

**Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
Regional Plan
July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2023**

Planning Region Name:

Central Region

Local Areas within the Planning Region:

Catawba, Lower Savannah, and Midlands

Local Area Administrators and Contact Information:

Catawba Workforce Development Area:

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Lower Savannah Workforce Development Area:

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Attachment A: Regional Plan Requirements

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

- Partnership and collaboration
- Increased access to resources and services through the use of technology
- The impact of COVID-19 on the state's workforce and strategies to facilitate rapid reemployment

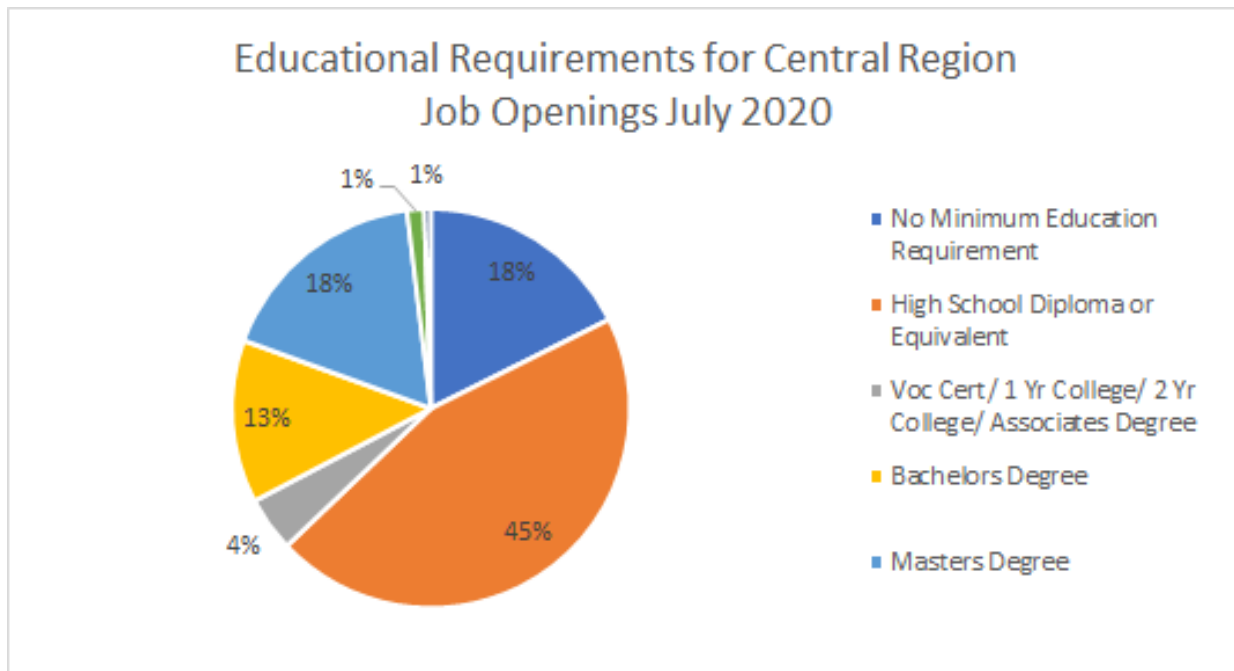
The regional plan must include:

1. A description of how each local area within the region was afforded the opportunity to participate in the regional planning process, along with a description of the planning process undertaken to produce the regional plan. The description must include how the chief elected officials and local boards were involved in the development of the plan.

The Central Region Plan was a collaborative effort between the three local areas. The planning process evolved from collaboration between the member local areas and was initially derived from the framework built by the Regional Team. Using this framework along with the South Carolina Unified State Plan and each local plan, the blueprint for integrated service delivery between the areas was crafted. To facilitate the process, an online document was created and shared to allow team editing and collaboration. Each area had the opportunity to engage their Board members, partners and local elected officials to be an active participant in the planning and development process. Given the limitations as a result of COVID-19, meetings and plan development were handled through virtual platforms. After the draft document had finalized, each area posted and promoted access to the Central Regional Plan for public comment prior to submission.

2. An analysis of regional labor market data and economic conditions, to include existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations, and the employment needs of employers in those existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations. The analysis shall include:
 - The knowledge and skills necessary to meet the employment needs of the employers in the region, including those in in-demand industry sectors and occupations;
 - An analysis of the current workforce in the region, including employment and unemployment data, labor market trends, and the educational and skill levels of the workforce, including individuals with barriers to employment; and

The following chart shows that 45% of the jobs advertised in the Central Region required a high school diploma or equivalent. It is somewhat surprising to note that 18% of the jobs listed required no minimum education. A Master's Degree was required for 18% of the jobs listed and 13% required a Bachelor's degree. Only 4% of the jobs required a certification or some college, including an Associate's Degree.



The educational attainment of the Central Region population 25 years and older as noted in the Central Region Community Profile is as follows:

| | |
|------------------------|--------|
| Less than 9th Grade | 4.53% |
| 9th to 12th No Diploma | 9.20% |
| High School Graduate | 28.58% |
| Some College | 21.44% |
| Associate's Degree | 8.78% |
| Bachelor's Degree | 17.49% |
| Graduate Degree | 9.98% |

Our region appears to be a little high in the percentage of individuals with some college and Associates Degrees as compared to current advertised job openings. Although not required, for some jobs, additional education is an asset in finding employment and advancing to other jobs. As the economy continues to recover from the pandemic, we may see a shift in employers looking for increased skills.

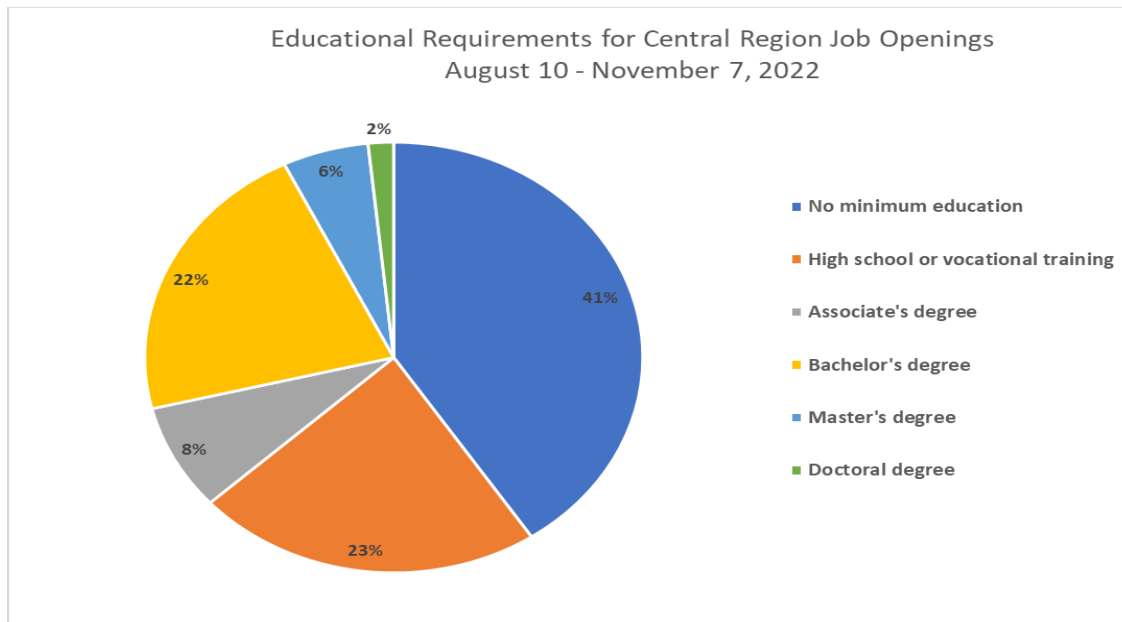
As did the rest of South Carolina, and most of the country, the Central Region saw historically low unemployment in 2019. As noted in the Central Region Community Profile, published by SCDEW in July, 2020, the Central Region saw the lowest unemployment in September 2019 at

2.2%. Due to the pandemic, that percentage rose drastically to 14.4% in April and was down to 11.2% in June. The hardest hit industry groups include Administrative and Support and Waste Management, Accommodation and Food Services, Manufacturing, Retail Trade, and Health Care and Social Assistance based on Unemployment Insurance claims for June 2020. As businesses continue to open back up, we anticipate that those numbers will continue to drop but may not see the levels reached in 2019 in the foreseeable future.

Over the last year, the Central Region had the highest number of people employed in March 2020 at 676,536. That dropped to 611,290 in April but climbed back to 643,941 in June. In the same time period, the largest number of job openings was in November 2019 at 21,902 and the lowest number was in May 2020 at 15,718. It is good news that in June 2020, there were 18,383 openings meaning employers are hiring again. The top occupational openings in June were Registered Nurses, Retail Salespersons, First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers, Customer Service Representatives, Managers, All Others, Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers, Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Except Legal, Medical, and Executive, and maintenance and Repair Workers, General which all had between 200-600 job openings. See page 17 of the attached Central Region Community Profile for a full list of occupational openings for June 2020.

The Labor Market Projections on page 22 of the Central Region Community Profile anticipate the industries employing the most people by 2026 will be Health Care and Social Assistance, Retail Trade, Accommodation and Food Services, Manufacturing, Educational Services, Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation. Transportation and Warehousing is also on the list and if the trend toward on-line ordering continues after the pandemic, we anticipate this industry to continue rapid growth. We also have seen the trend in less jobs in Retail Trade, Accommodation and Food Services and may not see the anticipated growth in these industries as they continue to recover from the pandemic.

Following is Educational Requirement data from job postings for 90 days in PY22 (August 10 – November 7, 2022). The biggest change is for “No Minimum Education” included in the job postings. It is hard determining the reason for this but it may be attributed to employers being desperate to fill entry level positions.



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

The three local areas that make up the Central Region all have a wide range of training to meet the industry needs within their area and the region. Each area is also involved with various partners, initiatives, etc. to benefit area employers and job seekers, including those with barriers to employment. Some of those include:

- Registered Apprenticeship (Technical Colleges in each area/Apprenticeship Carolina)
- Catawba Reentry Navigator Grant will enable the area to employ a person to specifically work with individuals who have been involved in the justice system. This specialized staff person will help this population obtain employment through delivery of soft skills training, possible occupational skill training, on the job training, and/or transitional employment. This gives the area an extra boost to serve this important population. As of PY22, Catawba no longer has funding for a dedicated Reentry Navigator but still serves this population through other staff.
- The Catawba Priority Populations Committee has hosted several events for area employers to highlight services available for employees with disabilities. Partnering with Able SC for these events has been a great resource for area employers.
- The Catawba Areas recently was awarded a United Way grant to help York County residents reach financial stability. This grant will enable the area to provide soft skills and transitional jobs to York County residents that are currently unemployed or

underemployed. As of PY 22, Catawba no longer has this grant but continues to provide soft skill training throughout the area.

- The Catawba area also has partnerships with Foster Care for those aging out of the system at 18; Children’s Attention Home; and Lancaster Children’s Home. Strong relationships have been formed with area high school guidance counselors who refer those graduating without plans for further education, to SC Works for services.
- The Lower Savannah Region has over the last five years made significant investment in Business Services with a focus on increasing both Registered Apprenticeships as well as On-the-Job Training to aid both job seekers and employers with finding the talent to keep them globally competitive across all three funding streams. We continue to utilize this as marketing and outreach for employers and jobseekers throughout the Central Region. One such example is a registered apprenticeship with the Aiken County Public School System. Lower Savannah has been able through collaboration with Savannah River Site (SNS) and Aiken Technical College has been able to lay the foundation for a strong Apprenticeship Program on SRS affectionately known as the “The Site”. Presently there are over 50 plus (and growing) co-enrolled WIOA participants participating in a USDOL registered apprenticeships on the SRS campus, with a substantial likelihood of permanent employment at the end of the apprenticeship training period.
- The Lower Savannah Summer “Jumpstart” Program which focuses on soft-skills education and Work-based Learning (WBL) has proven very successful in addressing workforce concerns for our rising seniors (students moving from the 11th to the 12th grade). Jumpstart serves Youth participants across the 6-county region of Lower Savannah. The program has proven so successful that it has won multiple innovation awards and a modified version of the program is being considered not only for the Central Region but deployment statewide.
- In affiliation with the Aiken County Public Schools, the WIOA youth program continues to be a perennial sponsor and participant in the Aiken Works program hosted by the local school district. Aiken Works connects properly screened 9th through 12th graders with employers seeking to increase youth participation in the workforce. These students receive academic credit for successful participation and completion of the program.
- The Lower Savannah region is in the process of creating Memorandums of Understanding with Augusta University and Aiken Technical College to focus on Information Technology training that will not only benefit the Lower Savannah Region but the entirety of the Central region job-seekers and employment organizations. This is particularly necessary with Augusta being named the Cyber-Security Headquarters for the United States.
- The Lower Savannah Workforce Development Area purchased a Mobile SC Works Center capable of providing Workforce Development services in the harder to reach

and mobility challenged sections of the Central Region. The unit is outfitted with 10 computer stations with internet connectivity and is ADA compliant. The unit's official roll-out took place on June 14, 2022 and to date has had over 115 visitors and been utilized at 8 employer sponsored events/job fairs.

- Building Occupational Opportunities in the Midlands (BOOM) is a construction job-training program for high school students with disabilities. The program provides an innovative pathway for disabled students to learn skills while still in high school and find employment with local homebuilders. BOOM is now partially funded through Apprenticeship Carolina as a pre-employment program for citizens with disabilities. This covers approximately 80% of the class costs which includes earning OSHA certification and basic skills training in the area of construction. BOOM also supports job readiness to include resume writing, interview skills, and career communications. The project wraps up with students meeting with employer interviews striving for completing students with at least one employment offer.
- Apprenticeship Carolina™ has developed a work group to determine resources to provide employers to assist with hiring individuals with disabilities into new or existing United States Department of Labor Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs). Thanks to a 2021 award of \$7.71 million in State Apprenticeship Expansion, Equity, and Innovation (SAEEI) funding, there are plans to allocate a portion of those funds to this initiative. Stakeholders in the initiative project include Midlands Technical College and Able SC. Apprenticeship Carolina is also investigating ways grant funds can be used to provide financial support, both tuition assistance and supportive service stipends, to individuals with disabilities to ensure they are successful in their RAP.
- Create Opportunity is a private/public partnership that seeks to develop software engineers from untapped markets and non-traditional locations. Using artificial intelligence as an aptitude and success predictor, the opportunity blends classroom training on the front end, with a Registered Apprenticeship in the Midlands Area.
- South Carolina I-77 Alliance is a county-driven nonprofit economic development organization dedicated to positioning and marketing the five counties (Chester, Lancaster, York, Fairfield, and Richland) as a world-class business location to attract capital investment and high-quality jobs to the region.
- Midlands Tech BOOST (Better Occupational Outcomes with Simulation Training) grant created three short-term, stackable certificates in healthcare that take less than one year to complete utilizing high tech simulators, 3D/virtual reality technology and online course materials and demonstrations. MTC consulted directly with major healthcare employers, who expressed the need for significantly more entry-level workers.
- Midlands Youth Apprenticeship Program is a partnership between the Columbia Chamber, Midlands Technical College and participating school districts. MYA is a career-education pathway that helps build a viable, local workforce for high-demand, hard-to-fill positions. It provides high school juniors and seniors the opportunity to get

paid to learn as youth apprentices. Youth apprentices receive paid on-the-job training along with job-related education at MTC. The MYA Program also provides businesses and organizations the unique chance to meet qualified high-school students from a variety of fields and backgrounds who are already achieving at a high-level

- REEMERGE is a 6-12-month reintegration program that uses employment, coaching, education and entrepreneurship. Program participants receive a curriculum of study in HVAC, industrial electrical, landscaping or carpentry, as well as real work experience, classroom study, and professional coaching. Participants will learn life-long skills that will provide them with new and exciting opportunities allowing them to provide for their families and, equally important, keeping them from returning to prison.
- Life Launch & Pathway Home are two DOL grant funded projects in the Midlands area launching in 2022 through Goodwill Industries of Upstate/Midlands SC. Life Launch serves past justice involved job seekers aged 18-24 find their way through the barriers and into sustainable employment. Pathway Home is a project aimed specifically at the correctional facilities working with pre and post release clients transition into sustainable employment. Projects like these help the returning citizens transition into productive work and help to fill the employment gaps in the area with a new pool of job seekers.

Additionally, the WIOA program links customers/jobseekers to employment and training opportunities. The strengths of all of these and emerging programs relate to the focus on in-demand employers and industries. This concentration has contributed to the growth of the regional economy and job development. The initiatives represent more opportunities than ever for entry into in-demand careers. If there is a weakness to these - or any such programs - it is related to a lack of connectivity and data sharing. With many programs, whether designed to assist job seekers or businesses, there are going to requirements or eligibility elements that must be met. While there is often overlap between customers of these programs, there remains a difficulty of connecting them seamlessly. This can be directly related to individual program performance metrics or confidentiality requirements that do not allow for direct sharing. These competing interests can lead to a perceived silo or disconnect between organizations. Consistent funding for programs can also lead to an issue of continuity, and therefore services gaps.

A focus on priority populations, or those with barriers to employment, has gained notable traction within the Central Region, and many workforce programs carry a priority to serve these individuals. Examples above include linkages for individuals with disabilities through BOOM, and REEMERGE and Pathway Home are specifically designed to serve returning citizens. The Reentry Navigator Grant in Catawba is a great example of specialized services for the justice involved population. The WIOA programs in the Central Region continue to seek to serve those that have barriers as a prime customer, with an emphasis on partnerships to lever the highest quality service to address or eliminate barriers.

3. A description of plans for the development and implementation or expansion of sector initiatives for in-demand industry sectors or occupations for the region. Regions should consider:
 - Current in-demand industry sectors and occupations within the region;
 - The status of regional collaboration in support of the sector initiatives;
 - Current sector-based partnerships within the region;
 - Data-driven sector priorities within the region;
 - The extent of business involvement in current initiatives; and
 - Potential public-private partnerships in the region to support sector strategies.

The COVID-19 pandemic has and will continue to have impacts on the Central Region Sector Strategies. The various responses (statewide and local) have resulted in a virtual pause for several reasons - primarily the Manufacturing has been impacted in different ways from shut-downs to increased or shifting production, as well as a need for social distancing. The end result, we project, will be an even greater need for Sector Strategies, though with differing needs. For example, prior to Q2 2020 staffing was of the lowest concern for the group due to a growing economy across the Region. The directions and shift that our employer-led Sector group will head remains to be seen, as of this document planning we are in the middle of what is considered to still be the first wave of the virus impact. Planning for potential virtual engagement is the next/new phase of the Region's strategy, as it is unclear when in-person gathering may be safe, as well as travel for industry representatives may be approved. The current hiatus is also an opportunity for the region to evaluate the public-private partnerships that may support, or be supported, by the strategy team. Specifically, identification of resources that could support the three areas of: Workforce/Talent Pipelines, Rural Community development and Business to Business engagement.

We anticipate that our Champions will continue their roles in our NextGen model approach, while we will have adjustments to our support team. The Central Region focus is the continued expansion of Manufacturing, with the target plan for a scalable model to roll out to Healthcare, and then Transportation/Distribution/Logistics in the next few years. The three of the industries remain critical in the Region, and have the potential to increase their overlap and reliance on each other.

The spirit of the NextGen model that is the basis of the Sector Strategy reboot is that of a business-led consortium. The Sector Strategy in fact belongs to business stakeholders- with service partners on the periphery. Currently, the Sector Strategy for the Central Region is run by 26 business leaders

4. A description of regional service strategies that may be established as a result of the regionally coordinated delivery of services, including the use of cooperative service delivery agreements, when appropriate. Regions should consider:
 - Existing service delivery strategies that will be expanded, streamlined, or eliminated;

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

The Central Region LWDAs work together and “across lines” to serve job seekers and employers. Customers are encouraged to seek services in the SC Works Center that is most convenient to them, regardless of the local area in which they reside. This includes collaborative service for employers, especially those located close to area lines or with area-crossing populations. One example is providing OJT contracts for an employer located in one local area with a worker from another local area. The region will continue to consider additional collaborative activities to serve job seekers and employers. When a need or opportunity arises, the Central Region will pool resources on shared SC Works satellite centers. We will also continue to work together to provide Rapid Response services for an employer layoff or closure that touches more than one area. This may include collaborating to provide workshops, mailing/emailing information on SC Works services, etc. The impacts of COVID-19 and new technologies to link the areas have the potential to provide new opportunities to leverage resources.

The primary example of Regional strategy currently in use is the Sector Strategies, using the Next Gen model. The work today has been around manufacturing. While work had progressed toward a cohesive group, some turnover in participants and COVID-19 impacts has stalled work in 2020. As we work through what the long-term changes and needs will be to the industry, we remain committed to the benefits of Sector Strategies in a post-COVID-19/recovery system. In fact, we project the work of a Sector Strategy to become more critical. Additionally, our target to scale the project to Healthcare and Distribution/Logistics is aligned with the critical industries and needs as we emerge from the pandemic.

As noted, the Central Workforce Region is a large geographical area extending from the SC/NC border, near Charlotte, to the SC/GA border, near Augusta, and consists of the Catawba, Midlands, and Lower Savannah Local Workforce Areas. The geographic advantages of the Central Region are linked to the size, location and resources. Through planning and continued exploration, we seek additional ways to capitalize on the fact that the region is the geographic center of the state with a convenient connection via the interstate system – both with-in and outside of the Region. The benefit is for expanded commuting patterns that afford businesses and job seekers, direct commerce routes into border states Georgia and North Carolina. Engagement with the I-77 alliance and the bordering local area counties continue to work with our bordering states and economic development entities to maximize our available LMI data, especially commuting patterns. This information and the

opportunities are shared with our regional team. As with aspects of our approach, we look for methods to expand our communication and data sharing. The region will continue to work to explore partnerships that will maximize the full advantage of our regional assets.

The Central Regional is also continuing to refine our approach to serving individuals with disabilities, veterans, youth, and other customers that may be harder-to-serve. Our previous and current strategies include: coordinating the work of Local Area committees, to include Youth and Disabilities Committee data and initiatives. Through collaboration and sharing of information, service delivery and partnership models, the Region hopes to benefit from a more refined and efficient approach. The conversations and initiatives that evolve are shared between the administrators of the three areas. Another approach under consideration is convening Regional/Inter-Area meetings of these committees. Identifying partners and stakeholders in common between the WDAs is another approach that is under evaluation. Potential additional partners for Regional Coordination such as ABLE SC, Job Corps, SC Department of Correction, Probation, Parole & Pardon Services, SC Vocational Rehabilitation and Department of Veterans Affairs are examples of entities with connections to the priority populations that we are seeking to increase our engagement. This will primarily occur through regular Regional-based meetings and updates between Workforce Administrators and other Regional stakeholders to ensure the consistent flow of information and ideas for service strategies.

Work-based learning continues to be valuable for job seekers – especially as budgets for WIOA funds are reduced. Each local area has their own processes in place but the Central Region will consider ways to collaborate on work-based learning across the region. This may include sharing best practices, success stories, etc., as well as national or regional partnerships with worksites that may develop.

The Central Region Team has and continues to be a great way to involve core partners in our Sector Strategies. We continue to see this as a foundation to more regional planning in the future and involving more core partner staff.

5. A description of any administrative cost arrangements that currently exist or that will be established within the region, including the pooling of funds for administrative costs, as appropriate. Regions should consider:
 - Current or proposed resource leveraging agreements; and
 - The establishment of a process to evaluate cost sharing arrangements.

To date, comprehensive administrative cost arrangements have not been established. The Local Areas are open to considering the possibility of expanding administrative cost arrangements, if it were to make strategic or financial sense. Currently, the region has shared a limited number of job positions in areas that makes sense given the current arrangement. The Catawba and Midlands areas share two financial position at the contractor level. Given that the two area share a common service provider, the shared function increases efficiencies by minimizing operational allowing both areas to dedicate more resources to service to

participants. Additionally, the Lower Savannah and Midlands area share a Data Coordinator position at the Administrative level. This shared function not only saves funding in operational expenses but creates an environment of collaborative work and shared best practices for service provision. In addition to sharing a SCWOS Coordinator, Lower Savannah has entered into a 2-year Consortium/USDOL direct grant with 4 other local workforce areas to increase Dislocated Worker engagement which has proven beneficial in providing services to this hard to serve population. We will monitor for ways that additional costs can be leveraged across the Central Region, while at the same time ensuring efficient use of WIOA and Workforce Development Funding.

6. A description of how transportation, access to childcare or other supportive services are coordinated within the region, as appropriate. Regions should consider:
 - How the provision of transportation or other supportive services could be enhanced regionally;
 - What organizations currently provide or could provide supportive services; and
 - Establishing a process to promote coordination of the delivery of supportive services.

The Central Region, like all of South Carolina, struggles to support a regional public transportation system that would cross regional boundaries. Though South Carolina lacks a statewide transit system, a few areas of the state maintain a localized transit system. In the Central Region, the only existing transportation plans that are in place are localized within each individual Local Workforce Area. We envision transportation as a potential long-term barrier that could be targeted through Sector Strategies. Given complex nature, and many challenges associated with this topic, it will require a consortium of business and industry to truly drive the process.

The Central Region will continue to examine the option of collaboration of supportive services in the circumstances that the collaboration makes sense and is mutually beneficial. The Central Region will also seek out ways that will impact Workforce participants in a positive way across borders and share in the promotion of supportive services as it relates to the Central Region as well as the State of South Carolina. Additionally, the Region will strive to leverage services for transportation and other supportive services through organizations within the Central Region as well as outside those boundaries. We will look for leveraging opportunities through many agencies, a few are the I77 Alliance, Economic Development, DOT, Counties, Local Municipal Government funding and others. Though leveraging cannot be guaranteed, every attempt will be made to develop a successful partnership of services.

7. A description of how workforce development services are coordinated with economic development services and providers within the region. Regions should consider:
 - Current economic development organizations engaged in regional planning; and
 - Education and training providers involved with economic development.

Economic development entity representatives of all three local areas (Lancaster County Economic Development, Aiken Economic Development Partnership and Richland County Economic Development) are active members of the Central Region Team and their input has been extremely important for Sector Strategies and planning for the future. Others will be engaged for participation as needed for additional planning. Locally, each economic development entity is involved in planning to varying degrees. Many are members of the local WDBs and committees and very involved. As a region, we plan to work toward more collaboration with economic development. Since the nature of their business is very confidential, we agree that working relationships with existing industry coordinators is most beneficial. We also feel it is valuable to work more closely with regional economic development entities such as the I-77 Alliance, which included 4 of the counties in the region.

Economic development is involved with education/training providers to some degree in all areas. One example is York County Economic Development being instrumental in the inception of Manufacturing Training in the York School District to meet employer needs. The region may investigate ways to better connect economic development and education/training providers throughout the region.

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

The Central region will ensure that as a region we will meet the minimum standard of performance negotiated for a single workforce area across the entire region. As we become aware of the true performance expectation for our individual workforce areas and the region as a whole we will surely strive not only to meet those standards but exceed them. The Central Region will exercise continual improvement with not only the performance goals set by DOL, but will constantly seek ways to improve Local Area relationships to ensure positive service delivery outcomes that the Regional Team will be seeking to achieve.

Regional Plan Signatures

Local Workforce Development Boards:

Catawba Workforce Development Board
Joanie Winters, Chair

Lower Savannah Workforce Development Board
Tommy Boyleston, Chair

Signature

Date

Signature

Date

Midlands Workforce Development Board
Harry Plexico, Chair

 Signature Date

Local Grant Recipient Signatory Officials:

Catawba Workforce Development Area
Randy Imler, Executive Director
 Name Title

Lower Savannah Workforce Development Area
William Molnar, Ph.D., Executive Director
 Name Title

 Signature Date

 Signature Date

Midlands Workforce Development Area
Benjamin J. Mauldin, Executive Director
 Name Title

 Signature Date