occupations within the region;**
- **The status of regional collaboration in support of the sector initiatives;**
- **Current sector-based partnerships within the region;**
- **Data-driven sector priorities within the region;**
- **The extent of business involvement in current initiatives; and**
- **Potential public-private partnerships in the region to support sector strategies.**

As described in the data provided in question #2 above, the current top four in-demand industry sectors and occupations within the region, are Retail Trade, Health Care and Social Assistance, Accommodations and Food Services and Manufacturing.

Current in-demand industry sectors and occupations that are common across the Pee Dee Region include primarily healthcare, advanced/diversified manufacturing, retail trade and the Hospitality Industry (Accommodation and Food Services).

Collaboration is significant and ongoing between the technical colleges and the local areas. Creating a region-wide partnership continues to be the goal for regional planning. Regional Sector Strategies efforts have begun on the regional level and have progressed over the past year since implementation. With funding provided from the State, all three Local Areas have entered into an agreement to support a sector strategies convener for the region. Local and regional meetings have been held to create opportunities in the greater region.

As the data supports, Healthcare is shared among all three LWDAs as a strong sector, therefore, it must be mentioned that there is a strong network of foundations in the region that are working to improve the health and well-being of citizens of the region. These entities are doing good work and the LWDAs are partnering and supporting sector strategies that are being developed outside of the Diversified Manufacturing Sector Strategy driven by the grant from SCDEW. For example, CareFirst Carolina is the supporting foundation of CareSouth Carolina Inc. and is dedicated to providing and improving access to health and support services to those who need them most. It serves Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Lee and Marlboro Counties. The LWDAs will continue to utilize IWT funds when possible to leverage funding in the community for healthcare and diversified manufacturing.

The US Economic Development Administration's (EDA) Good Jobs Challenge Grant opportunity laid the foundation for Pee Dee, Santee Lynches and Waccamaw Local Workforce Development Areas to partner with two other local workforce areas to create sector partnerships in high-demand fields of healthcare, diversified manufacturing and transportation/logistics. This grant opportunity created the catalyst for increased communication with local employers, economic developers and training partners to understand the critical workforce needs in the selected sectors. Although the application was not funded, it created new partnerships among entities with shared needs across in-demand industry sectors and occupations within the region. This grant opportunity gave momentum to the selection of Diversified Manufacturing as the focus area to develop for the Region's sector strategy efforts.

When the Greater Pee Dee Region developed a proposal for the Sector Partnerships grant from the SC Department of Employment and Workforce, consideration had to be given to the Manufacturing Sector. There was discussion of trying to pick up the Pee Dee Region Healthcare Partnership that started in October of 2019 and which COVID halted. It was decided that there had been major changes to the healthcare industry. Many of the participating hospitals had been bought out by other hospitals and administrative staff had shifted priorities ensuring preparatory measures are in place in case of another pandemic occurring. Many of the hospital leaders who were involved in the launch meeting in 2019 had either retired or found employment elsewhere. Employers in the healthcare sector emerged from the pandemic perhaps more self-reliant than ever therefore making efforts to revive the healthcare sector partnership more difficult.

Data shows that Manufacturing is in fourth place for the region, however, it is number two in the six-county Pee Dee LWDA and number three for the Santee-Lynches LWDA. Also, it is noted that the average annual wage for manufacturing is higher than the top three occupations. Wages for the workforce in Retail trade and Accommodation and Food Services are the lowest of any of the sectors identified. Therefore, the selection of a **Diversified Manufacturing Sector Partnership** was made. Beginning in November 2023, work began with Brianna Dennis, of Indevo Sparks Group, LLC, the selected convenor for the Diversified Manufacturing Partnership, to bring the manufacturers together first locally and then regionally. Following three meetings with employers and/or support partners in each LWDA, **the regional collaboration response** was very good for the first regional meeting held in Lake City, SC, on August 28, 2024. Nearly 70 people were in attendance including 22 representatives from 18 manufacturers and 47 persons representing education of all levels, workforce, state and local agencies, community-based organizations, and councils of governments. Ms. Dennis engaged the industries to provide more information about their needs and explained how support partners in the room could assist them. Rebecca Battle Bryant of Battle Plan Consulting provided a dynamic presentation about Recruitment and Retention strategies in rural areas and generational differences in the workplace. More regional events are planned before the end of the grant. The goal is that manufacturers will realize value from the sector strategy so that efforts can be sustained.

**The extent of Business involvement in the current Diversified Manufacturing Sector Strategy Initiative** is impressive. In the Pee Dee LWDA, 12 manufacturers are participating, in Santee Lynches 6 are participating and in Waccamaw 15 are participating. A sampling of employers include AESC, Florence; Domtar, Marlboro County; Harbor Freight, Dillon County; OTIS, Florence; Wyman Gordan, Dillon; Coca-Cola Consolidated, Lee County; BCA, Clarendon; Continental Tire, Sumter; Envirosep, Georgetown; Palmetto Synthetics, Williamsburg County; and Teknoware, Horry County. Over 15 employer support partners, including SC Works Core partners, economic development, Regional Transportation Authorities (RTAs), Secondary and technical Education, etc. are involved. One of the overwhelming conclusions of the employers is that they were not aware of all of the resources available via the public workforce system and they need more information and interaction.

The determined priorities of the Partnership are:

- 1) Education (Secondary, Adult Education and Higher Education) and
- 2) Workforce Recruitment and Retention.

In Secondary Education, the focus is on increasing awareness and engagement in Career and Technical Education (CTE) among middle and high school students. Two events are planned in the Region: a hands-on Manufacturing Expo in Pee Dee LWDA and the re-start of “Waccamaw Working Wednesday” in Waccamaw LWDA which takes employers into the area high schools to combat strain and expense of field trips. Ongoing conversations will take place between Secondary Ed and

Manufacturers about increasing usage of career assessment testing and soft skills via WIN Learning; including manufacturing basics into popular CTE Pathways like Agriculture, Construction, Logistics/Transportation; increasing/improving work-based learning opportunities in Manufacturing; continued support for Career Specialist, Regional Workforce Advisor; and employer participation in CTE curriculum development and delivery. Action items regarding Higher Education emphasize the need for higher education institutions to partner with manufacturers for better curriculum alignment and workforce readiness. In Adult Education, there are plans to create a workplace literacy program called “Introduction to Manufacturing” to prepare students for work in manufacturing. Also, there are plans to promote the “Orientation to Manufacturing” Certificate at Central Carolina Technical College to Adult Education students as well as the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition.

Action items around Workforce Recruitment and Retention priorities include developing a resource guide for employers of key contacts in the public workforce system; promoting use of Registered Apprenticeship and WIN Learning; more preparation of job seekers for mass hiring events such as application prep & interview practice. Transportation is an important recruitment issue and there is a need to increase the awareness of employers about RTA’s fixed routes, on-demand response services, and Commute with Enterprise Vanpool. Also, discussions around expanding RTA transportation resources via “fixed routes for employers”, CDL-Passenger Endorsement Training and Park and Ride Model.

There is great promise in terms of **private-public partnerships in the region to support the Diversified Manufacturing Sector Strategy**. Perhaps the greatest potential lies in the area of transportation. All three transit systems represented in the Greater Pee Dee Region discussed growing relationships with private employers to bring employees to their workplace. Pee Dee RTA’s progress began in 2019 when the Pee Dee LWDA had a transportation grant from SCDEW to transport employees from Marion County to Harbor Freight in Dillon County. The discussions with employers have greatly expanded and PDRTA has employer partnerships in most of its six-county service area. Williamsburg County Transit is establishing relationships and beginning in September 2014, it is offering direct drop off for Continental Tire and eVAC. Santee-Wateree RTA has also created a pilot called the 521 Express route that offers hourly drop-off and pickup for Continental Tire and eVAC (currently for construction workers on site at the development of the new eVAC building). Also, establishing Apprenticeships is a topic among participating employers. Many just need a greater understanding of the process of establishing apprenticeships in South Carolina. When the private sector employer offers employment and the public sector offers tuition and supportive services, Apprenticeship is the ultimate private-public partnership.

**4. A description of regional service strategies that may be established as a result of the regionally coordinated delivery of services, including the use of cooperative service delivery agreements, when appropriate. Regions should address the following:**

- **Existing service delivery strategies that will be expanded, streamlined, or eliminated;**
- **New service strategies necessary to address regional education and training needs;**
- **Strategies to address geographic advantages;**
- **Approaches to improve services to individuals with disabilities, veterans, youth in or aged out of the foster care system, offenders, or other hard-to-serve populations;**
- **Strategies to connect the unemployed with work-based learning opportunities; and**
- **Strategies to integrate existing regional planning efforts among core partners.**

An existing service delivery strategy that has been regionalized is the Integrated Business Services Team (IBST). The Regional Team maximizes the purpose of integrating by reducing duplication,



ensuring that employers have a single, coordinated point of contact and ensuring services are delivered efficiently. The Regional Team collaborates to share job openings and employer outreach ideas. The Regional Team hopes to resume the Pee Dee Reentry Job Fair post COVID. Planning is underway for future co-hosted events.

In early November 2024, International Paper – Georgetown Mill closed its doors after nearly 90 years of operation, resulting in the layoff of 675 mill employees and over 250 contract workers. A two-day job fair was held in Georgetown County for the displaced workers, with approximately 500 participants. Seventy-eight employers from across the Pee Dee region attended, showcasing a strong example of the IBST collaborating across local boundaries to recruit employers.

Currently, the Pee Dee LWDA is participating with Pee Dee Regional Reentry Council in Horry County. The Council is focused on supporting individuals transitioning back into the community after incarceration. The council collaborates with various subcommittees, including substance use disorder, mental health, housing, transportation, identification, churches, education/employment, complex reentry, and restorative justice, to address specific barriers faced by returning citizens. These subcommittees work to streamline access to resources, develop action plans, and coordinate efforts with local stakeholders. Key initiatives include improving connections to housing, transportation, mental health support, and employment opportunities. The council also leverages partnerships with organizations like SC Works, United Way, and local agencies to provide comprehensive services. Through these collaborative efforts, the council proposes to reduce recidivism and promote successful reintegration. Recently, the council secured a Department of Justice Smart Reentry: Housing Demonstration grant to further enhance its programs. Active participation from community members and stakeholders is essential to advancing this mission. In the Santee-Lynches LWDA, the partnership with Midlands Fatherhood Coalition has provided heightened opportunities for individuals transitioning back into community and workforce. This partnership offers services and education specifically for fathers trying to rebuild their lives and their families. The Midlands Fatherhood Coalition also works with businesses to help provide them with a pipeline of ready-to-work individuals.

Another innovative service strategy that may be expanded within the Region is a partnership with Success Training Institute (STI) for soft skills training and work experience. Santee-Lynches LWDA has used STI for approximately 4 years and it has proven to be a great mechanism for youth to learn soft skills as well as gain valuable work experience in a non-traditional manner. This online option also allows for more youth to be served; especially those with transportation barriers. STI's platform can be accessed by students through their mobile devices. This factor alone makes it a viable option for students in rural areas like the Pee Dee Region. The platform includes pre and post assessments, individualized learning plans and curriculum around the fourteen elements, to include leadership skills, entrepreneurial skills, workforce preparation and financial literacy. The participants also participate in work experience opportunities in the areas of basic coding and website design. STI is a viable option to accomplish the delivery of soft skills and work experience.

An examination of the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) of each local area in the region reflects that the region's education and training needs are similar and that the geographic makeup and size of the region is advantageous to its citizens. WIOA participants are crossing the "borders" on a regular basis as they may travel to a technical college outside of their local area because a college in an adjacent area offers a curriculum that is most appropriate or a schedule that is more conducive to the participant's life schedule and graduation plan. New service strategies may be developed among the

regional educational entities as they are introduced to the regional approach promoted by WIOA. As participants have the need to travel throughout the region to their particular training venue, the need for transportation services increases. This need may be a catalyst for a regional transportation strategy as it is communicated to transportation providers that routes are needed that can “transfer” students from one local area’s bus route to a route in another county or local area.

The Diversified Manufacturing Sector Partnership promoted discussion between employers and the public transit providers in each region. For many years, Pee Dee RTA has provided daily transportation from Lake City and Marion County to employment opportunities in the tourist industry in the Waccamaw LWDA. The new EV battery gigafactory, AESC, will need nearly 1,700 employees once it is fully operational. It will need to pull team members from a vast area, including the Greater Pee Dee Area. Discussions between Pee Dee RTA and AESC are already in progress. Likewise, in the Santee-Lynches LWDA there may be additional opportunities for partnering with other RTA entities as we work to complete a new project for eVAC that will create 300 new jobs in Sumter.

Veterans are an extremely important customer to the workforce system and to the region, especially as Shaw Air Force Base is located here. Myrtle Beach Air Force Base closed in the 1990s and Myrtle Beach is a very popular retirement destination. Also, the largest military base in the world, Fort Bragg, is located across the state border in Fayetteville, NC and the Pee Dee Region is adjacent to NC. New strategies may develop as best practices to reaching and serving this population can be shared among veteran specialists. SCDEW’s Veteran staff, Veterans Business and Workforce Consultants, are co-located in the SC Works Centers in the Region and are an integral part of business services. In the Santee-Lynches LWDA, SC Works Veteran Staff partner with the Family Readiness Center at Shaw AFB to provide services and information to airmen who are transitioning out of the Military.

Beginning Since February 2020, the Pee Dee Region has participated in the Annual Pathways to Possibilities (P2P) event, a regional collaboration of workforce development partners, businesses, educational institutions and economic developers for middle school students to explore various career pathways through a hands-on learning approach. P2P is an interactive, hands-on career expo designed to help 8th graders link their passions to a paycheck. Professionals from 19 career pathways (aligned with the national and state department of education) engage the students with hands-on activities in their various fields. They also share what life is like in their jobs and the training and education that is required. The attendance has grown each year for this two-day event. Students spend two hours exploring their careers of interest and engaging with professionals who actually work in those careers. The next P2P event is planned for January 15-16, 2025, and students from the Region will participate again.

A strategy to serve young adults in Williamsburg County, Job Readiness Boot Camp, is a best practice that is under consideration for regionalization. The youth developed resumes, worked on interviewing skills, participated in customer service training and problem-solving activities. The activity culminated in a work experience opportunity for the youth participants. Providing work-based learning opportunities for youth is the best way to teach employability skills, teamwork, and soft skills and regionalization promotes the discovery of strategies that can be replicated. In the Santee-Lynches and Pee Dee LWDA, Career Smart is a Job Readiness Boot Camp utilized for all youth/young adults (16-24). This soft skills program assists youth with developing or updating their resume, interviewing skills, problem-solving skills, financial literacy, workplace safety and Dress for Success.

In PY’23, the Pee Dee LWDA was invited to partner with the Harbor Freight Fellows Initiative (HFFI). The HFFI is a partnership between Big Picture Learning and the Harbor Freight Tools for Schools program. Its focus is to support youth, ages 16-22, for whom the trades are the best path to

a successful, sustaining life following high school. The State of South Carolina's HFFI Coordinator is a member of the Pee Dee Youth Committee. Leadership of HFFI determined to do a pilot project with WIOA Title I out-of-school youth. Previously, HFFI had only engaged in-school youth. HFFI requires that a mentor employer is carefully selected in the trade of interest of the participant. One Title I participant had received a welding certificate, but did not have employment. A mentor was identified with Billy's Welding Works in Mullins and Title I prepared its traditional Work Experience (WEX) agreement with the employer. Although only 120 hours are required by the HFFI, the participant continued to complete the 480 hours of the WIOA-funded WEX. Following a successful experience, the employer "mentor" and Title I advisor receive a \$250 stipend and the student receives a \$1,000 stipend from Big Picture Learning. The HFFI program wants to expand its reach and would be welcome in the region.

Adult Education is a core WIOA partner. Within the region, Adult Ed is participating in the SC Works Centers at varying levels. The priority of services policy that includes priority to individuals with basic skills deficiency increases the need for increased coordination with Adult Education. In the Waccamaw and Santee Lynches Local Areas, Adult Education provides services (Including TABE and WIN testing) on-site three days a week in a center. In the Pee Dee LWDA, Florence Adult Education provides WIN testing two days a week. They also assist clients in the Resource Center. Each center, its customers and the workforce system would benefit from a replication of this practice. This collaborative approach will be touted at partner meetings. Perhaps as other Adult Educations learn of the benefits of partnering to this degree, more such arrangements may result. In the Pee Dee and Santee-Lynches Local Areas, several WIOA youth contractors have co-located at Adult Education sites and both partners benefit from the arrangement- TABE testing and post-testing is easily accessible and the availability of work experience opportunities and WIOA incentives can motivate students. PY'24, some Adult Educations received additional funding from the State Department of Education to increase their visibility in the comprehensive centers. For SC Works Florence and SC Works Sumter, this means that two days a week a representative will be in the center to provide career readiness assessments and make/receive referrals. For SC Works Conway, an Adult Education representative provides services five days each week. Also, Vocational Rehabilitation is a core WIOA partner. Like Adult Education's role in the centers, VR provides services in the centers across the region on a varying basis and there are certainly times that the services VR is providing are not conducive to delivery in the center environment. In Waccamaw, a VR representative serves in the center once a week. WIOA provides the stimulus for strategic conversations to take place about sharing resources and most efficiently serving shared customers. Partnerships in one local area may be perfectly replicated in another local area and the customer will be the main benefactor.

Likewise, another partner, SC Department of Social Services, has co-located Workforce Consultants in all SC Works Comprehensive Centers and in several affiliate centers. Referrals can be made between programs. It is a great partnership for Title I if an individual is receiving SNAP and/or TANF, because Title I can offer assistance with occupational skills training or work-based learning while DSS' services provide wrap around services. SCDSS offers many programs to its target audience that are similar to Title I programs and it is important for the system to work together and not duplicate services.

Georgetown Jobs Connection is a "one stop jobs program" that combines the assets of the non-profit agencies in the Georgetown community led by Helping Hands, A Father's Place, Goodwill, and the Waccamaw Local Area. This program gives those in poverty (specifically the unemployed and the underemployed) a "hand up" toward achieving independent productive lives. Participants in the program undergo a week-long Boot Camp in which they participate in employability skills development activities. Participants take a Career Interest Inventory that assists in their selection of a career path. They are then routed towards the entity that can best assist them with employment

attainment, be it WIOA, VR, or other entities that can best meet their needs. This model of public/non-profit partnership can be replicated throughout the region.

**5. A description of any administrative cost arrangements that currently exist or that will be established within the region, including the pooling of funds for administrative costs, as appropriate. Regions should address the following:**

- **Current or proposed resource leveraging agreements and**
- **The establishment of a process to evaluate cost sharing arrangements.**

Currently, no administrative cost arrangements exist between the three local areas of the region. However, as a result of the planning process and the Sector Strategy planning, the local areas would consider pooling administrative costs to:

- Hire a consultant to facilitate the development of future Workforce Board Strategic Plan(s) and/or a Regional Plan. A consultant may also be helpful in assisting the region to implement facets of the Regional Plan currently under development. Due to funding limitations, a consultant may no longer be a consideration.
- Accomplish Workforce Development Board training. The region could split the costs of the consultant, venue costs, and travel expenses of board members.
- Facilitate the achievement of One Stop Certification Standards for all centers in the region.
- Procure IT services or supplies for the SC Works Centers in the region.
- Secure a Public Relations firm to manage the content of its social media platforms. The LWDA Administrators continue to have discussions about regionalism as a cost savings measure.

Certainly, once a decision is made to share administrative costs in some way, a process will be established to evaluate the cost sharing arrangements. Standardized procurement procedures would be used in the selection of consultants, facilitators and/or trainers.

All local areas in the region have developed an agreement to cost share with funds provided by the SC Department of Employment and Workforce for a convenor for Sector Strategies Development locally in each area and as a whole for the entire greater region. This agreement was implemented in November 2023 and continues through to the Spring of 2025.

**6. A description of how transportation, access to childcare, or other supportive services are coordinated within the region, as appropriate. Regions should address the following:**

- **How the provision of transportation or other supportive services could be enhanced regionally;**
- **What organizations currently provide or could provide supportive services; and**
- **Establishing a process to promote coordination of the delivery of supportive services.**

The provision of transportation and other supportive services might be better coordinated and enhanced through a regional agreement with transportation providers (e.g. transportation authorities) and other providers of support services (e.g. department of social service offices, etc.). This option will be investigated. Currently, the Regional Transportation Authorities (RTAs) provide limited coverage, primarily in the larger metropolitan areas or from rural areas to technical colleges, such as Florence-Darlington, Northeastern, Central Carolina and Williamsburg Technical Colleges, USC Sumter, Coker and Francis Marion Universities and Morris College. The CareFirst Carolina Foundation has rallied communities in the Pee Dee LWDA to financially support local routes in communities such as Bennettsville, Cheraw, Dillon and Hartsville. These routes are connecting citizens in the rural communities to resources and jobs and these partnerships are proving to be very

successful. One result of the sector partnership discussion in Waccamaw was the initiation of efforts to explore the possibility of establishing a vanpool service between employers and their employees. This has been successful in the Pee Dee area. In the Pee Dee Local Area, a couple of the Adult Educations have cooperative arrangements with RTAs for their students. In addition to free rides to the Adult Education sites, as a result of being enrolled in Adult Education, the students can access the system and travel throughout the metro area. Due to the scarcity of public transportation resources, there are many private transportation companies and some community action agencies providing limited transportation services to their clients. Just as WIOA provides supportive services and/or training costs to its clients, the Department of Social Services (DSS) and Vocational Rehabilitation do, as well. Co-enrollment of participants in multiple programs allows for the sharing of resources as one entity may cover training costs and another federal/state program covers the supportive services costs, or vice versa. A result of Sector partnership discussions in Santee-Lynches is the development of a specialized bus route to Continental Tires. Buses go to this employer site every hour of the day from 7am – 7pm. Individuals are able to get on the buses for any stops along the way. This also helps with securing opportunities for transportation services for OJT and Work Experience services at these and other nearby employer locations.

An opportunity that would enhance the provision of transportation services in the region would be arrangements with faith-based organizations to utilize their buses/vans during the week when many sit idle. Churches may be interested in serving their communities in this way. Of course, faith-based organizations could also be approached to provide other supportive services such as meals, access to clothes closets, food closets, etc. Churches are aware of needs in their communities but may not know how to get involved. Marketing plans and materials and MOUs could be shared between the local areas.

Many Adult Educations have Family Literacy programs. These programs partner with local providers like Head Start, First Steps and local school districts to offer childcare to adult education students. In Florence, the Adult Education has a childcare center onsite. The students bring their children with them to school. Also, parents are brought into the center to be taught important skills like reading with their children and educational play.

The region continues to research the possibility of establishing a process to promote the coordination of the delivery of supportive services. Efforts would most likely have to be initiated locally to gain buy-in and support. Regional meetings would then be coordinated to bring the various agencies together to develop and implement a regional approach to providing such services. A regional process would certainly be assisted by a shared participant management system which would allow core partners and others invested in the lives of the participants to know where there may be gaps in services. The region is active in sharing SCWOS with core partners and securing access for staff.

**7. A description of how workforce development services are coordinated with economic development services and providers within the region. Regions should address the following:**

- **Current economic development organizations engaged in regional planning and**
- **Education and training providers involved with economic development.**

Within the Pee Dee Region, there are several examples of workforce development services coordinating with economic development services and providers within the region:

- Santee-Lynches LWDA continues to work with the Chamber of Commerce entities, the Economic Development entities, The Link, Team Sumter and other local organizations to

development and implement economic development opportunities. Team Sumter is a catchphrase for all of the agencies (Economic Development, Workforce Development, Education, Private Business and Industry, etc.) who have come together to expand the education and workforce systems in Sumter County and have expanded to include the other three counties in the Local Area. The Link is Sumter and Lee County's Economic Development Entities combined. They continue to orchestrate a Post-Education Summit Steering Team that was formed of these same partners with the goal to address employers' short-term hiring needs; document, analyze, and publish regular data on local hiring trends, employer skill requirements and labor supply; strengthen education alignment to promote a pipeline of skilled workers; create enthusiasm for local career opportunities & provide roadmap for accessing them and leverage private dollars to bring in more state and federal funds. The Sumter Link, along with Educational Entities, Industries, Economic and Community Developers and STEM Organizations now hosts an annual eSTEAM event that brings together enthusiasts in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math. The purpose is to expose participants to advances and opportunities in these ever-growing areas. eSTEAM endorses STEAM related careers and advancements in Sumter and surrounding counties and showcases STEAM exhibits and areas of interest for K-12 and secondary education, cultivate experiences that promote modern manufacturing while incorporating the arts. In October 2024, over 6,000 individuals attended the eSTEAM event.

- NESAs- The Pee Dee and Waccamaw Local Areas are partners with Northeastern Strategic Alliance (NESAs), a regional economic development organization that serves a nine-county region in the northeast corner of South Carolina. NESAs's primary objective is to significantly enhance the quality of life for residents of the region by creating additional jobs and capital investment within the existing industry base, recruiting new companies and expanding tourism-related development. NESAs is often called upon to partner on various workforce projects, including grant writing, providing LMI and region-specific data regarding workforce, industry and county data. In PY'21, a NESAs staffer was appointed to the Pee Dee Workforce Development Board, and he recently became the Business and Industry Committee Chairperson.
- Three Councils of Governments (COGs) administer the WIOA programs in the Region- Santee-Lynches, Pee Dee and Waccamaw. COGs are quasi-governmental agencies, created by legislation in 1969, that foster inter-governmental cooperation and innovative partnerships for the communities within the regions they serve. They are a link between county governments, municipalities and residents. In other words, at their core, they are "regional", and their focus is on the economic development of their subsequent service area. Some of the broad activities that they are involved in include Planning, Workforce Development and Economic Development, to include the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program and US Department of Economic Development Administration (EDA) programs. It is often that COG staff from different departments are working on aspects of the same project, therefore, coordinating economic development activities and ensuring that all applicable organizations in the community are at the table. One way that Pee Dee and Santee-Lynches Local Areas ensure that economic development organizations have hands-on involvement in workforce efforts is by inviting the county economic development directors to participate on a committee to review Incumbent Worker Funds (IWF) applications when funding is made available. This relationship has served both local areas well over the years and keeps the organizations aware of the Boards' purpose and goal to provide business services that will strengthen the available industry and new industry prospects. Economic Development directors also assist with the promotion and outreach of the IWF program to employers in need of such funding. Also, on each Workforce Development Board, economic development agencies are vital members. These entities are able to add important information to the discussion about the local labor market, needs of current employers and the desires of prospective employers. As the Pee Dee Region's Workforce Boards engage in strategic

planning efforts, Economic Development organizations will be invited to participate and offer their expertise.

- Also, in the Santee-Lynches Local Area, partnerships have been fostered with economic development partners and chambers of commerce to where information is funneled to these representatives on a regular basis, and they in turn distribute the local area's information and promote our services to their clients and members. This is a great partnership that fosters outreach and educates communities in the region on the workforce services available to them. These entities also on a regular basis connect Workforce staff directly with employers when they have specialized needs for hiring to assist them with finding qualified candidates in a more expedited manner.
- **iMPACT** is an acronym for "**I**gniting **M**arion's **P**ower: **A**ttaining **C**ountywide **T**ransformation." iMPACT is a grass roots economic development effort that Marion County, in the Pee Dee Local Area, has embraced to bring economic prosperity to the county. It consists of individuals volunteering from across the spectrum of county and regional concerned citizens: SC Works, WDB, colleges, the faith-based community, county elected officials, the mayor and councilpersons. Many of the members of iMPACT became actively involved in Long Term Recovery Groups formed as a result of destruction from hurricanes. The Leadership Team has recently applied for a multi-million-dollar Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grant which if funded will provide a multi-functional conference center facility, classroom space, funding for occupational skills training in the energy sector, workforce development resources, etc. The Pee Dee Regional Council of Governments is actively involved in this effort and will manage the workforce component.
- Each of the local areas in the region partners with SC Department of Employment and Workforce's Regional Workforce Advisors (RWA) to educate students, parents and industries about career clusters, lucrative career opportunities available to students with associates degrees and certificates from technical colleges. The RWAs are involved in the Diversified Manufacturing Sector Strategy and board committees. Also, in the Santee-Lynches area, Health and Manufacturing Career Expos were held for middle and high school students to learn about viable careers in both fields. Advanced Manufacturing/STEM Expos have also been sponsored in the region by RWAs.
- The local technical colleges are excellent partners in Economic Development activities, particularly the Continuing Education/Economic Development divisions, as these divisions are working hand-in-hand with the local industry and are best suited to promptly develop trainings that meet their immediate needs. With the colleges, the local areas may co-sponsor Job Fairs, Student Success Days, meetings and surveys of employers, WIN profiling and testing services, etc. The Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing & Technology (SiMT), at FDTC, offers current quality programs to employers in the Advanced Manufacturing sector, a key sector for the region and SiMT is a critical partner in economic development activities in the region. Northeastern Technical College and Harbor Freight Tools, Dillon County's largest employer, partnered to bring a new Warehouse Logistics Training Center to Marlboro County. The Center provides training to 80-120 students annually. Harbor Freight donated inventory, equipment and software to stage a replica of their warehouses. Students are placed in a realistic work environment and exposed to the processes and flow of materials they will encounter while employed. After completing the program, graduates possess the skills they need to enter the workforce at Harbor Freight immediately through a paid internship program. The entire region benefits when education partners are directly involved in economic efforts. In the Santee-Lynches LWDA, SC Works partners and other Workforce staff are working directly with Central Carolina Technical college

to assist them with their recruitment efforts for their newly designed Orientation to Manufacturing course. It is a short course for initial exposure to Manufacturing and is designed to address the critical industry needs for all workers. The development of this training program was in response to input from industries in the LWDA. Apprenticeship Carolina is an Economic Development partner and is very responsive to the region's call to meet with local employers about establishing apprenticeships in their businesses and share about the cost savings benefits offered by the State and through WIOA. Apprenticeship Carolina is also a part of the Regional Sector Strategy efforts ongoing in the Pee Dee Region.

- Often education and training providers, such as the technical colleges, readySC, and SC Works Business Services Consultants are at the table with economic development organizations when they are working to secure a new company to the local area or region or to assist an existing company with an expansion. These providers are able to provide information on the various training programs currently available to meet the needs of the company, as well as, to obtain information from employers in order to develop training curricula/programs that may not exist but will be needed to meet the demands of said employers.

In applying for the Workforce Innovation grant application, NESAC, readySC, and Florence County Economic Development Board came together with the Pee Dee LWDA and AESC to form a Steering Committee. These economic development organizations work very well together and respect the expertise that each brings to the table. Such partnership has paved the way for future opportunities sought after as a team.

**8. A description of the region's plan regarding coordination of local performance negotiations. Each LWDA will continue to negotiate performance goals with the state and will remain ultimately responsible for ensuring performance meets or exceeds the agreed upon goals.**

Each local area will continue to negotiate performance goals with the State and will remain ultimately responsible for ensuring performance meets or exceeds the agreed upon goals. If the State requires that the region coordinates its local performance standards, every effort will be made to comply. Certainly, each of the local areas can learn from one another regarding strategies and efforts to meet or exceed its own local standards and this conversation will take place among the local areas. Efforts are made to benchmark strategies used in each area to help ensure that performance is met yearly.



**Regional Plan Signatures**

**Local Workforce Development Boards:**

Pee Dee Workforce Development Board Chair

Santee-Lynches Workforce Development Board Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Waccamaw Workforce Development Board Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Local Grant Recipient Signatory Officials:**

Pee Dee Workforce Development Area

Santee-Lynches Workforce Development Area

Joette Dukes,  
Name

Executive Director  
Title

Dennis Cyphers,  
Name

Executive Director  
Title

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Waccamaw Workforce Development Area

Sarah Smith,  
Name

Executive Director  
Title

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date