

# 2024 Porter County Workforce Update

**W**orkforce development has experienced significant shifts across Northwest Indiana and the nation in recent years. To respond to ever-changing needs and demands, workers and employers alike are seeking economic regeneration. Center of Workforce Innovations (CWI), representing Northwest Indiana Workforce Board (NWIWB), is uniquely positioned to lead economic invigoration efforts and advance the Region's status as a thriving, regional workforce hub where individual workers and local communities prosper.

In 2022, CWI invited stakeholders from across the region to contribute to a strategic plan that benefits all of Northwest Indiana. Collectively, we aspire to ensure the vitality of the regional workforce by putting our clients' employment needs and quality of life first. The following presents how CWI is working toward regional regeneration, inclusive workplaces, and sustainable practices that will stand the test of time.



# Workforce Report for Porter County

## Five Pillars of Opportunity

CWI's Strategic Plan was driven by stakeholders across seven counties: Jasper, Lake, La Porte, Newton, Porter, Pulaski, and Starke. The plan draws on insights from two regional convenings with more than 90 in-person participants, as well as interviews with subject matter experts, regional focus groups with more than 40 stakeholders, plus a region-wide survey with more than 100 total respondents. The findings resulted in five strategic initiatives that will define CWI's work through 2027.

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### 1 Accessible Employment Opportunities

We promote equity-centered policies, practices, and systems that remove structural barriers for entry-level workers and those seeking new employment.

#### INITIATIVES

- Workforce Talent Convenings and collaborations with community leaders
  - Adult Learning Centers with a student-centric focus, Integrated Education and Training (IET) & Workforce Education Initiative (WEI)
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### 2 Informed and Engaged Youth

We are creating a safe, supportive young adult community, connecting young people (16-24) with workplace experiences and positive, demographically representative mentorship.

#### INITIATIVES

- Expansion of Jobs for America's Graduates program, adding 15 schools in NWI. A 2nd JAG program is being added at Portage High School in Fall 2024.
- Ohio Growth Opportunity Grant helping youth discover a career pathway, gain training and work experiences that help reduce recidivism
- Delivering "Bridging the Gap" through youth-focused NextGen brand, targeting youth without a plan at Valparaiso Alternative Learning Experience school.
- Supporting in school youth with Intermediary Capacity Building grant to allow those students without a plan work-based learning opportunities and career exploration exposure.
- Midwest Urban Strategies' Growth Opportunity Grant for justice-involved youth between the ages of 18 and 24 in Gary helping upskill and place in employment
- Planning the 2nd Annual Porter County Construction & Skilled Trades Day, where 16 trade organizations bring equipment, technology, and create mock worksites for more than 1,000 students from 28 NWI high schools and career and technical programs to experience.

# 3

## A Supported Workforce

We are ensuring new employees' success through quality onboarding, onsite support, and upskilling opportunities.

### INITIATIVES

- Employer Training Grant through Next Level Jobs. Aero Machine -Labor Machinist; Steel Cities Steels- Mastering Sales; Healthline- Dental and Medical Assistant Training Program; Cleveland-Cliffs, Inc. Burns Harbor-Maintenance Technician Mechanical
  - Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education Consortium with Tristate Industries and 9 other regional employers to sponsor newly graduating seniors with paid work experience in Advanced Maintenance Technician Associate Degree level training
  - Apprenticeship expansion considerations to support new and expansion of existing Department of Labor Registered apprenticeships
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# 4

## Aligned and Activated Partnerships

We are creating a client-centric regional culture by nurturing strategic partnerships and collective action.

### INITIATIVES

- Pathways to the Trades support in partnership with regional unions, contractors and Indiana Plan leaders
  - Partnered with Construction Advancement Foundation (CAF) to introduce new Civil Construction Program at Porter County Career Center
  - Established a Farmer Apprenticeship with NWI Food Council and 5 Area Farmers
  - Partnering with Valparaiso University to create a community HUB of supportive resources
  - Partnering with NEO New Vistas High School and Adult Education
  - Building solid relationship with KLLM Transport Services, choice employer based in Burns Harbor. Engaged and aligned with several aspects of WorkOne system.
  - Providing employer services, including Food Production Manager Training, to BNutty, Portage-based, woman-led, going global corporation.
  - Helping Konrady Plastics access Mastercam training and technology (??)
  - Helping upskill NWI's first responders thru a partnership with MAAC Foundation, helping individuals receive medical technician (EMT) training
  - Implementing a Farmer Apprenticeship with NWI Food Council and 5 Area Farmers
  - United Way mobile lab to meet clients where their career services are needed courtesy of NIPSCO
  - Partnered with Ivy Tech to support a mobile training lab to serve Northwest Indiana
  - Organized an employer advisory board for READY NWI education, employer and community partner consortium to identify value, work experiences and bridging the connection
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# 5

## An Inspiring and Trusted Leader

We are establishing trust and building an approachable public-facing identity that uplifts the organization's unique strengths and leadership role within the region.

# Refocus on Skills

With a need to find qualified workers, employers are evaluating the need for skills and experience vs. the need for credentials and degrees. With an aging workforce, a lower birthrate bringing fewer new workers, and changing dynamics for educational paths and job interests, companies need new strategies for recruiting, retaining and training their employees.

**We are leveraging an extensive network of educators, partners, and programs to attract new talent to the workforce.**

- Job Posting and Talent Alignment System
- Recruit High School Talent to Open Jobs
- Pre-Apprenticeship Design
- Skilled and Career Ready Candidates

# Rethink Training

Employers want to get new employees on the job as quickly as possible. 80% of surveyed employers rely on on-the-job training as their primary source of adding or increasing skills for employees.

**We are customizing training opportunities for both new and existing staff ranging from short-term credentials to accredited coursework.**

- On-the-Job Training
- Apprenticeship Design
- Existing Employee Upskilling
- High School Equivalency (HSE) and Industry High Demand Certification Skills

# Reset Recruiting

With 77.5% of the NWI's workforce having less than a bachelor's degree, employers can no longer rely on a 4-year degree as a screening tool. We are helping employers working more closely with school districts to raise awareness of career paths in industries such as manufacturing, engineering, healthcare, construction and skilled trades.

**We are helping employers access industry specific training as well as develop career pathways for their employees. We provide employers access to resources and our robust ecosystem, plus tools to grow and retain employees.**

- Business Consulting
- Career Pathway Mapping
- Labor Market Data and Trends
- Training Plan Development
- Measure Return on Investment (ROI)



**For more information, please don't hesitate to contact us.**

**Lisa Daugherty, *President & CEO***  
(219) 462-2940, ext. 1020  
lidaugherty@cwicorp.com

**Center of Workforce Innovations**  
2804 Boilermaker Court, Ste. E, Valparaiso, Indiana 46383

[cwicorp.com](http://cwicorp.com)

