



Metro North Regional Employment Board

METRO NORTH REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT BOARD

STRATEGIC PLAN: 2009 - 2011

OCTOBER 2009

## I. Metro North Regional Employment Board Strategic Plan: Introduction and Background

### A. The Metro North Regional Employment Board

The Metro North Regional Employment Board (REB), incorporated in 1995, serves as the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) for the Metro North region of Massachusetts.

Workforce Investment Boards are state and federally mandated to provide oversight of a variety of local workforce development services authorized under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, as well as other federal, state, and local workforce activities. There are 16 Workforce Boards in Massachusetts which work in collaboration with local, state and federal workforce development partners to ensure that employers and current and future workers have access to high quality employment and training services, timely labor market information, and resources that will support the continued growth and capacity of the labor force.

The Metro North region consists of 20 communities north of Boston: Arlington, Belmont, Burlington, Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Malden, Medford, Melrose, North Reading, Reading, Revere, Somerville, Stoneham, Wakefield, Watertown, Wilmington, Winchester, Winthrop, and Woburn.

In 1996 the REB elected to participate in a demonstration project, funded by the United States Department of Labor and the Commonwealth, which allowed for the privatization of the delivery of a variety of employment and training services that were previously operated through state and local units of government into new entities called “One Stop Career Centers.” Four of the sixteen workforce regions in the state elected to participate in this initial demonstration which became known as the competitive “One Stop Career Center” model in Massachusetts.

As a result, the two One Stop Career Center operators in the Metro North Region were selected and chartered through a competitive bidding process to provide services throughout the region, which continue to this date. The operators of these Career Centers have been thoroughly reviewed and rechartered by the Metro North REB on a three-year basis since that time.

Massachusetts is now the only state that operates this type of center. The Workforce Investment Act of 1998, while establishing Career Centers as the primary vehicle for workforce development service delivery nationally, maintained the role of the state as the operator of direct services available through Wagner-Peyser, as well as services for Veterans while requiring collaboration and at a minimum co-location with Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Title I (previously JTPA) program operators.

Employment Resources, Inc., which operates the Career Source Career Center, provides direct customer services through locations in Cambridge and Everett. Middlesex Community College operates The Career Place in Woburn. Both Centers are chartered by the REB and provide workforce programming under the Board’s oversight and direction.

Since their inception almost 13 years ago, the Metro North Career Centers have served over 150,000 job seekers. Each year for the last three years, the centers have placed an average of almost 11,000 people in jobs. Based on customer-reported data, the average wage was \$19.69 for the

same time period. The centers serve an average of about 1,500 employer customers per year, listing thousands of job postings as well as providing a variety of other employer services such as outplacement and on-site recruitments.

The Metro North Career Centers have been recognized for their outstanding performance. In FY'09, the centers had the highest volume of customer visits (115,700), the second highest number of job placements, second highest average wage, and the second highest number of individual customers served (about 21,500). During the last eight years, the REB has conducted extensive customer satisfaction surveys, with an average of 82% of sampled customers rating the quality of services as "good" or "excellent."

In July of 2007, the REB became the fiscal agent for WIA funds at the request of the City of Cambridge, which is the grant recipient of those funds by federal statute. As a direct result, approximately \$100,000 in funds that were previously used by the City of Cambridge to manage the program were allocated instead to service providers to pay for direct services to customers in the first year.

Since its incorporation in 1995, the REB has actively sought to bring additional resources to the region's workforce, both by its own efforts and through cross-regional collaborations. Funding from federal and state initiatives have supported programs focused on careers in biotech and finance through the Build Essential Skills through Training (BEST) initiative, developing science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills to meet the needs of the technology industries in the region, healthcare initiatives including Nursing Career Ladder Initiative (NUCCLI) and Extended Care Career Ladder Initiative (ECCLI), and grants from U.S. Department of Labor which support joint activities across workforce regions in a particular industry or sector. The REB has also managed large-scale cross-regional National Emergency Grants (NEGs) for dislocated workers in the airline industry, at Level 5 and Fleet Bank, as well as a number of smaller NEGs for employers within the Metro North region.

The REB last engaged in a formal Strategic Planning process in 2002. The resulting strategic plan was reviewed and updated through a series of meetings in 2007. Progress made on reaching goals and objectives is reviewed and appropriate revisions are made on a yearly basis as part of the development of the Annual Plan submitted to the state each spring. In 2006, the REB Youth Council and other youth serving organizations in the region developed a Strategic Plan for Youth Development as part of the P21 Project. The results of these previous efforts are clearly demonstrated in the performance of the REB's Career Centers and program vendors, the membership and engagement of Board members, and the continued involvement of the REB in bringing additional resources and services for workforce development to the region.

The Metro North Regional Employment Board received formal notification of its biennial certification under the Workforce Investment Act in July of 2009. A copy of the notification letter is included in the Evidence section of this application.

#### B. The High Performing Workforce Board Strategic Planning Process

In March of 2008, Jennifer James Price, Undersecretary of the Executive Office of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, met with the Metro North REB to discuss the state's plan to require each of the sixteen workforce investment boards in Massachusetts to engage in a strategic planning and certification process in response to the State's High Performing Workforce Investment Board (HPW) initiative.

The REB's Strategic Planning process began in earnest on June 18, 2008. The full Board attended a presentation that outlined the steps necessary for the attainment of High Performing WIB Certification. The Board determined at that meeting that the three required Strategic Priorities outlined by the Governor were appropriate focal points for its activities. These priorities are as follows:

- ◆ Priority 1: Building the capacity of the workforce system
- ◆ Priority 2: Addressing the regions skill gaps in industries
- ◆ Priority 3: Enhancing the youth pipeline to employment

It was also agreed that additional initiatives and objectives that were identified by the REB would be incorporated within the scope of the Governor's priorities.

The Board directed that every effort be made to ensure that the process was inclusive of all appropriate stakeholders, reflected the priorities and needs of critical employment sectors in the region, and was aligned with local economic development efforts.

The REB Executive Committee was charged by the full Board with primary oversight and review responsibility throughout the planning process. These responsibilities included:

- Determining and approving the scope of the Strategic Plan; and
- Maintaining responsibility for final review and approval of the Strategic Plan/High Performing WIB Submission.

Utilizing the most recent labor market data available, the Board determined that two industry sectors in the region would be identified, and would receive specialized focus in the activities outlined in the Strategic Plan. The region's two largest employment sectors, the healthcare and professional and technical services sectors, were selected based on that data.

To inform the broadest possible audience and encourage participation in the planning process, the REB held a Regional Workforce Forum on August 7, 2008, at the Holiday Inn in Woburn. The Forum was attended by over 100 local business, education, labor, and community leaders. Neeta Fogg, Senior Economist from Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies, presented new and detailed regional labor market and demographic data to assist regional partners in developing strategies to meet local workforce challenges.

The comprehensive presentation included an analysis of industry and employment trends; identification of potential skill shortages; occupational and educational implications of employment growth; and post-secondary and technical institutions as a source of labor supply. Following the presentation, there was a lively question and answer period which added additional information on the current state of labor market, educational options and skill gaps. An invitation for all interested parties to participate in one or more of the focus groups that would address each priority area of the plan was extended to all participants.

Progress on the development and content of the HPWIB Strategic Plan has been a topic on almost every REB Board Meeting Agenda for the past 1-1/2 years. Board members have been active participants in determining the goals and objectives of this plan both at regular Board meetings and as participants in specialized focus groups and individual interviews.

Two separate groups, each comprised of REB members as well as other workforce stakeholders and interested parties, were formed to focus on the priorities of addressing the "skills gap" and "enhancing the youth pipeline to employment." Both groups met several times between September and

December. The goals, activities, and benchmarks that each group developed to address these priorities were subsequently presented and reviewed by the entire REB and approved at its December 2008 meeting. (Detailed information on the focus group work and participants can be found in Section IV. Metro North Regional Employment Board Strategic Initiatives 2009-2012.)

Dramatic changes in the economy have caused the REB to continually reassess priorities and plan objectives during the past year. In keeping with the strategic priority to build the capacity and effectiveness of the REB, that reassessment process resulted in the decision to conduct a survey of employers and key workforce stakeholder organizations and individuals during the late summer, early fall of 2009.

The survey sought to: identify the critical workforce issues impacting the business environment that must be addressed to ensure a thriving workforce in the region; assess the REB's effectiveness in addressing a number of these issues; and determine where the REB should focus its future efforts to best support employers and job seekers.

The results of this survey, which the REB is currently analyzing, identified many of the same workforce issues that are outlined in this Strategic Plan. The key issues relate to poorly educated and technically unskilled job applicants, inadequate job readiness preparation, the costs of doing business in Massachusetts, and concerns about the aging workforce and corresponding loss of experience and talent in the not-too-distant future.

The measures and metrics outlined in this Plan are designed in recognition of many of these issues, and will be refined as further analysis of the survey results demand. (The survey instrument may be found in the Evidence section of this application.)

The infusion of dollars from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) required the REB staff and members to quickly plan and spend those dollars to provide employment opportunities for the region's youth in the summer and fall of 2009, and develop group education and training programs for adults and dislocated workers for the first time in nine years. The REB, in collaboration with the two Career Center operators, have ensured that thousands of individuals who have lost their jobs in this region were served efficiently and effectively when seeking reemployment assistance, education and training services or when obtaining unemployment benefits.

Throughout this time period, the REB and workforce stakeholders in the region have continued to meet the immediate and compelling demands of employers and workers resulting from the economic downturn. This work has focused the REB's efforts to develop a strategic planning document that will address the workforce development needs of the region both now and in the future.

The following pages describe initiatives that have either been planned, or are currently underway. These initiatives are designed to address priorities and delineate measures, metrics and timeframes that will provide the Board, local stakeholders, funders and customers with a clear mechanism for measuring progress of the Strategic Plan over the next three years.

The Strategic Plan will be posted on the REB website. Progress on the objectives outlined in the plan will be reported through quarterly updates to the Board. This information will also be distributed through the REB e-newsletter to other interested parties on a regular basis, utilizing the measures and metrics identified by Metro North Board members and outlined on the Benchmarking Scorecard attached in the Evidence section of this application.

## II. Analysis of the Current Environment

As noted earlier, the Metro North REB began the strategic planning process with a comprehensive analysis of the demographics of the regional labor market. Included in this analysis were factors such as age and educational attainment, as well as an in-depth look at the industry and occupational composition of those currently employed in the region, and the projected growth and opportunities in leading and emerging industries. This data formed the foundation used by REB committees and focus groups in formulating the Strategic Plan. One of the key aims of the strategic plan is to address regional needs by linking youth and the unemployed adult labor force, including the more highly educated as well as those in need of basic skills or English proficiency, with promising training and employment opportunities, while also supporting regional economic growth and ensuring a rich supply of qualified workers for area employers.

An analysis conducted by the Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, and presented to REB members and a wide variety of stakeholders in August of 2008, provided an initial look at the makeup of the civilian labor force.

There were 456,094 individuals in the civilian labor force in the Metro North Workforce Investment Area (WIA) in 2005-6. As the chart below indicates, foreign born workers comprised 28.2% of the workforce, native born workers 71.8%. White non-Hispanic workers comprise 74.6% of the workforce, minority group workers 25.4%.

Percentage Distribution of the Civilian Labor Force by Gender, Nativity Status, and Race-Ethnicity, 2005-2006<sup>1</sup>

	Metro North	Massachusetts	New England	U.S.
<b>Total</b>	<b>456,094</b>	<b>3,369,817</b>	<b>7,521,725</b>	<b>148,191,267</b>
<u>Gender</u>				
Male	51.7%	52.0%	52.2%	53.5%
Female	48.3%	48.0%	47.8%	46.5%
<u>Nativity Status</u>				
U.S. born	71.8%	81.3%	85.0%	84.1%
Foreign born	28.2%	18.7%	15.0%	15.9%
Foreign born entered since 2000	7.0%	4.2%	3.3%	3.3%
<u>Race-Ethnicity</u>				
White, non-Hispanic	74.6%	81.2%	83.4%	68.8%
Black, non-Hispanic	5.6%	5.1%	4.9%	11.1%
Hispanic	9.6%	7.0%	6.6%	13.6%
Other, non-Hispanic	10.3%	6.6%	5.1%	6.4%

<sup>1</sup> Fogg, Neeta. Metro North in Demand: A Massachusetts Regional Workforce Strategies Initiative, Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, 8/7/2008.

In comparison to the resident labor force of the state, the New England region, and the nation, 68% of the Metro North labor force has some post-secondary education, versus 64% in the state and 58% in the nation. Additionally, 46.7% have a Bachelors Degree or higher in comparison to 39% of the state and 28.3% in the country.

The relatively high educational levels in the region do not preclude the needs for an expansion of English as a second language, or for educational opportunities for youth and adults at all levels. There is debate as to the best use of educational resources between those who believe that a more generally educated and skilled workforce will be more successful over the long run, and those who believe that education and training that is focused in a particular area or industry is the most effective route to employment. This question will be further analyzed as part of the REB's continued evaluation of the effectiveness of program offerings in obtaining desired performance outcomes for customers.

Despite the diverse range of employment opportunities in the region, the economic downturn has had a clear impact even among those who have educational credentials. As of August 2009, the Metro North unemployment rate stands at 7.7%. In August of 2008 the rate in the region was 4.5%. The current state rate is 8.9%. While the labor force count for the region has remained essentially the same over the one-year period at 421,000 individuals, the number of people characterized as unemployed has nearly doubled from 18,772 in August of 2008 to 32,449 in August of 2009. Each of the twenty cities and towns in the Metro North region has experienced an increase in unemployment rate over the last twelve months.<sup>2</sup>

As of August 2009, 13,783 individuals are currently receiving unemployment assistance in Metro North. Fifty five percent (55%) are male, 79% are white, 90% have at least a high school diploma, and 60% have at least some college. Seventy percent (70%) are between 25 and 54 years old, 40% were earning at least \$50,000 per year, 41% have been unemployed for longer than 15 weeks. These individuals represent the educated and experienced workforce in the region in their prime earning years.

Metro North workers receiving unemployment assistance generally reflect the same industries that have been most impacted statewide. The largest declines have been 17.6% in construction and construction-related employment, 16.2%% in office and administrative functions, 13% in management positions, 7.6% in sales and related activities, 6.5% in business and fiscal positions, and 6.1% in food preparation and services.

## The Metro North Labor Market

The REB recognizes that the Metro North labor market is experiencing the same type of upheaval and change as the rest of the state and country. However, the REB believes that the critical and emerging sectors identified by the REB at the inception of the Strategic Planning process are still vital to future economic growth and success in the region.

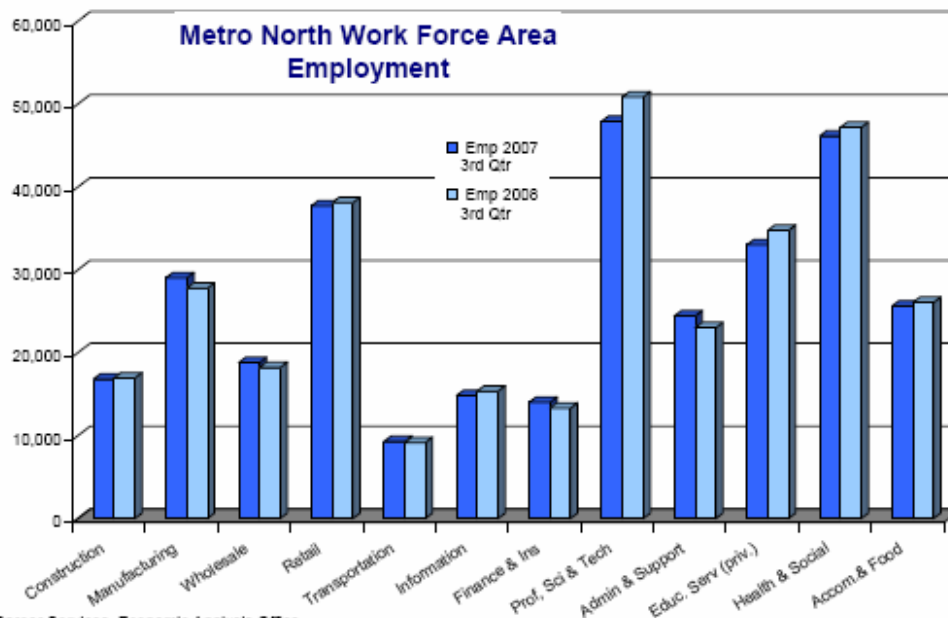
To validate that assumption, the REB has contracted with Northeastern University to provide an updated labor market assessment of the region, which will be completed by the end of October 2009. Updated information from that survey will be available through the REB's website, and will be unveiled at a forum and presentation by Northeastern for the region's secondary school guidance counselors to be held October 28, 2009.

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<sup>2</sup> Mass LMI, Boston Region Factsheet, Division of Career Services, Economic Analysis Office, August 2009.

Following an analysis of several sources of information, the MNREB selected the healthcare sector and the professional and technical services sector for specialized focus during the next three years. This decision was based on an examination of current labor market data, input from Board members and other workforce stakeholders, and the anticipated number of job opportunities for individuals who represent a wide variety of skill and educational levels. Also considered were the growth sectors in the local labor market prior to the economic downturn, as demonstrated in the following chart:

REB



Prepared by Division of Career Services, Economic Analysis Office.  
 Source: Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (ES-202)  
 C=Confidential--Note: Large changes in Employment and Wages sometimes due to code change. (\*significant code change)

The healthcare and professional services sectors combined are projected to provide more than two-thirds of all new jobs in the region through 2016.

In the most recent Massachusetts Job Vacancy Survey, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2008, there were 11,780 healthcare and social assistance postings, the highest number in any industry. The job vacancy rate in the healthcare industry in Greater Boston/Metro North is 2.5%. Even this industry experienced 41% fewer vacancies than the previous year.

The professional and technical sector job postings have decreased by 55%.<sup>3</sup> While it is clear that both of these sectors have been seriously impacted by the economic downturn and that hiring projections in the Job Vacancy Survey are likely overly optimistic, these two sectors will continue to grow and provide employment opportunities albeit at a slower pace.

The Professional and Technical Services industry, which employs 47,000 workers, is the largest employment sector in the region, and continues to be the leading source of new wage and salary growth. Jobs within this sector are in accounting, engineering, management consulting, computer systems design, scientific development and research services, and legal and architectural services. This sector is critical to the development and expansion of the Commonwealth's biotech/biopharma industry.

Employment in this sector is expected to increase by over 36,000 jobs by the end of 2016. It is expected that this growth will be primarily in the areas of technical consulting services, scientific research and development, and computer systems design. Management and technical consulting services, other professional and technical services, scientific research and development, and computer systems and design are four of the top eight industries with projected growth between 2006-2016.

Healthcare and Social Assistance is the second largest employment sector in Metro North. Employment opportunities, at a variety of skill and educational levels, continue to expand. Between the third quarter of 2007 and the third quarter of 2008, employment in this sector grew by 3.5% or 2,776 jobs. The most recent Annual Profile for Metro North projected that between 2006 and 2016, home healthcare and residential care facilities would grow at a rate of over 16.8%, and that hospitals, residential care facilities, health practitioners and home healthcare services would generate nearly 64,600 new jobs through 2016.<sup>4</sup>

Looking at the impact of the recession of the past year in the Metro North region, it is clear that the recent economic downturn may well affect the timetable for great expansion in these two sectors. However, both sectors have significant investments in the region that are unlikely to diminish. The future economic vitality of the state as well as the country requires that investments continue to be made in research, technology, and healthcare and that employment opportunities continue to grow over time. Three of the five occupations that are expected to account for more than half of the net new jobs created through 2016 are in either healthcare (registered nurses and home health aides) or the professional and technical sector.<sup>5</sup>

As the following chart indicates, it is clear that education and training is essential to success in both of these sectors, as well as to future employment in the Greater Boston region which includes Metro North. More than half of all new jobs related to growth will require an Associates degree or higher. A major element of this Strategic Plan is the expansion and development of activities that will support access to higher education and advanced training and retraining for all current and future job seekers and employees in the region.

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<sup>3</sup> Massachusetts Job Vacancy Survey, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2008, Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development

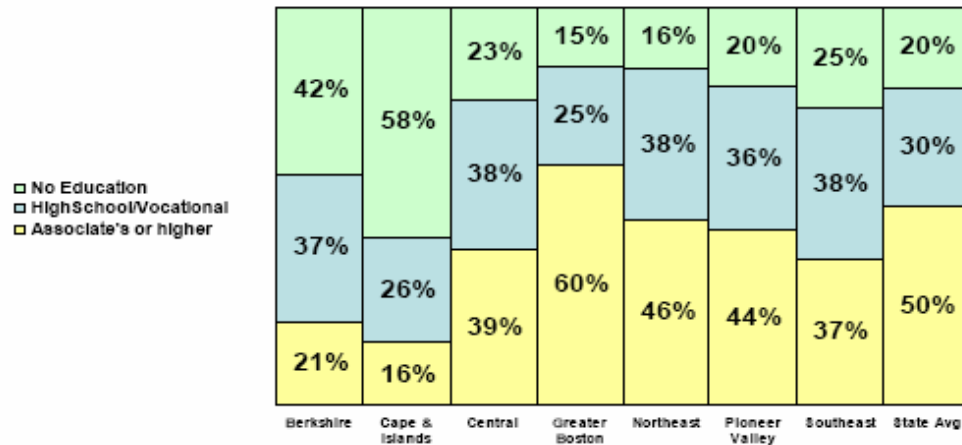
<sup>4</sup> Annual Regional Profile for Metro North, May 2009

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

## EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR AVAILABLE JOBS IN GREATER BOSTON REGION

Figure 5:

Due to higher than average concentration of managerial and professional and technical job postings in the Greater Boston region, educational requirements in this region exceeded those required in other areas.



2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2008 Job Vacancy Survey Appendix Page 18

In the current environment, the first goal of the local workforce system must be to assist as many people who are newly and unexpectedly unemployed as possible to find new employment. For others or for those who are newcomers to the labor market, there is a responsibility and an opportunity to encourage job seekers to explore options for retraining or further education in these stable and still growing sectors, as well as others that may emerge over time.

The crucial challenges facing the REB are: ensuring that the workforce development system is responsive to, and understands, the needs of these industries as they continue to grow and evolve; and ensuring that workers are prepared with the education and skills to maintain those industries in the Commonwealth.

The strategic priorities, objectives and activities that are outlined by the REB in the following pages are designed with those goals in mind.

The sources cited in the footnotes and as well as additional data on the labor market, demographics of the population, and other employment and education related data can be found at [www.mnreb.org](http://www.mnreb.org) under Metro North REB Resources.

### III. The Metro North Regional Employment Board Mission

Mission: Building Partnerships for a Better Workforce

“The Metro North Regional Employment Board is a public-private partnership whose mission is to enable area residents to gain the skills to maximize their economic self-sufficiency and provide employers with the workforce they need to effectively compete in the changing world economy.”

In keeping with this Mission, The REB:

- ◆ Cultivates and fosters partnerships that promote workforce collaborations between employers, educators, training providers, state and local governments, governmental entities, and community-based agencies to expand workforce resources in the region
- ◆ Identifies opportunities to partner with other regions to promote the awareness and utilization of the services and expertise available through the workforce system for employers and job seekers
- ◆ Develops opportunities for employers to find and keep the employees they need and to ensure that workers and companies are aware of the availability of options for training, education, and other resources that may assist in meeting their specific needs
- ◆ Ensures that the resources under the oversight of the REB are utilized and maximized and that activities are effective and appropriate to meet the needs of local employers and workers
- ◆ Establishes challenging performance measures that are met or exceeded by service providers
- ◆ Integrates a continuous improvement process into all REB activities
- ◆ Develops mechanisms to ensure that the workforce system in Metro North has the flexibility and dynamism to respond to constantly changing economic and governmental environments and demands

#### IV. Metro North Regional Employment Board Strategic Initiatives, 2009-2012

The Governor's three required priorities reflect the priorities of the REB, and also incorporate other strategic issues and initiatives that had been identified by the Board in the FY'08 planning process and discussions. The three priorities are:

- Priority 1: Building the capacity of the workforce system
- Priority 2: Closing the skill gaps in industries and sectors
- Priority 3: Enhancing the youth pipeline to education and employment

Incorporated within these overarching priorities are activities focused on:

- Continuing to educate Career Center staff on the current and emerging job market and skill requirements on a routine basis;
- Working more closely with employers and educators to ensure that needed skills are identified and training is provided;
- Expanding the summer jobs program and developing additional resources for youth programming;
- Creating opportunities for additional training and education for Career Center and vendor staff who work with targeted populations; and
- Prioritizing services for older workers.

#### Capacity Building

The Executive Committee and REB staff, in consultation with other Board members, workforce stakeholders, and state and local officials, took responsibility for identifying the objectives and benchmarks which will address the strategic priority of building the capacity of the REB.

Capacity-building activities will focus on: expanding the visibility and awareness of the REB as a repository of workforce and labor market information and assistance for employers and job seekers in the Metro North region; ensuring that the Board membership reflects the diversity and employment sectors in the region; and expanding collaborations with other partners to raise awareness of workforce development issues and needs.

#### Addressing the Skills Gap

In order to best examine the issues and challenges being faced by both employers and educators in addressing workforce skill gap issues in the region, the REB held a series of meetings and focus groups. The REB included as many Board members as possible, in addition to other invited or volunteer participants, to ensure that the needs of the diversity of employers, as well as employment opportunities in the two identified sectors, were represented.

Two meetings were held of a larger group, and several smaller meetings were held with individual employers, as well as with a healthcare focus group. The larger group represented a number of employers in both the professional and technical sector and the healthcare sector. Several common themes developed; employers cited the lack of appropriate educational skills in applicants, the lack of readiness for employment in terms of behavior and attitude, and the need to continuously upgrade skills of workers in response to constantly changing technology.

The large group also discussed a report, “Growing Talent: Meeting the Evolving Needs of the Massachusetts Life Sciences Industry”<sup>6</sup> that had just been released by the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center and the Massachusetts Biotechnology Council. The basis of the report was a study conducted by the UMass Donahue Institute that assessed the capacity of the state’s public and private higher education institutions to meet the anticipated demands for talent in the biotech and life sciences industries. Both of these are major industries in the professional and technical sector in the Metro North region. The Executive Director of the Metro North Regional Employment Board participated on a sub-committee that focused on human resource and workforce development needs in biotech and life sciences. The information contained in the report, as well as information that developed from the meetings, helped to frame goals and activities designed address the skills gap and youth pipeline issues in the region for this sector.

As a subset of the larger REB Skills Gap group discussion, a healthcare focus group was convened. The focus group included employers from home health care, extended care facilities and nursing homes, community health agencies, and large hospital facilities. This meeting was particularly interesting as it became clear that regulations in the industry around training may be resulting in the perceived “labor shortage” in the nursing field. It also provided significant information on jobs in the industry that do not require post-secondary degrees but do require short-term training and certifications.

The healthcare focus group expressed the hope that these meetings would continue as part of the ongoing activities of the Strategic Plan implementation with an eye toward addressing a number of issues through collaborative efforts between the different types of healthcare providers.

Education and training providers were also in attendance at all Skills Gap group meetings. All employers and other participants indicated their support and participation in REB-sponsored activities that would assist in better preparing both the current and future workforce. (The list of Skills Gap meeting participants and affiliations can be found in the Evidence section of this application.)

In April of 2009, the infusion of ARRA dollars allowed the REB to issue a request for proposals (RFP) for group training for adults and dislocated workers for the first time in nine years. The RFP was designed to solicit new training options for job seekers beyond that which was currently provided through the Individual Training Account selections funded by the Workforce Investment Act. The REB set aside \$200,000 for these projects which encouraged creative and innovative approaches that would enhance the ability of the local system to respond to employer needs. In keeping with the goals of the Strategic Plan, the REB sought proposals that provide training options in our targeted sectors of healthcare, professional, scientific and technical services and the green jobs sector that were highlighted by ARRA and which incorporate skills and technology inherent within the Professional and Technical services sector.

The RFP also provided the option to provide vocational English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) combined with job readiness preparation as a first step to prepare job seekers for enrollment into higher level training.

The REB received nine proposals in response to the solicitation and selected three for funding, two of which are for training in the healthcare sector and one which will prepare individuals for jobs as Biomedical Technicians in the Biotech field.

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<sup>6</sup> **Growing Talent: Meeting the Evolving Needs of the Massachusetts Life Sciences Industry; Massachusetts Life Sciences Center, Massachusetts Biotechnology Council, UMass Donahue Institute, September 2008.**

The REB continues to seek out partnerships with other organizations and regions to take advantage of available ARRA and other funding that will support expanded opportunities for employers and workers in our region in these key sectors. Currently the REB has partnered with other regions and workforce stakeholders in five pending proposals.

### Enhancing the Youth Pipeline

The Metro North REB Youth Council was joined by other workforce partners to form the Youth Pipeline Sub-Committee focused on developing strategies for enhancing the transition of youth to employment, in accordance with the Strategic Plan. This group focused on issues related to expanding and improving the opportunities for the region's youth to attain the education and skills needed to successfully transition into a productive and satisfying working adulthood. The Committee met on a number of occasions beginning in September of 2008.

Given the importance of the technology, scientific and healthcare industries in the region, there are currently a number of programs designed around building skills in science and math for students from elementary through the secondary grades. The Metro North REB was actively involved in the review and selection of the BioTeach awards made by the MA Biotechnology Council to schools in the Metro North region in 2007 and 2008, and will support the expansion of related initiatives through its strategic planning activities.

A primary objective of previous Youth Council efforts through P21 has been ensuring that newcomer and immigrant parents and youth in the region are aware of the assistance and resources available to them from the workforce system, educational providers and other community agencies. Community forums are designed to bring relatable role models, who can speak from experience, to the community to reinforce the value of education and training to improve the quality of life for immigrant youth and their families. These forums are proving to be quite effective, and will continue to be part of the Strategic Plan.

In keeping with Priority 3 of the Strategic Plan, the Youth Council is working on strategies that will permanently include the voice of young people in the ongoing deliberations of the Council. The Youth Council members are considering various ways that are appropriate for the youth to share their knowledge about their own workforce preparation needs with the adult members of the Council and for the youth to use their involvement in the Youth Council as a learning and leadership experience during the FY2011 planning process.

To identify issues currently presenting challenges for youth providers in the region, a brief survey related to enhancing the employment and education pipeline was disseminated to 20 youth-serving organizations. Eighteen of the 20 organizations responded to this survey. Issues identified focused on the need to further the active engagement of employers. Opportunities in the workplace -- through job shadowing, internships, expansion of career awareness activities through real life experiences and interaction with mentors and role models -- were a priority. Making education more practical in terms of its value in "real" life and developing alternative educational models that will address youth who cannot achieve in a traditional system are also critical.

The Strategic Planning process has already had significant impact on a funding decision made by the Community Initiatives Program funded by Massachusetts General Hospital. The Coordinator of that program was a member of the Youth Pipeline Committee. As part of its Determination of Need application to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, MGH, through the Community Initiatives Program in collaboration with the City of Revere, conducted a competitive bid process to support one or more sustainable employment and training programs for 18-24 year olds in

Revere. The training focuses on job placements in the industry sectors identified in this Strategic Plan, healthcare and professional and technical services. The Career Source Career Center received a grant of \$305,000 over six years to support an employment preparation program in the targeted sectors. (A list of members of the Youth Pipeline group can be found in the Evidence section of this application.)

In March of 2009 the Metro North Regional Employment Board, in collaboration with the Harvard School of Engineering and Applied Science, sponsored a symposium presented by the DOME (Diversity and Outreach in Mathematics and Engineering) Foundation for administrators and teachers of mathematics, science, engineering and technology for students in grades 6-12. The objective of this meeting was to encourage expansion of STEM learning experiences for students through mentoring, tutoring, special projects and exhibitions, both within the regular school experience and connections with out of school programs and activities and building bridges with corporate resources and funding streams.

Continuing this work, the REB will sponsor a Labor Market forum for guidance counselors on October 28, 2009 to present an updated Labor Market analysis of the region, conducted for the REB by Northeastern University. In addition, the REB will again co-sponsor the DOME Foundation Annual Symposium on November 6, 2009, at the Raytheon Corporation in Woburn, MA, titled "Staying in the STEM Pipeline." The forum will feature MIT's Dean of Undergraduate Education and executives from Raytheon Corporation.

As a result of funding received through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the REB and its Career Centers implemented a Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) from early July through the end of September, 2009. The REB employed 522 youth, ages 14-24 across the 20 cities and towns. Ten special projects engaged youth in integrated work and learning experience activities.

During the fall of 2009, the Metro North REB will continue employment for approximately 360 youth in six cities: Everett, Malden, Medford, Revere, Somerville and Woburn. As in the summer, the youth will be ages 14-24 and low income, and four special projects will be funded. The fall ARRA funding comes through the Executive Office of Public Safety. Both of these programs offer an important opportunity for challenged youth to gain valuable work experience, learn transferable skills and begin a positive work life.

The following pages outline the objectives, activities, timeframes and performance benchmarks and indicators approved by the REB that have been or will be implemented to address each of the three strategic initiatives outlined in Section IV of this document.

## Metro North Regional Employment Board Strategic Plan Benchmarking Chart

Priorities	Time Frame	Healthcare Sector	Time Frame	Professional/Technical/Scientific Sector
<b>Priority 1: Building Capacity</b>				
A. Build the capacity and effectiveness of the REB as a workforce development leader; enhance the capacity of the REB and Youth Council to address the issues of critical sectors		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Add one new REB member from healthcare sector each year</li> <li>◆ Add one healthcare employer to Youth Council each year</li> </ul>	7/09-6/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Add one new REB member from professional/technical scientific sector each year</li> <li>◆ Add one STEM industry employer to Youth Council each year</li> </ul>
	7/09-6/12	◆ Establish and convene Regional Healthcare Planning Group with healthcare providers, community colleges, education and training providers, and career centers	7/09-6/10	◆ Convene a forum of STEM-related industries to discuss/review best practices in providing STEM exposure to regional youth
	7/10-6/11	◆ Expand membership in healthcare partnership activities; invite all hospitals in region	7/10-6/11	◆ Establish a STEM Planning Team to consist of employers, educators, CBOs, career centers
B. Increase linkages between sector employers, higher education, training providers, and career centers	7/11-6/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Develop a training model for applications to major funding sources</li> <li>◆ Collaborate in the development of training curricula, articulation of career ladders, and design of staff development curricula</li> </ul>	7/11-6/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Develop one or more STEM-based projects in region</li> <li>◆ Collaborate in the development of training curricula, articulation of career ladders, and design of staff development curricula</li> </ul>
C. Expand visibility of REB activities; develop stature as convener and disseminator of information on workforce issues	7/09-6/11	◆ Use ALMIS database to expand distribution list to include all healthcare industry employers in the region	7/09-6/11	◆ Use ALMIS database to expand distribution list to include all professional/technical/scientific industry employers in the region
	7/09-6/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Convene annual vendor meeting to highlight healthcare training gaps and encourage corresponding course development</li> <li>◆ Host annual Healthcare Career Awareness Community Forum for students, parents, teachers, and guidance counselors</li> </ul>	7/09-6/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Convene annual vendor meeting to highlight professional/technical/ scientific industry training gaps and encourage corresponding course development</li> <li>◆ Host annual STEM Career Awareness Community Forum for students, parents, teachers, and guidance counselors</li> </ul>

Priorities	Time Frame	Healthcare Sector	Time Frame	Professional/Technical/Scientific Sector
<b>Priority 2: Closing the Skills Gap</b>				
A. Continue work with sector partner teams to build career ladders  B. Train job seekers, including those in need of remediation/English skills	7/09-6/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Obtain funding for phlebotomy training proposal, develop curriculum, and implement program, working with Regional Healthcare Planning Group, including employers, community college, and career centers</li> <li>Convene educators from ARRA-funded pilot programs to identify successes/challenges using vocational ESOL/occupational skill models</li> <li>Continue work on identifying other healthcare training needs, identifying potential funding sources, preparing grant proposals</li> </ul>	7/09-6/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify career ladder occupations and related skill/remediation requirements for each step</li> <li>Convene educators from ARRA-funded pilot programs to identify successes/challenges using vocational ESOL/occupational skill models</li> <li>Disseminate information on career ladders/best practices to broader education/training community</li> </ul>
	7/10-6/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Train and certify 20 participants in phlebotomy</li> <li>Develop proposal and obtain funding for the next step in the career ladder: a clinical laboratory assistant certificate program</li> </ul>	7/10-6/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and implement a vocational ESOL/ABE/occupational skills program in conjunction with employers, DESE education providers, and skills training providers, e.g., in the biotech industry</li> </ul>
	7/11-6/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and implement a medical laboratory technician Associate's degree program with community college</li> </ul>		
C. Increase training opportunities in priority sectors	7/10-6/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase training programs on Approved ITA Provider list by 10%</li> <li>Increase internships connected to Metro North programs by 5%</li> <li>Increase Connecting Activities internships for youth by 10%</li> </ul>	7/10-6/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase training programs on Approved ITA Provider list by 10%</li> <li>Increase internships connected to Metro North programs by 5%</li> <li>Increase Connecting Activities internships for youth by 10%</li> </ul>

Priorities	Time Frame	Healthcare Sector	Time Frame	Professional/Technical/Scientific Sector
<b>Priority 3: Enhancing the Youth Pipeline: Facilitating Linkages Among Sector Champions, Educators, Training Providers, CBOs, and Career Centers</b>				
A. Ensure that youth internships/jobs are developed in priority industries	7/09-6/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Increase the number of summer jobs/Connecting Activities internships in healthcare by 10% each year</li> </ul>	7/09-6/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Increase the number of summer jobs/Connecting Activities internships in STEM industries by 10% each year</li> <li>◆ Summer Youth or other Special Projects to include mandatory math component</li> </ul>
B. Influence the expansion/development of K-12 curriculum and student/teacher activities targeting priority sectors	7/10-6/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Host annual Healthcare Career Awareness Community Forum for students, parents, teachers, and guidance counselors</li> <li>◆ Require youth programs, in conjunction with career centers, to provide exposure activities, e.g., tours or job shadows, at employer organizations in the healthcare sector</li> </ul>	7/10-6/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Host annual STEM Career Awareness Community Forum for students, parents, teachers, and guidance counselors</li> <li>◆ Facilitate linkages with programs, e.g., Beyond Benign, that train teachers and students on sector-specific career preparation</li> <li>◆ Require youth programs, in conjunction with career centers, to provide exposure activities, e.g., tours or job shadows, at companies in the STEM sector</li> </ul>
C. Increase training options for out-of-school youth	7/10-6/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Increase percentage of slots in healthcare group training/ITAs for youth by a minimum of 5% each year</li> <li>◆ Adapt adult training models for youth populations</li> <li>◆ Identify new funding sources and develop proposals for new programs</li> </ul>	7/10-6/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Increase percentage of slots in STEM-related group training/ITAs for youth by a minimum of 5% each year</li> <li>◆ Adapt adult training models for youth populations</li> <li>◆ Identify new funding sources and develop proposals for new programs</li> </ul>
D. Develop mentoring/tutoring model or program component for out-of-school youth	7/09-6/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Research and identify best practice models and requirements</li> <li>◆ Recruit participating healthcare employer mentors</li> </ul>	7/09-6/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Research and identify best practice models and requirements</li> <li>◆ Recruit participating STEM employer mentors</li> </ul>
	7/11-6/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Operate pilot project for 5-10 students in one school district</li> <li>◆ Review and refine model for broader implementation</li> </ul>	7/11-6/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Operate pilot project for 5-10 students in one school district</li> <li>◆ Review and refine model for broader implementation</li> </ul>