

Lancaster County
WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT BOARD



Lancaster County Workforce Development Board
Strategic Plan 2025 – 2028

Lancaster County Workforce Development Board Strategic Plan 2025-2028

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lancaster County is an **exceptional place to live, work, and play, thanks in part to the quality of our workforce**. The goal of the Lancaster County Workforce Development Board is to ensure that all aspects of workforce development interact to produce an effective system that prepares and connects all residents with meaningful employment opportunities that enhance quality of life in the County.

The LCWDB Strategic Plan for 2025-2028 will provide:

- Strategic leadership that clarifies priorities and drives measurable results
- Programs to enhance relationships that increase workforce participation and equity
- Greater awareness of systemic barriers and opportunities to increase accessibility
- Enhanced operational capacity to deliver excellent services

Key principles that are infused into this plan include:

1. **Human connection is vital** to a highly effective workforce system. Beyond the administrative protocols we must provide efficiently, we strive to foster trusting relationships and clear communications that encourage people to fully embrace opportunities for support.
2. **Lancaster County has a strong workforce, but unresolved worker gaps could create a crisis**. To support a good quality of life for residents, we must prepare more people in vital areas such as health care, child care, manufacturing, trades, and other key sectors of our local economy. To do so, we will engage more potential job seekers, partner with more employers, and amplify the community services that support workforce development.
3. **YOU need to tell YOUR career story**. It's not just that jobseekers need to *'see it before they can be it.'* They need to see the imperfect, authentic journey that comes before the job. When job seekers understand that there isn't just one smooth pathway that works for everyone, they're more willing to take the first step from wherever they're starting out.
4. **Systemic barriers make it more difficult for job seekers**. We'll draw attention to the persistent, systemic challenges to spark community partnerships that lead to solutions.
5. **More employers need to participate in the win-win**. We aim to make it easier and even more beneficial for employers to engage, because employers are both the *starting point and destination*. This *'closed loop'* between employer needs and job placements is vital to address workforce gaps and help individuals fulfill their potential.

The LCWDB is ready to lead the way by raising awareness of how the workforce systems works and coordinating strategic initiatives that improve opportunities for job seekers, employers, and program partners. Our future is bright, but we have some work to do. Join us in making Lancaster County one of the best places to work!

Executive Director

Anna Ramos

Board Chair

Tom Neely

Building a stronger workforce together

The Lancaster County workforce development environment is characterized by innovative opportunities for job seekers, employers, and community partners to achieve their maximum potential.

Strategic Leadership for Workforce Development

1. Lead workforce development improvements by accelerating the cycle of assessing needs, investing in promising solutions, and addressing impact for the business community.
2. Educate the community about the workforce development priorities for Lancaster County.

Impactful and Intentional Programs & Outcomes

3. Create a 'standard of excellence' across all service delivery to increase the engagement of stakeholders in quality programs.
4. Facilitate intentional connections and collaborations that build trusting relationships for and between business and community organizations.
5. Go beyond standardized data to better understand the impact and equity of outcomes across the workforce development system.

Addressing Barriers to Increase Accessibility

6. Establish a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion strategy and utilize a DEI lens to programs and funding.
7. Create awareness of barriers for success through data collection and outreach to promote a welcoming workforce environment.

Building Operational Capacity & Excellence

8. Cultivate robust professional development experiences.
9. Prioritize and enhance internal standard operating procedures
10. Expand the Board's capacity for unrestricted funding



About LCWDB

The Lancaster County Workforce Development Board (LCWDB) serves as a backbone organization, guiding workforce development activities across Lancaster County. By aligning federal, state, and local funding, the LCWDB provides strategic direction and administers resources to support job seekers and employers. While the LCWDB does not directly manage programs, it offers oversight and funding to key workforce initiatives, including PA CareerLink® Lancaster County, Career Ready Lancaster! (CRL!), Incumbent Worker Training, Apprenticeships, on-the-job training, the Youth Committee, re-entry employment services, and online career exploration platforms.

Mission – The Lancaster County Workforce Development Board seeks to align fiscal resources and provide strategic direction for Lancaster County job seekers and employers.

Vision - The Lancaster County workforce development environment is characterized by innovative opportunities for job seekers, employers, and community partners to achieve their maximum potential.



The Strategic Planning Process

3 PHASE APPROACH

The first phase of the strategic planning process was gathering **organizational insights** through a strategy scorecard kickoff meeting, staff and board surveys, and key informant interviews.

*In the second phase, **external stakeholder insights** were gathered via key stakeholder interviews, stakeholder focus groups, and a community survey. Attention was given to gathering insights from diverse parts of the business, education, and non-profit sectors. The results were discussed in Strategic Plan Workgroup meetings culminating in a research report presented to the Board. This resulted in a draft strategy framework and discussion questions for the next phase.*

*In phase three, LCWDB hosted a **Strategic Planning Retreat** to generate and prioritize strategic pillars, strategic objectives, and initiatives. Following the retreat, the LCWDB staff and members of the Strategic Planning Workgroup refined and finalized the plan to align LCWDB goals and priorities for the next three years.*

PHASE 1: ORGANIZATIONAL INSIGHTS

Organizational Priorities

Major themes emerged from both the strategic planning workgroup survey and a broader survey of the entire LCWDB Staff & Board, assessing the current state through a detailed strategy scorecard. The following priorities emerged.

Measuring Impact: Contracted providers require clear outcomes and improved methods for measuring job seeker and employer satisfaction through simpler, standardized qualitative and quantitative measures. LCWDB staff should add leading indicators to track proactive improvement alongside lagging measures. Storytelling and testimonials can increase public awareness of LCWDB's work and give a true assessment of the service provided.

LCWDB Unique Value Proposition: LCWDB monitors the funding landscape to better allocate resources, ensuring programs meet community needs. Satisfaction and effectiveness of provider services will help employers believe in the workforce development leadership of LCWDB in Lancaster County. LCWDB must hold service providers (like CareerLink) accountable with clear success metrics, while the CRL! model should be the connective tissue to strengthen collaboration across the ecosystem - workforce, employers, government, and service providers. LCWDB also aims to be the foremost authority on workforce topics through advocacy, public awareness, and leadership.

Stakeholder Needs & Opportunities: Understand, align & communicate key partners' roles and leverage their expertise through collaboration and aim for a county-wide system with clear

structure. Defining long-term goals as a network, and enhancing impact measurement is essential. Many employers and community partners/leaders are unsure how to interface with the Board and what the Board does. A clear, shared narrative of how the board is a resource to each stakeholder group is needed. Addressing systemic barriers for job seekers and improving resource centralization are key challenges, alongside regulatory hurdles.

Internal Challenges & Opportunities: New staff structure requires clearer roles and expectations, with a need for a strong fiscal mindset and innovation in funding. Board development should reflect the diversity of Lancaster County, and efforts to improve organizational culture, retention, and DEI initiatives are critical.

To summarize, the following are **Key Themes from the Internal Stakeholders:** there is a need for greater community engagement, visibility, and awareness of LCWDB services. Improved resource allocation to impactful programs, innovative funding strategies, leadership, strategic partnerships, and enhanced impact assessment methods are priorities. Systemic challenges include skills gaps, transportation barriers, racial inequities, and regulatory obstacles that limit access to services.

PHASE 2: EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER INSIGHTS

Needs of Diverse Stakeholder Groups

Successful relationships with stakeholders begin with understanding the unique needs of each group.

General Public: Elevate awareness and engagement of LCWDB among all stakeholders. Front-line staff shapes the public perceptions of the LCWDB so it's important that this experience is consistently positive and helpful. Improved understanding leads to better engagement and outcomes for participants and partners.

Job seekers and Employees: Key stakeholders – youth, job seekers, and incumbent workers—face systemic barriers that limit full workforce participation. Issues like inequitable access to transportation, childcare, language services, mental health services and essential programs restrict opportunities for career growth and advancement. Youth need career exploration and hands-on workplace experiences, while incumbent workers and job seekers require knowledge of career pathways and training to enhance their skills and wages.

Businesses/Employers: The LCWDB needs broader employer involvement to strengthen the workforce development ecosystem. While many businesses are drawn by funding for incumbent worker training, they often lack clarity on their role in building a diverse, high-quality workforce pipeline and how to fully utilize available services. There is a need for clearer communication about the board's broader services and purpose. To better engage businesses, especially small employers with limited staff time, the LCWDB must offer industry-specific support and simplified, accessible resources that demonstrate a strong ROI.

Providers: Service providers who have contracts with the LCWDB are key to impact. They have needs that must be met in order to productively support job seekers and youth. They are the front-line staff and the face of LCWDB to many, for better or for worse.

Community Partners: Community benefit organizations (CBOs) and schools need stronger collaboration with employers and the LCWDB to better align their services. CBOs and schools face challenges in filling positions with qualified candidates. The LCWDB needs enhanced cooperation with nonprofit networks to leverage resources and expertise for mutual benefit.

External Stakeholder Collective Priorities:

Insights on the community and stakeholders were gathered through interviews, focus groups and a community survey. The collective priorities reflect the overarching themes that recur across the data collection methods.

Relationships and social capital are critical for workforce success.

Across all stakeholder groups—youth, job seekers, incumbent workers, and employers—there is a clear need for stronger, person-centered connections at the individual level, and intentional collaboration across sectors at the system level. Employers highlight the importance of supportive relationships for employee growth and seek deeper ties with community benefit organizations (CBOs) and schools. Job seekers and students value services that are relevant, trustworthy, and flexible, which fosters higher engagement. Meanwhile, CBOs and schools need more opportunities to connect directly with employers to align on mutual needs and priorities, working together to create a coordinated system for workforce success.

Businesses, community benefit organizations (CBOs), and educational institutions are essential partners in workforce development and their unmet needs reduce the capacity of the system.

CBOs and educational institutions play a vital role in achieving the LCWDB's goals. They need support not only as service providers, but also as employers to effectively help job seekers and youth while aligning with employer needs. A crucial aspect of this support is fostering more opportunities for businesses, CBOs, and educational institutions to make a network, creating stronger partnerships and strategies. Currently, many workforce initiatives in Lancaster County rely on the same service providers and a limited pool of employers, leading to burnout. Expanding efforts to engage more employers in workforce development strategies is necessary for long-term success.

Strategic Thought Leadership is needed in the Lancaster Workforce Development Ecosystem.

A consistent message across all sectors and collection methods was a lack of understanding and awareness about the LCWDB's identity and the resources available for each stakeholder group. Respondents noted the confusion caused by the many similar but disconnected workforce development services in the county, which make it difficult for individuals to find the right support and for stakeholders to unite around a cohesive strategy for the county. Stakeholders expressed the need for a clearly defined LCWDB identity and to establish its role as the key strategic leader in the workforce development ecosystem.

Youth is the future of Lancaster County's workforce.

Career Ready Lancaster! (CRL!)* stands out as one of the most highly rated LCWDB initiatives among stakeholders. This program aligns with the urgent need to prepare for the future and address the challenge of knowledge transfer as retiring employees exit the workforce—a major concern highlighted in the community survey. Despite youth programs receiving lower value ratings from the business sector in the survey, various stakeholder groups stress the importance of investing in career exploration and providing tangible, paid work experiences for youth across sectors. Youth need to view their workforce experiences as relevant and leading to promising career paths to remain engaged. This will lead to higher retention of trained youth workers in

Lancaster County's workforce. Strong social capital, access to on-site work experiences, and affordable transportation are crucial factors for sustaining youth engagement.

Accessibility, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion go hand-in-hand with overcoming systemic barriers in workforce development that would optimize outcomes.

Systemic barriers such as inadequate transportation, limited child care, and difficulties in accessing quality support services are impeding workforce development efforts and preventing full participation in the job market. Transportation is the most significant challenge, affecting employers, job seekers, students, and employees alike. Stakeholders have called for more CareerLink service locations and extended hours, as well as innovative transportation solutions. While employers said in the survey that they value the importance of a diverse candidate pool and are committed to enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion, many also said they need support in accessing this pool. Improved relationships with schools and CBOs are essential to accessing diverse job candidates and addressing equitable access to resources.

Services must be perceived as highly relevant, beneficial, and reasonably easy to access in order to generate participation and impact.

Employers in business, education and CBOs are pressed for time and seek resources from the LCWDB that are easy to use and offer a strong ROI. This includes initiatives like the apprenticeship program, incumbent worker training, digital communication from LCWDB, data sharing, and funding opportunities for potential providers. Financial support for incumbent worker training is a significant motivator for engagement. High-value initiatives for stakeholders also include apprenticeships, paid work experiences, and Career Ready Lancaster! (CRL!). Stakeholders desire better usability and access to demographic data to understand service utilization. To increase engagement with RFPs, CBO's want funding opportunities that cover administrative costs and other essential services and are not a drain on their limited resources.

PHASE 3: STRATEGIC PLANNING RETREAT & PLAN COMPLETION

Building Relationships & Co-Creating with Community Stakeholders

The Strategic Planning Retreat began with collaborative solution-oriented discussions between community members and Board members in a World Cafe format (see appendix). A few community members enhanced discussions by bringing additional perspectives from employers and community organizations. In small groups, participants rotated through 6 conversation topics (see appendix). These conversations were the basis for the problem-solving discussions that led to the Strategic Pillars and Strategic Objectives.

Board members and the LCWDB staff collaborated to identify the Strategic Framework.

Following the retreat, LCWDB leadership and staff worked closely to review existing priorities and integrate the new objectives. A detailed set of initiatives has been developed by the staff to support each of the strategic plan objectives.

Lancaster County Workforce Development Board
Strategic Initiatives Framework
Strategic Plan 2024

Pillar 1: Strategic Leadership for Workforce Development

Strategic Objective 1: Lead workforce development improvements by accelerating the cycle of assessing needs, investing in promising solutions, and addressing impact for the business community.

Strategic Objective 2: Educate the community about the workforce development priorities for Lancaster County.

Pillar 2: Impactful and Intentional Programs & Outcomes

Strategic Objective 3: Create a 'standard of excellence' across all service delivery to increase the engagement of stakeholders in quality programs.

Strategic Objective 4: Facilitate intentional connections and collaborations that build trusting relationships for and between business and community organizations.

Strategic Objective 5: Go beyond standardized data to better understand the impact and equity of outcomes across the workforce development system.

Pillar 3: Addressing Barriers to Increase Accessibility

Strategic Objective 6: Establish a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion strategy and utilize a DEI lens to programs and funding.

Strategic Objective 7: Create awareness of barriers for success through data collection and outreach to promote a welcoming workforce environment.

Pillar 4: Building Operational Capacity & Excellence

Strategic Objective 8: Cultivate robust professional development experiences.

Strategic Objective 9: Prioritize and enhance internal standard operating procedures

Strategic Objective 10: Expand the Board's capacity for unrestricted funding

APPENDIX:

Strategic Planning Retreat World Café Discussion Questions

World Café is a method of collaborative dialogue around questions that matter in service to real work. The goal of this exercise was to develop a deeper understanding of strategic opportunities and identify potential initiatives in response to opportunities revealed by the strategic planning research. Insights from the research introduce each discussion question.

1. OUTREACH & SOCIAL CAPITAL (pillar 1)

RESEARCH INSIGHTS: The LCWDB strategic planning research (focus groups and stakeholder survey) highlights the critical role of social capital, relationships, and human experiences in workforce development. Results indicate this is a top challenge, with 76% of respondents identifying improved relationships with community partners as a key tactic for LCWDB. For job seekers, strong, supportive relationships greatly influence their engagement and persistence in processes. Similarly, HR professionals use relationships to signal what's important and to facilitate key tasks in workforce development. Community organizations and educators benefit from knowing the right contacts for referrals and collaboration. By leveraging social capital and relationships, we can enhance understanding and engagement in workforce initiatives and LCWDB programs. Relationships help us understand the evolving experiences of job seekers and employers, to ensure programs are relevant to the changing needs of stakeholders.

Here's what AI said about this challenge:

QUESTION 1: How might the LCWDB, through its services and funding authority, build social capital and foster relationships among stakeholders to enhance engagement and relevance of workforce development programs?

2. THOUGHT LEADERSHIP- RELEVANCE - FUTURE PLANNING (pillar 1)

RESEARCH INSIGHT: Stakeholder interviews, board and staff surveys, and focus groups consistently highlight a strong desire for LCWDB to be a thought leader in Lancaster County's workforce development. This could include sharing best practices, resources, trends and data that help inform stakeholders about issues affecting workforce development. The survey also revealed that among future scenarios to plan for, developing skills for new types of careers and sectors is the top concern of 71% of respondents.

QUESTION 2: As a workforce development thought leader, how might LCWDB enhance the understanding and use of workforce development information, while assisting the community in preparing for future workforce scenarios such as accelerating technology advancements (robotics, AI, etc), jobs related to climate resiliency and other emerging sectors, hybrid and remote work, intergenerational work dynamics, globalization, local population growth and others?

3. ENGAGEMENT OF EMPLOYERS (pillar 2)

RESEARCH INSIGHT: Stakeholder interviews, focus groups, and surveys reveal two critical themes: the importance of relevant, paid workplace experience and the need for streamlined processes for busy employers across all LCWDB initiatives. According to the survey, 52.38% of respondents identified "making it easier for employers to provide workplace experience for youth" as a top priority for the LCWDB. Relevant workplace experiences are vital to developing the workforce pipeline and retaining talent. However, employers have limited staff time available and/or don't know how best to do this. They often don't know who to contact and if they did, they are short on time to execute these opportunities. Additionally, community organizations and educators need and want a better 'closed loop' with employers so they understand the skill gaps to address through their programs.

QUESTION 3: How might the LCWDB, at a strategic and systemic level, make it easier and more beneficial for employers to engage with community organizations and educational partners?

4. CAPACITY AND EXCELLENCE AMONG COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS (pillar 2)

RESEARCH INSIGHT: Many community organizations and educational institutions have missions aligned with workforce development, so their work influences Lancaster County workforce development outcomes. They also have ongoing relationships and trust with populations they serve. But, when these organizations have workforce gaps, which many focus group participants cited, it weakens the workforce system overall. Sometimes these organizations are seen primarily as service providers and may be overlooked in employer-focused initiatives. This is especially challenging for organizations and districts serving marginalized communities, who have more significant needs. In the words of a respondent "the places we are especially interested in working with to advance diversity and equity, don't have the capacity to work with us." Additionally, as a leader for workforce development, LCWDB has access to national best practices and resources about effective workforce practices that could enhance the capacity and service excellence across community organizations.

QUESTION 4: What types of strategic initiatives might the Board use to support community organizations and educational institutions and bolster their capacity to deliver impactful workforce development programs to audiences who can benefit?

5. TRANSPORTATION & ACCESSIBILITY (pillar 3)

RESEARCH INSIGHT: Transportation remains a significant challenge. It was reported as the top barrier for job seekers consistently across stakeholder interviews, focus groups and the survey. It impacts job seekers and also the employers who are unable to get workers because they cannot find transportation to their workplace. People also reported challenges accessing the LCWDB building, with 30% of respondents reporting that the office location and community hubs are not effective at reaching individuals who need services. While WDB is already addressing this issue through initiatives like Uber partnerships, participation on the transportation authority committee, and local community hubs, the barriers caused by transportation are still significant.

QUESTION 5: What types of initiatives could leverage LCWDB's role in the community to improve transportation solutions for job seekers and employers across the county and where might LCWDB look for funding, partners, and community support?

6. DIVERSITY OF JOB CANDIDATES (pillar 3)

RESEARCH INSIGHT: 92% of respondents indicated that recruitment of a diverse workforce is a high priority for their organization, and 67% of respondents indicated a need for assistance in improving diverse candidate pools. Concerns about racial equity surfaced repeatedly during stakeholder interviews and focus groups. Given this, LCWDB has a significant opportunity to provide valuable and impactful support to both employers and job seekers in the realm of equity, diversity and recruitment. Disaggregating outcomes data by demographics is an important step and is part of future plans.

QUESTION 6: How might LCWDB lead and influence strategies that improve and diversify qualified candidate pools, elevating opportunities for economic mobility and including more diverse representation in the workforce system?