

*Supporting a Tradition of
Excellence: A Proposal for an Office of
Workforce Development*

for the

*York County Economic Development
Corporation*

prepared by

*FAIRWEATHER
CONSULTING*

NEW PALTZ, NY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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York County is home to a wide array of workforce development service providers. Individually and collectively, these providers comprise an effective system for addressing the workforce demands of the county's employers. Through a series of interviews with both employers and providers, this report identifies numerous examples of interagency collaboration and innovation that highlight the effectiveness of the county's system of providers and support organizations. Overall, York County's workforce development system is doing well responding to the current needs of the county's employers.

Yet, while the county's strong demand-driven approach has been successful at meeting employer's needs in the past, economic change and demographic shifts in the workforce, both at a national and a local level, are requiring workforce development systems to extend their reach beyond issues of training and education.

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As the population ages, the traditional "entry-level-age" worker has become a relatively smaller component of the workforce. Even in a successful place like York County, a major challenge facing a growing economy is finding new sources of workers to fill these jobs or enabling firms to use technology to reduce their need for such workers. In order to avoid such a shortage of workers the York County workforce development system must:

- Find a more effective way to transition non-College-bound high school graduates & high school dropouts into the workforce
- Ensure that the County's immigrant population has the language skills and support to effectively participate in the workforce
- Ensure that workers with young children have access to high-quality day care and those with elderly parents have effective means to address the problems of elder care

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The Need for a Network Builder and Catalyst

These are issues that extend beyond one industry and beyond the scope of any single agency. An effective response will involve creating and sustaining a network of various service providers to work together to address these issues across a variety of industry sectors. The current system is outstanding at addressing employer needs once they are expressed and understood. But changes in the economy require more from the system.

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NOTE: The YCEDC Office of Workforce Development would not be a service provider. It would serve as an intermediary or broker between Employers and Workforce Development Providers, identifying existing needs, anticipating future needs and putting together the network of organizations required to address them.

The office would have two primary functions:

Creating a Network through a case management approach:

The YCEDC Office of Workforce Development would act as a “case manager” for firms with workforce issues. It would be responsible for bringing together networks of service providers to address existing workforce issues facing individual employers, issues that reach across various industry groups, or issues that affect a geographic location in the County. The office would:

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- Serve as the single point of contact & referral on workforce-related issues for employers.
- Maintain a working referral catalogue on who does what well in terms of workforce development services.
- Follow through on leads from Business Retention visits that need complex responses from the Workforce Development System, including assisting the creation and maintenance of industry consortia involved in training or other initiatives.

Acting as a Catalyst for Addressing Long-term Workforce Development Issues: In addition to creating responses to existing issues or needs, the Office of Workforce development would also identify and organize responses to long-term emerging issues for both employers and workforce development service providers. Depending upon the needs identified, we would envision this involving the following types of tasks:

- Developing elder care options for employees. An analysis sponsored by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, estimated national productivity losses due to elder care issues ranging from 11 to 29 billion dollars per year.
- Identifying emerging needs for transit systems for workers. As necessary, the Office would work with Rabbitransit, the County Planning Commission and employers, to identify bus routes that could serve to link people with employers needing workers.
- Initiating systems that enable firms to outplace workers into industries where they are needed as productivity reduces demand for jobs in certain industries. In the face of global competition, manufacturing success will often depend upon dramatic increases in productivity. Consequently firms or industry clusters that are succeeding globally often end up eliminating jobs. The Office could work with firms or clusters to anticipate such developments and have an outplacement process already extant before such jobs are eliminated.
- Providing staff support for York County SCWIB members’ deliberations/decisions. This group’s scope of action has been limited because it has no dedicated staff to provide administrative support between the group’s meetings. The Office would provide that staffing function.

- Creating and sustaining initiatives to systematically build the pipeline of entry-level workers for clusters or the entire economy. Despite its rapid growth, York County could still experience periodic shortages of entry-level workers either county-wide or within particular clusters or industries. As described above, safeguarding against these shortages requires continual work on multiple fronts. The Office would serve as the single coordinating point and catalyst to sustain these efforts.
- Drafting an annual report on the State of the York County Workforce. As part of its role as catalyst and advocate, the Office would compile an annual report on the County Workforce, evaluating past performance and identifying major issues to be addressed in the coming years.

Implementing the Office of Workforce Development

We recommend a phased approach to creating this office. Initially, the Office should be staffed by a single professional position with half-time administrative support. The initial staffing commitment should be maintained for at least two years. After two years, the operations of the Office should be evaluated by YCEDC to determine if additional professional staffing and/or support are required.

We propose the following job description for the position of Coordinator of the Office of Workforce Development:

- Reports to YCEDC Executive Director
- Represents YCEDC on all York County Workforce Development Initiatives including providing staff support for York County consortium of SCWIB Board members & attending SCWIB with Exec. Director
- Creates referral catalogue/listing of services available in County
- Monitors status of York County workforce (e.g., trends in demographics, workforce participation, education levels, skills shortages, etc.)
- Coordinates activities with YCEDC Business Retention Staff & follow up on retention cases that require workforce-based solutions by referring firms to appropriate providers and ensuring adequate response
- Establishes new workforce development initiatives in response to existing or anticipated workforce needs of York County employers (e.g., establishing new training consortia, transit routes, etc.)
- As necessary, provides logistical support for such initiatives (grants writing/reporting, coordination of participants/trainers)
- Creates an annual report on the state of the York County workforce including an action agenda for the following year

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In a sense, this is the first phase in 21st Century workforce development. As the competition for the “creative class” of engineers, programmers, and designers of all types heats up for York County, the Office of Workforce Development’s role as a catalyst will likely extend to such areas as contributing to the continuing revitalization of downtowns as well as advocating for enhanced opportunities for cultural activities and outdoor recreation, all of these tied to York County’s effectiveness in competing for the so-called “creative class.”

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