

**Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
Regional Plan
July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2028**

Planning Region Name:

Link Upstate WIOA Region

Local Areas within the Planning Region:

Greenville County, Upper Savannah, Upstate, and WorkLink

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The regional plan serves as an action plan to develop, align, and integrate service delivery strategies and resources among multiple local workforce development areas (LWDAs) within a region. Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) and chief elected officials (CEOs) 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 LWDA within the planning region. The following guiding principles must be considered priorities and included in responses throughout the document:

- Partnership and collaboration
- Increased access to resources and services through the use of technology
- Innovation and cost efficiencies.

The regional plan must include:

1. A description of how each LWDA 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 CEOs and LWDBs were involved in the development of the plan.

Each of the four Workforce Development Directors appointed a staff member to coordinate responses for the 2024-2028 Regional Plan on behalf of their respective workforce areas. This group developed the groundwork, tasks list, and timeline for completing the regional plan. Each local area was given the chance to submit responses for consideration of the group. These responses highlighted the similarities and ongoing partnerships within the region, while also identifying areas of opportunity. The effort, coordinated by the four local areas, was inclusive and all submissions were evaluated to ensure inclusion of each local area’s unique perspective and views. A draft of the plan was then sent to the county administrators in order to ensure that chief elected officials were included in the process.

The process for including the chief elected official(s) and local WDBs may vary from local area to local area.

- In the **Greenville County** area, the chief elected official and Greenville County WDB are involved in the development of the plan via:
 - The Chief Elected Official, the County Administrator, and the Greenville County WDB receive the planning guidance and have opportunity to review and provide feedback to the WDB Executive Director during development.
 - The Chief Elected Official, the County Administrator, and the Greenville County WDB receive an executive summary of the draft regional plan and have opportunity to provide feedback to the WDB staff.
 - The draft regional plan is also made available for a ten (10) business day public comment period to ensure community stakeholder input. Any comments received in response to the plan public comment process will be incorporated as attachments to the final regional plan and presented to the Chief Elected Official, the County Administrator, and the Greenville County WDB.

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- In the **Upper Savannah** area, Workforce Board Members were invited to take part in the planning sessions with Board Staff and included a cross section of Partners outside of the Board such as economic developers, county/city managers, and chamber leaders. Chief elected officials are part of the plan review and feedback during the Public Comment Period.
 - The full regional plan is sent to each of the seven County Councils (Abbeville, Edgefield, Greenwood, Laurens, McCormick, Newberry, and Saluda) for information at each County Council meeting. Any comments received from the seven Councils and their members will be provided by the Clerk to Council or via the Public Comment Form available online as part of the public comment period. The regional plan will be made available for a 10-day public comment period. Any comments received will be incorporated as attachments to the regional plan and sent to the County Councils.

- In the **Upstate area**, consisting of Cherokee, Spartanburg and Union Counties, the Upstate Workforce Board Executive Director sent the local plan in sections to 147 individuals and invited them to attend three zoom meetings to review and discuss the document. There were 147 representatives from businesses, non-profits, government, education, labor, local Upstate Workforce Board members and elected leaders. The Regional Plan and the Local Plan were posted for review and for a 10-day comment period. Ads were placed in three newspapers (one in each of our counties) about the three public hearings for individuals to provide comments and ask questions. Each County Council member on the three County Councils in our workforce area received a copy of the document or a link to the document and an invitation to join zoom meetings and/or to attend a public hearing. We asked for an email from each County Administrator stating that their Council members had an opportunity to review the plans and that the plans are approved for submittal.

- In the **WorkLink area**, elected officials of Anderson, Oconee, and Pickens Counties, County Administrators, and WorkLink Workforce Development Board (WDB) members were involved in the development of the regional plan in the following ways:
 - The elected officials, County Administrators, and WorkLink WDB members received the planning guidance and had the opportunity to review and provide feedback to the WDB Executive Director during the plan's development.
 - An executive summary of the draft regional plan was provided to each of our stakeholders, along with access to the full draft plan, allowing them to thoroughly review and offer additional feedback before finalization.
 - The full regional plan was presented as an item for information to each County Council member. Any feedback received was captured by the WorkLink WDB staff and shared with the other areas in the Link Upstate region.
 - The regional plan was made available for a 10-day public comment period. All comments received during this period were documented as attachments to the plan and presented to the WorkLink WDB for final approval.

Regional planning and collaboration began during the 2016 Regional Planning process and continues through the life of the 2024-2028 Regional Plan. The collaboration among the four regions has led to innovation, cross-region sharing of resources and continues to promote positive changes in the way things are done across the Link Upstate Region.

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For the 2024-2028 plan, each of the four Workforce Development areas appointed a staff member to coordinate responses and solicit input for the new plan. The lead for consolidating responses from all four areas for this modification was the Upper Savannah Workforce Board. The Upper Savannah Workforce Board Director forwarded updates received to the plan periodically throughout the modification writing process to ensure that all modification responses were shared and agreed upon by all four Workforce Development Area Directors. This was also done so that each Workforce Development Area could share and gather input from those involved in the workforce system to include the local elected officials.

- 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 must include the following:**
- **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**
 - **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.**

Upstate WIOA Region



INTRODUCTION TO THE LINK UPSTATE REGION

Link Upstate, the Upstate WIOA region, consists of the Greenville, Upper Savannah, Upstate, and WorkLink Workforce Development Areas, and covers fourteen counties in the northwesternmost corner of South Carolina: Abbeville, Anderson, Cherokee, Edgefield, Greenville, Greenwood, Laurens, McCormick, Newberry, Oconee, Pickens, Saluda, Spartanburg, and Union.

The region is chiefly defined by its access to the I-85 corridor that connects Atlanta, Georgia with Charlotte, North Carolina, and serves as an economic driver for the region. The Inland Port, located in Greer, has provided additional access to the port in Charleston, SC, roughly 200 miles away, and has bolstered transportation and logistics for companies located in the Upstate. The Inland Port's growth is part of a larger trend of increased intermodal cargo at South Carolina Ports (SC Ports). In 2023, 23% of all marine containers were moved by rail, which is back to pre-pandemic levels. This growth is due to SC Ports' investment in rail infrastructure and the expansion of Inland Port Greer from the \$28 million expansion in May of 2021 and another \$50 million for expansion beginning in 2023. The Inland Port has continued to be the largest asset for economic development. The port is on pace in 2024 to exceed the 2023 numbers.

REGIONAL INDUSTRY OVERVIEW

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SC Department of Employment and Workforce reported **45,727** employers in the Link Upstate region for the last quarter of 2024. Small Business, defined as having less than 49 employees, makes up 94.24% of the employer community whereas medium business (50 to 500 employees) makes up 5.40% and large business (501+ employees) makes up .36%. However, medium businesses employ the most individuals at 40.79% followed by small business at 32.22% and large business at 26.99%.

Employers & Employees by Size of Establishment

Business Description	Employers	%	Employees	%
Small Businesses (0-49)	45,727	94.24%	258,667	32.22%
Medium Businesses (50-500)	2,621	5.40%	327,408	40.79%
Large Businesses (501+)	173	0.36%	216,619	26.99%
Total Businesses	48,521		802,694	
<i>Source: SCDEW Community Profile 2024 Q4</i>				

The top five employing industries as of Quarter Four of 2024 are Manufacturing (18.4% of those employed work in this industry); Healthcare and Social Assistance (14.2%); Retail Trade (11.5%); Accommodation and Food Services (9.4%); and Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation (6.5%).

The following five industries experience the least amount of turnover: Utilities (-4.8%), Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction (-3.0%), Educational Services (2.4%), Construction (2.6%), Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting (2.7%) and Management of Companies and Enterprises (5.2%). Those five industries that experienced the most are as follows: Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation (39.2%), Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation (23.0%), Information (19.1%), Health Care and Social Assistance (16.9%), and Accommodation and Food Services (16.1%). Staffing services are included in the Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation industry including those employed at manufacturing facilities as temporary employees who may also be hired into permanent manufacturing positions.

INDUSTRIES	# of Employees	% of Employed	% Change	Average Annual Wage
Accommodation and Food Services	64,539	9.4%	16.1%	22,763
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	44,642	6.5%	23.0%	44,111
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	2,432	0.4%	2.7%	46,771
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	9,845	1.4%	39.2%	21,920
Construction	32,902	4.8%	2.6%	73,425
Educational Services	56,775	8.3%	2.4%	51,539
Finance and Insurance	19,119	2.8%	3.7%	10,143
Health Care and Social Assistance	97,506	14.2%	16.5%	65,611

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Information	7,158	1.0%	19.1%	82,911
Management of Companies and Enterprises	7,837	1.1%	5.2%	110,750
Manufacturing	126,004	18.4%	7.0%	72,929
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	317	0.0%	-3.0%	90,935
Other Services (except Public Administration)	16,129	2.3%	11.1%	44,391
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	32,456	4.7%	11.4%	86,429
Public Administration	24,100	3.5%	20.5%	51,767
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	7,410	1.1%	8.3%	61,191
Retail Trade	78,921	11.5%	5.6%	36,110
Transportation and Warehousing	27,677	4.0%	18.4%	61,765
Utilities	3,359	0.5%	-4.8%	85,245
Wholesale Trade	27,284	4.0%	12.2%	83,730
Total	686,412		11%	
<i>Source: SC Department of Employment and Workforce, Community Profile (September 2024)</i>				

The five industries that pay the highest annual wages are as follows: Management of Companies and Enterprises (\$110,750); Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction (\$90,935); Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (\$86,429); Utilities (\$85,245); Wholesale Trade (\$83,730). Those that pay the least in annual wages are Finance and Insurance (\$10,143); Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation (\$21,920); Accommodation and Food Services (\$22,763); Retail Trade (\$36,110); Other Services (except Government) (\$44,391). It is worth noting that the wages have gone up slightly since the last plan update.

Existing and Emerging Industries

Manufacturing is the leading industry for the area. This industry has several specialty types that are significant to the Link Upstate Region: Automotive, Advance Materials, Biosciences, and Aerospace. Other major existing and emerging industries include Healthcare and Distribution & Logistics.

AUTOMOTIVE

The automotive industry is a cornerstone of the Link Upstate Region's economy. Upstate SC is home to more than 250 automotive-related companies. BMW, a tier-1 automotive manufacturer, has established its sole North American facility along the I-85 corridor. To date, BMW has invested \$13.3 billion in the Upstate of South Carolina. The Spartanburg plant is the company's largest worldwide production facility. Currently, BMW employs over 11,000 individuals. The plant assembles more than 1,500 vehicles each day. BMW Manufacturing currently assembles nine gas-powered models and two plug-in hybrids, and they are gearing up to assemble six new totally electric vehicles by 2030. BMW's most recent investment for electric vehicles

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includes \$1 billion at the Spartanburg facility and \$700 million for a high-voltage battery assembly plant in the city of Woodruff.

Other key contributors to the region's automotive industry include Michelin North America, Inc., headquartered in Greenville, SC, since the early 1970s. Michelin employs 7,800 South Carolinians across eight Upstate facilities. Upstate is home to ZF's largest facility, which produces fuel-efficient 8- and 9-speed automatic transmissions for the passenger car and light truck market. At 1.4 million square feet and with more than 3,000 employees, the Upstate SC auto plant produces more than 1.2 million transmissions per year. In 2025, the facility will begin manufacturing the 8-speed plug-in hybrid transmission. They are among the region's top 25 employers. Oshkosh Defense is a tactical vehicle manufacturer and is establishing a \$155 million Upstate production facility for zero-emission battery electric vehicles and fuel-efficient low emission internal combustion engine vehicles used in the US Postal Service. Robert Bosch, operating in Anderson, SC, since 1985, is a leader in automotive technology with a workforce of approximately 1,100 employees.

ADVANCED MATERIALS

Advanced manufacturing plays a pivotal role in the Upstate economy, extending beyond the automotive industry into sectors such as fiber-related technology, ceramic technology, coatings, and film. There are 1,038 businesses in the Upstate representing the advanced material industry. According to the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce's Community Profile (2024 Q1), the manufacturing sector employs 126,004 individuals in the Link Upstate Region. Of these, approximately 40,487 are specifically engaged in the advanced materials and composite industry.

The advanced manufacturing sector includes employers specializing in plastics and rubber products, such as Cryovac Sealed Air, one of the region's largest employers. Other areas of specialization include chemicals, fabricated metal products, computer and electronic components, and aerospace and transportation equipment. Milliken, a major employer in the region, employs over 2,500 individuals in the production of textiles, floor coverings, performance materials, and specialty chemicals. Other key employers include 3M, Mitsubishi Polyester Film, Sterilite, and Kemet Electronics Corporation (YAGIO).

In terms of workforce concentration, the Upstate region demonstrates a competitive advantage. The Upstate Alliance's 2019 Workforce Availability report cites a manufacturing location quotient of 2.05 for the region. This is significantly higher than Charleston, SC (0.92), Charlotte, NC (1.09), Atlanta, GA (0.76), New York, NY (0.44), and Los Angeles, CA (0.94), underscoring the Upstate's prominence as a manufacturing hub.

BIOSCIENCES

The bioscience sector has established a strong foothold within the manufacturing industry in the Link Upstate Region, showing robust growth potential. There are 460 life sciences companies in the Upstate of SC and 12,229 STEM graduates. South Carolina ranked #1 in employment growth in life sciences among Southeastern States since 2017. From 2017 to 2022, companies in medical equipment and supplies manufacturing experienced job growth of 60%. According to the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), the bioscience industry was projected to grow by 8.3% in 2018. The Upstate is home to leading pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturers such as Nutra Manufacturing, St. Jude Medical, Ortec

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Inc., Arthrex, and Bausch & Lomb. Additionally, smaller but significant companies like IRIX Manufacturing, Inc. and Pharmaceutical Associates enhance the region's bioscience ecosystem.

Key Career Pathways

Bioscience, automotive, and advanced manufacturing industries offer diverse career pathways, including:

- **Production:** Assembly, manufacturing, and creation of goods and products.
- **Maintenance, Installation, and Repair:** Ensuring operational efficiency of machinery and systems.
- **Quality Assurance:** Maintaining regulatory compliance and high-quality standards.
- **Logistics and Inventory Management:** Overseeing supply chains, storage, and distribution.
- **Health, Safety, and Environmental Assurance:** Promoting workplace safety, sustainability, and compliance.

Key Occupations

These industries support a wide array of roles, including:

- **Technical and Production Roles:** Assembler, Automated Manufacturing Technician, Machine Operator, Welder, and Biomedical Equipment Technician.
- **Engineering and Quality Control:** Industrial Engineer, Manufacturing Engineer, Quality Engineer, Precision Inspector, and Process Control Technician.
- **Maintenance and Repair:** Industrial Machinery Mechanic, Maintenance Technician, Facility Electrician, Electrical Equipment Installer/Repairer, and Industrial Maintenance Electrician.
- **Leadership and Management:** Production Manager, Industrial Electronic Manager, and Safety Team Leader.
- **Specialized Technicians:** Electrical and Electronic Technician, Quality Control Technician, Safety Technician, and Computer Maintenance Technician.

Key Skills and Abilities

Professionals in these industries require a range of technical and interpersonal skills, including:

- **Communication Skills:** Proficiency in written and oral communication.
- **Problem Solving and Critical Thinking:** The ability to address challenges and implement solutions effectively.
- **Technology Proficiency:** Competence in using information and technology applications.
- **Team Collaboration:** Understanding team dynamics and effectively fulfilling team roles.
- **Health, Safety, and Environmental Procedures:** Adhering to workplace safety and sustainability protocols.
- **Leadership and Teamwork:** Inspiring and collaborating with team members effectively.
- **Ethics and Legal Responsibilities:** Maintaining integrity and compliance with industry regulations.
- **Technical Expertise:** Specialized knowledge and hands-on technical skills specific to the industry.

These foundational pathways, occupations, and skills highlight the dynamic opportunities and critical contributions of the bioscience and advanced manufacturing sectors to the Link Upstate Region's economy.

HEALTHCARE

- The Link Upstate Region is home to several prominent healthcare systems, making healthcare a cornerstone of the local economy. Prisma Health, the largest healthcare provider in the region, treated 1.5 million unique patients across their network this year (2024) and employs 29,309 individuals, according to its website. With an extensive network of hospitals and medical offices, Prisma Health meets a wide range of medical needs for residents. Other significant healthcare providers in the region include AnMed Health, Bon Secours St.

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Francis Health System, Self-Regional Hospital, and Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System. Together, these systems ensure comprehensive healthcare services across the region.

Key Career Pathways in Healthcare

The healthcare industry in the Link Upstate Region offers diverse career pathways, including:

- **Therapeutic Services:** Direct patient care aimed at improving health outcomes, such as physical therapy and nursing.
- **Diagnostic Services:** Performing tests and procedures to diagnose health conditions.
- **Support Services:** Roles that ensure healthcare facilities operate efficiently and safely.
- **Health Informatics:** Managing patient information, records, and healthcare technology.
- **Biotechnology Research and Development:** Innovating and advancing medical science and technologies.

Key Occupations in Healthcare

The healthcare sector provides opportunities in various roles, such as:

- **Technologists and Technicians:** Surgical Technologists, Diagnostic Medical Sonographers, Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) Technologists, Nuclear Medicine Technologists, Radiation Therapists, Radiologic Technologists, and Ophthalmic Medical Technicians.
- **Therapists and Assistants:** Physical Therapist Aides and Assistants, Occupational Therapy Aides and Assistants, and Respiratory Therapists.
- **Dental and Medical Support Roles:** Dental Hygienists, Dental Assistants, Phlebotomists, and Medical Assistants.
- **Nursing and Caregiving:** Nurse Practitioners, Nursing Assistants, Home Health Aides, and Personal Care Aides.
- **Administrative and Support Staff:** Medical Secretaries, Health Technologists, and Technicians.

Key Skills and Abilities for Healthcare Professionals

Success in healthcare requires a combination of technical expertise and interpersonal skills, including:

- **Soft Skills:** Interpersonal skills, integrity, professionalism, dependability, adaptability, flexibility, and teamwork.
- **Problem-Solving Skills:** Creative thinking, initiative, and decision-making abilities.
- **Organizational Skills:** Planning, organizing, scheduling, coordinating, and maintaining accurate records.
- **Technical Proficiency:** Working with tools and technology, examining and recording data, and implementing sustainable practices.
- **Customer Focus:** Providing patient-centered care with a focus on excellent service.
- **Health and Safety:** Adhering to health and safety regulations to ensure patient and workplace well-being.
- **Lifelong Learning:** Staying current with advancements in healthcare and continuously improving skills.

The healthcare industry's robust infrastructure, career opportunities, and emphasis on skills development make it a vital and dynamic sector within the Link Upstate Region.

DISTRIBUTION & LOGISTICS

With Link Upstate's strategic location at the intersection of I-85 and I-385, the distribution and logistics industry has become a cornerstone of the region's economy. The area's connectivity is further enhanced by

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the Inland Port of Greer, proximity to multiple airports including Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport, and railroad access via Norfolk-Southern and CSX Transportation. These assets make Link Upstate an attractive hub for distribution and logistics companies.

Major employers in distribution include Walmart Distribution, Atlas Cold Food Storage, Colgate/Palmolive, Diversified Distribution Systems, Greenco Beverage Company, Pet Dairy, Scansource, Sunland Logistics Solutions, Synnex, and WW Grainger. Additionally, Walgreens operates a significant pharmaceutical distribution center in Anderson County, known for actively recruiting individuals with disabilities.

The logistics sector is supported by companies such as AAA Cooper Transportation, Am-Can Transport, DMX Transportation, Greenwood Motor Lines, SAIA Motor Freight Lines, Estes Express Lines, Quickway Carriers, and Southeastern Freight Lines, which collectively enhance the region's transportation infrastructure.

Key Career Pathways in Distribution & Logistics

The industry offers diverse career pathways, including:

- **Facility and Mobile Equipment Maintenance:** Maintaining and repairing machinery and vehicles.
- **Health, Safety, and Environmental Management:** Ensuring compliance with safety and environmental regulations.
- **Logistics Planning and Management Services:** Optimizing supply chain efficiency and operations.
- **Sales and Services:** Managing customer relationships and sales within logistics operations.
- **Transportation Operations:** Overseeing the movement of goods via various modes of transport.
- **Transportation Systems and Infrastructure:** Managing and maintaining transportation networks.
- **Planning, Management, and Regulation:** Establishing strategies and ensuring compliance within the logistics system.

Key Occupations in Distribution & Logistics

The industry supports a variety of roles, including:

- **Management and Coordination Roles:** Communications, Transportation, and Utilities Manager; Dispatcher.
- **Operations Roles:** Freight, Stock, and Material Mover; Industrial Truck and Tractor Operator; Traffic, Shipping, and Receiving Clerk.
- **Logistics and Engineering Roles:** Logistical Engineer; Logistician; Process Improvement Technician.
- **Materials Management Roles:** Materials Associate, Materials Handler, and Materials Mover.
- **Quality and Warehousing Roles:** Quality Control Technician; Warehousing and Distribution Center Operator.

Key Skills and Abilities

Professionals in this sector need a combination of technical expertise and soft skills, including:

- **Core Skills:** Interpersonal skills, integrity, professionalism, dependability, adaptability, and teamwork.
- **Problem-Solving Skills:** Initiative, critical thinking, and decision-making capabilities.
- **Organizational and Business Skills:** Planning, organizing, and understanding business fundamentals.
- **Technical Proficiency:** Working with tools and technology, checking, examining, and recording data.
- **Customer Focus:** Ensuring excellent service and responsiveness to client needs.

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- **Lifelong Learning:** Staying updated with industry trends and technological advancements.

With its unmatched connectivity, robust infrastructure, and diverse opportunities, the distribution and logistics industry continue to thrive as a vital component of the Link Upstate economy.

REGIONAL WORKFORCE OVERVIEW

Population

Link Upstate is home to 1,686,132 individuals (U.S. Census July 2023). Projected population totals for 2030 are expected to reach 1,777,825.

Demographics

According to the American Community Survey, Link Upstate demographics broken down by age, race, and gender are as follows.

AGE

Under the age of 20	26%	438,394
Working age 20-74	68%	1,146,570
Seniors age 75+	6%	101,168

RACE

White	75.3%	1,269,657
Black	18.5%	311,934
American India/Alaskan Native	0.2%	3,372
Asian	1.4%	23,606
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0.1%	1,686
Two or more races	3.1%	52,270
Other	1.4%	23,606

GENDER

Female	51.3%	864,986
Male	48.7%	821,146

Labor Force: Employed & Unemployed

The total civilian labor force (not seasonally adjusted) for Link Upstate in November 2024 was 781,460, of which 745,075 were employed, and 36,385 were unemployed. The unemployment rate was 4.7%.

Area	Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Unemployment Rate
Greenville	273,982	262,055	11,927	4.4%
Upper Savannah	114,646	108,930	5,716	5.0%
Upstate	199,014	189,072	9,942	5.0%

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WorkLink	193,818	185,018	8,800	4.5%
Total	781,460	745,075	36,385	4.7%
<i>November 2024, SCDEW Community Profile</i>				

Labor Market Trends

Estimated and Projected Employment (Growth/Decline by Industry)

The largest sector in the Link Upstate WIOA region is Manufacturing, employing 127,426 workers. The next-largest sectors are Health Care and Social Assistance (98,979 workers) and Retail Trade (80,185 workers). High location quotients (LQs) highlight sectors with strong regional concentrations of employment compared to the national average. The sectors with the largest LQs are Manufacturing (LQ = 2.13), Utilities (1.22), and Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services (1.12).

Sectors with the highest average wages in the region are Management of Companies and Enterprises (\$103,832), Utilities (\$86,784), and Finance and Insurance (\$82,973). Over the past five years, the sectors with the most notable job growth were Health Care and Social Assistance (+8,050 jobs), Manufacturing (+5,611 jobs), and Construction (+5,188 jobs).

Looking ahead, employment in the Link Upstate WIOA region is projected to grow by 9,113 jobs over the next year. The fastest-growing sector by percentage is expected to be Management of Companies and Enterprises (+2.1% year-over-year growth). The strongest job growth by number is forecasted in Health Care and Social Assistance (+1,748 jobs), Manufacturing (+1,073 jobs), and Accommodation and Food Services (+777 jobs).

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NAICS	Industry	Current			5-Year History		1-Year Forecast				
		Empl	Avg Ann Wages	LQ	Empl Change	Ann %	Total Demand	Exits	Transfers	Empl Growth	Ann % Growth
31	Manufacturing	127,426	\$66,808	2.13	5,611	0.9%	13,956	5,156	7,726	1,073	0.8%
62	Health Care and Social Assistance	98,979	\$61,163	0.91	8,050	1.7%	11,480	4,687	5,045	1,748	1.8%
44	Retail Trade	80,185	\$35,799	1.09	2,680	0.7%	11,621	4,901	6,139	581	0.7%
72	Accommodation and Food Services	65,889	\$21,947	1.02	4,378	1.4%	12,460	5,264	6,418	777	1.2%
61	Educational Services	58,589	\$48,497	0.98	4,977	1.8%	6,204	2,717	2,817	670	1.1%
56	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	52,386	\$40,246	1.12	-9,919	-3.4%	6,691	2,596	3,436	659	1.3%
23	Construction	41,455	\$64,660	0.93	5,188	2.7%	4,091	1,459	2,137	495	1.2%
54	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	35,886	\$79,343	0.66	4,906	3.0%	3,574	1,192	1,749	633	1.8%
81	Other Services (except Public Administration)	32,951	\$32,850	1.05	309	0.2%	4,195	1,649	2,127	419	1.3%
48	Transportation and Warehousing	30,221	\$54,743	0.82	3,477	2.5%	3,856	1,450	1,873	533	1.8%
42	Wholesale Trade	28,038	\$76,209	1.00	2,164	1.6%	3,129	1,143	1,703	283	1.0%
92	Public Administration	23,489	\$50,452	0.68	574	0.5%	2,404	957	1,211	235	1.0%
52	Finance and Insurance	19,906	\$82,973	0.67	1,379	1.4%	1,948	704	971	273	1.4%
71	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	11,813	\$22,773	0.79	1,150	2.1%	1,975	749	1,018	207	1.8%
53	Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	9,832	\$58,850	0.74	762	1.6%	1,091	456	497	139	1.4%
55	Management of Companies and Enterprises	8,306	\$103,832	0.72	989	2.6%	886	292	423	171	2.1%
51	Information	7,932	\$71,220	0.54	-1,512	-3.4%	830	281	432	117	1.5%
11	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	6,015	\$29,727	0.65	-261	-0.8%	743	351	369	24	0.4%
22	Utilities	4,675	\$86,784	1.22	-45	-0.2%	433	168	242	24	0.5%
21	Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	427	\$74,892	0.16	-84	-3.5%	45	15	25	5	1.2%
99	Unclassified	3	\$111,862	0.00	-4	-15.3%	0	0	0	0	1.4%
Total - All Industries		744,404	\$53,703	1.00	34,767	1.0%	90,651	35,959	45,579	9,113	1.2%

Source: Link Upstate Economic Overview, JobsEQ

A cluster refers to a geographic concentration of interrelated industries or occupations. In the Link Upstate WIOA region, the Textile/Leather cluster has the highest relative concentration, with a location quotient of 6.31. This cluster employs 9,583 workers in the region and offers an average wage of \$52,819. However, employment in the Textile/Leather cluster is projected to decline slightly, contracting at a rate of 0.1% per year over the next ten years.

Occupational Growth

The largest major occupation group in the Link Upstate WIOA region is Office and Administrative Support Occupations, employing 91,155 workers (JobsEQ Link Upstate Report). The next-largest groups are Production Occupations with 85,046 workers and Transportation and Material Moving Occupations with 69,622 workers. High location quotients (LQs) indicate regional strengths compared to the national average. The groups with the largest LQs in the region are Production Occupations (LQ = 2.05), Architecture and Engineering Occupations (1.22), and Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations (1.12).

Occupation groups with the highest average wages are Management Occupations (\$114,600), Legal Occupations (\$102,200), and Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations (\$97,700). Unemployment rates vary by group, from 0.8% among Legal Occupations to 4.9% among Transportation and Material Moving Occupations.

Over the next year, the fastest-growing occupation group is projected to be Healthcare Support Occupations, with a +2.2% growth rate. The strongest growth in job numbers is expected in Transportation and Material Moving Occupations (+1,048 jobs) and Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations (+745 jobs). Additionally, the highest separation demand is forecasted in Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations (12,420 jobs) and Office and Administrative Support Occupations (10,524 jobs).

Link Upstate WIOA, 2023Q4: Occupational Overview

SOC	Occupation	Current					5-Year History			1-Year Forecast				
		Empl	Mean Ann Wages ²	LQ	Unempl	Unempl Rate	Online Job Ads ³	Empl Change	Ann %	Total Demand	Exits	Transfers	Empl Growth	Ann % Growth
43-0000	Office and Administrative Support	91,155	\$43,000	1.02	2,418	2.5%	3,643	-338	-0.1%	10,853	4,930	5,594	329	0.4%
51-0000	Production	85,046	\$47,000	2.05	3,102	3.6%	2,472	-255	-0.1%	9,988	3,717	5,711	560	0.7%
53-0000	Transportation and Material Moving	69,622	\$41,200	1.07	3,749	4.9%	3,774	3,420	1.0%	10,294	3,734	5,512	1,048	1.5%
41-0000	Sales and Related	68,435	\$45,200	1.04	2,590	3.5%	6,797	1,515	0.4%	9,895	4,226	5,116	554	0.8%
35-0000	Food Preparation and Serving Related	62,812	\$28,600	1.04	3,131	4.6%	3,753	3,143	1.0%	13,164	5,632	6,788	745	1.2%
11-0000	Management	48,525	\$114,600	0.87	719	1.4%	4,933	7,245	3.3%	4,631	1,519	2,389	724	1.5%
29-0000	Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	42,948	\$97,700	0.98	492	1.1%	6,606	3,424	1.7%	3,257	1,416	1,118	722	1.7%
25-0000	Educational Instruction and Library	36,844	\$53,900	0.93	709	1.9%	1,928	3,028	1.7%	3,794	1,697	1,626	471	1.3%
13-0000	Business and Financial Operations	32,939	\$78,100	0.70	756	2.0%	3,175	4,339	2.9%	3,298	1,056	1,729	513	1.6%
49-0000	Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	32,503	\$53,700	1.12	689	2.0%	2,898	1,527	1.0%	3,444	1,320	1,648	476	1.5%
47-0000	Construction and Extraction	30,582	\$48,900	0.90	1,504	4.3%	1,120	2,042	1.4%	3,118	1,101	1,614	404	1.3%
31-0000	Healthcare Support	28,936	\$34,600	0.86	803	2.6%	1,900	3,050	2.3%	4,896	1,943	2,304	649	2.2%
37-0000	Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	23,016	\$33,700	0.94	1,079	4.2%	1,462	-528	-0.5%	3,508	1,497	1,725	287	1.2%
39-0000	Personal Care and Service	17,508	\$33,100	0.95	599	3.3%	643	499	0.6%	3,509	1,265	1,954	289	1.7%
17-0000	Architecture and Engineering	14,640	\$88,000	1.22	241	1.6%	2,042	163	0.2%	1,252	438	581	233	1.6%
15-0000	Computer and Mathematical	13,903	\$91,000	0.58	284	1.7%	1,528	1,529	2.4%	1,185	335	553	298	2.1%
21-0000	Community and Social Service	12,432	\$50,200	0.93	246	1.9%	1,264	354	0.6%	1,336	509	615	212	1.7%

SOC	Occupation	Current					5-Year History			1-Year Forecast				
		Empl	Mean Ann Wages ²	LQ	Unempl	Unempl Rate	Online Job Ads ³	Empl Change	Ann %	Total Demand	Exits	Transfers	Empl Growth	Ann % Growth
33-0000	Protective Service	11,369	\$43,100	0.71	302	2.4%	602	800	1.5%	1,430	594	714	123	1.1%
27-0000	Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	10,456	\$57,300	0.76	314	2.8%	862	713	1.4%	1,256	484	624	148	1.4%
19-0000	Life, Physical, and Social Science	4,667	\$76,900	0.71	122	2.4%	789	325	1.5%	509	104	333	73	1.6%
23-0000	Legal	4,178	\$102,200	0.69	35	0.8%	305	385	2.0%	344	129	146	70	1.7%
45-0000	Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	1,887	\$40,900	0.43	92	4.4%	35	11	0.1%	292	106	175	11	0.6%
Total - All Occupations		744,404	\$54,700	1.00	23,976	3.0%	52,532	36,389	1.0%	95,339	37,749	48,567	9,022	1.2%

Source: Economic Overview of the Link Upstate Region, 2023Q4, JobsEQ

Occupational Decline

According to SC DEW’s dashboard updated in January 2024, several occupations in the Link Upstate WIOA region are projected to decline. These include:

- Textile, Apparel, and Furnishings Workers: Expected to decrease by 3.06%, representing a loss of 359 workers.

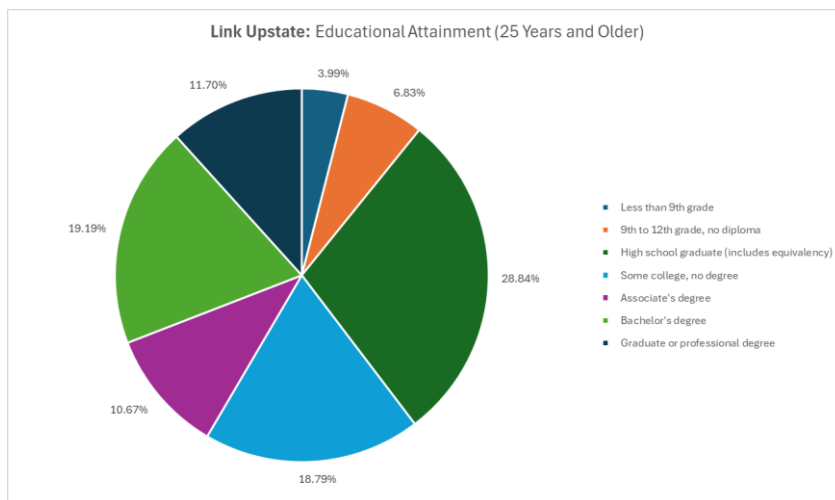
Link Upstate WIOA Region

- Retail Sales Workers: Anticipated decline by 5.93%, with a reduction of 30 positions.
- Financial Clerks: Projected to decrease by 1.68%, amounting to a loss of 33 positions.
- Other Office and Administrative Support Workers: Expected to decline by 1.35%, with a reduction of 23 positions.

These declines reflect shifts in industry demand, technological advancements, and evolving workforce dynamics in the region.

Skills and Knowledge

The American Community Survey estimates educational attainment (of those 25 years or older) for the Link Upstate workforce to be as follows: 10.8% (123,467) have less than a High School Diploma (HSD) or equivalency; 58.3% (665,613) have a HSD or equivalency, some college, or an Associate's Degree; and 30.9% (352,646) have a Bachelor's Degree or higher.



Source: American Community Survey, US Census Bureau (2023, 1 yr. estimate). Population 25 years old & older

Barriers to Employment

The Link Upstate region is home to a growing and diverse population. The groups of individuals provided here have been identified as having specific needs or challenges that may cause barriers to becoming employed. These groups also align with the State Workforce Development Board's identified priority populations.

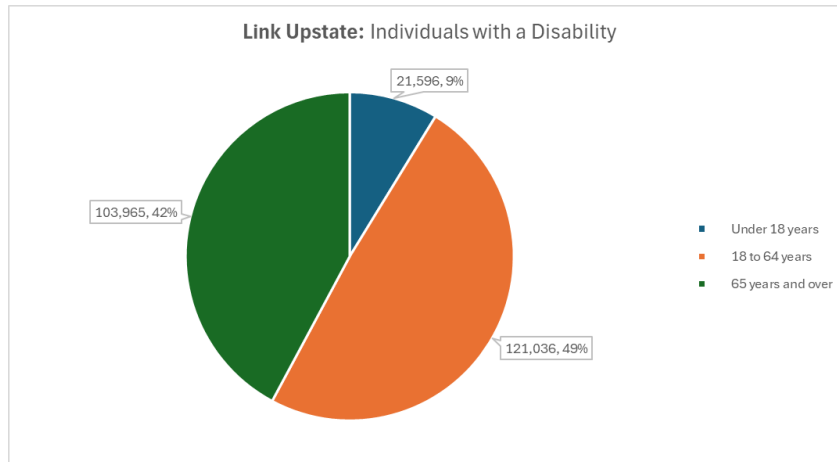
1. Individuals with a Disability

According to the most recent data, there are 246,597 individuals in the Link Upstate region identified as having a disability, representing 15.0% of the total population. Among these, individuals aged 18 to 64 years account for 49.1% (121,036), while those 65 years and older make up 42.2% (103,965). This data highlights the significant challenges these populations face in accessing employment opportunities, support services, and resources needed for workforce inclusion.

Youth with a Disability

Link Upstate WIOA Region

In the Link Upstate region, there are 21,596 individuals under the age of 18 with a disability, comprising 8.8% of this age group. Ensuring access to education, training, and specialized support systems remains crucial to fostering long-term employment outcomes and opportunities for this population.



US Census: American Community Survey (2023 -1 Yr estimate)

These individuals have disabilities which include hearing difficulties, vision difficulties, cognitive difficulties, ambulatory difficulties, self-care difficulties, and independent living difficulties. These individuals may need additional or specialized assistance when searching for employment.

2. **VETERANS**

Of the total Link Upstate population aged 18 and above, approximately **5.3%** are veterans, accounting for **89,173** individuals (Source: American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2019-2023). While a portion of these veterans have retired and are no longer part of the workforce, many transition successfully into productive civilian careers. However, some veterans face challenges in translating their military experience into civilian skills that align with workplace demands.

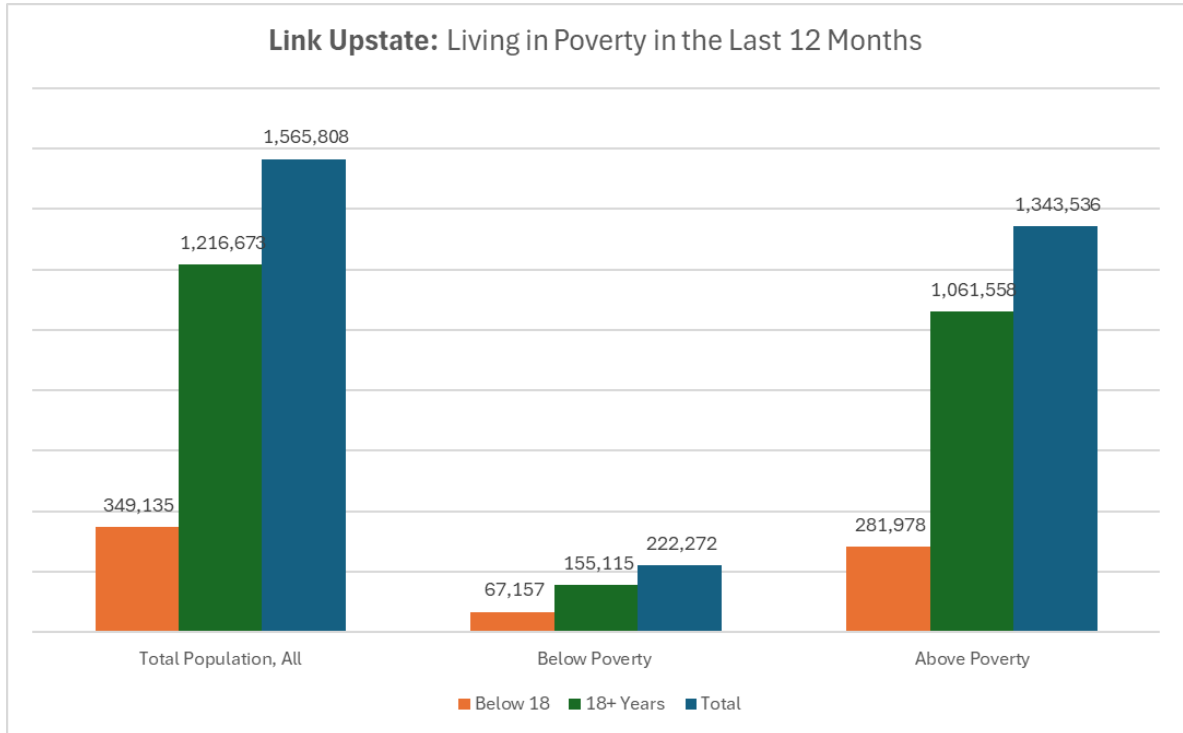
Additionally, many veterans seek to enhance their employability by pursuing degrees or certifications. As workforce development entities, it is essential to remain informed about the extensive network of nonprofits and government organizations dedicated to serving veterans. This awareness ensures that veterans are effectively connected to the resources and services they need for a successful transition.

SC Department of Employment and Workforce recently launched The STAYS Program. This program encourages veterans to “Stay to Apply Your Skills in South Carolina” by offering five interview opportunities to veterans who use the SC Works system. Employers will be highlighted as a STAYS Employer with a logo on their SC Works account. Employers registering with SC Works can opt-in as a “STAYS Employer.” Employers in this program understand that veterans have transferable skills that are not always shown on an application or resume but are demonstrated in interviews. These employers understand the benefit of interviewing veterans for their positions.

To further support these efforts, the South Carolina Department of Veterans’ Affairs (SCDVA) has launched the Combined Arms platform, a comprehensive tool designed to help veterans access critical services and resources efficiently. By leveraging platforms like Combined Arms and fostering collaboration across service providers, workforce development entities can play a pivotal role in empowering veterans to achieve their career and education goals.

3. POVERTY/LONG TERM UNEMPLOYED

There are approximately 222,272 people living in poverty in the Link Upstate region, which equates to about 14% of the population. This means that approximately 1.4 out of 10 individuals in the region live in poverty. Poverty can be a significant barrier to employment, as individuals who cannot afford stable housing, transportation, phone/internet access, and other essential needs will face greater challenges in finding and maintaining a job. Additionally, poverty makes pursuing further education and training much more difficult, limiting opportunities for career advancement and long-term stability.



US Census: American Community Survey (2023 -1 Yr estimate)

4. YOUTH WITH BARRIERS

▪ **Low-Income**

Link Upstate has a population of youth under 18 years of age equaling 349,135, which is 22.3% of the total population. There are approximately 67,157 youth below the age of 18 living in poverty. This equates to about 19.2% of all youth living in poverty in the region, which means nearly 1 in 5 youth in the Link Upstate region experience poverty. Poverty for youth can be a barrier to employment because an individual who cannot afford stable housing, transportation, phone/internet, and many other needs will likely have a harder time finding and keeping a job. Poverty also makes attending school for additional training and education much more difficult.

▪ **Dropouts**

In the 2022 school year, SC Department of Education reported that 70,135 students enrolled in the K-12 Link Upstate school system. Twenty-seven school districts serve the Link Upstate region. Approximately 1,874 students dropped out before graduating, equaling a dropout rate of 2.7% for the year. This reflects

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a downward trend year after year of students completing high school. COVID-19 contributed to the dropout increase. Potential challenges dropout face: dealing with social stigma, fewer job opportunities, lower salaries, and higher probability of involvement with the criminal justice system.

DISTRICT	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
ENROLLMENT FOR GRADES 9-12	65,289	64,885	65,166	66,107	68,051	70,135
DROPOUTS FOR GRADES 9-12	1,593	1,583	1,442	5,894	1,905	1,874
PERCENTAGE FOR GRADES 9-12	2.4	2.4	2.2	1.9	2.8	2.7

Source: Dept of Education School Dropout Tables

- **Crime**

SC Department of Juvenile Justice released data for juvenile cases for the 2018-2019 fiscal year. In the Link Upstate Region, there were a total of 3,268 juvenile cases representing 27.6% of the State’s total number of Juvenile offenders. Year over year, the total number of juvenile cases has dropped.

Those classified as “Violent or Serious,” and “Detention Center Cases” have decreased, but “Status of Offense Cases” has increased. Challenges faced by youth that have been detained by the justice system include lack of education, lack of housing, mental health and substance abuse, and reconnecting with families can all present barriers to employment. (*Re-Entry: Key issues, Juvenile Justice Information Exchange*)

- **Foster Care**

According to the SC Department of Social Services, in December 2024, 973 youth were served through foster care in the Link Upstate area. This equates to 29.4% of the 3,307 foster care youth served by the state of South Carolina.

SC Foster Care 2024	0-6 YO	7-12 YO	13-17 YO	Total
STATE TOTAL	1267	925	1115	3307
Link Upstate Total	365	270	338	973
% of State Total	28.8%	29.2%	30.3%	29.4%

Source: SC Department of Social Services, Foster Care Dashboard 2024

According to “Young Adults Formerly in Foster Care: Challenges and Solutions,” a Foster Care Youth Brief published by youth.gov, individuals in or aging out of foster care face these possible challenges: unstable housing or homelessness, lack of adequate elementary and secondary education, lack of employment and job training, problems with physical health, behavioral health, and general well-being, lack of access to health care, justice system involvement, lack of social connections. These can be barriers to finding and keeping sustainable employment. It is important that we are intentional in meeting with those in Foster Care before they are released as they need case management as they obtain jobs, attend adult education or attend post-secondary education.

- **Teen parent**

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SC Department of Public Health tracks teen pregnancy statistics and released the following data for 2022:

2022 Teen Birth Rates and Numbers by Age Group						
	Ages 15-19		Ages 15-17		Ages 18-19	
County	Number	Rate*	Number	Rate*	Number	Rate*
Abbeville	9	45.8	2	4.1	7	87.5
Anderson	171	29.3	44	11.0	127	47.6
Cherokee	64	40.0	22	20.8	42	59.2
Edgefield	9	16.0	2	5.0	7	26.9
Greenville	363	23.8	110	10.7	253	36.9
Greenwood	72	30.2	19	11.7	53	48.6
Laurens	89	49.7	22	17.7	67	81.7
McCormick	5	33.3	3	33.3	2	33.3
Newberry	42	35.0	15	19.0	27	50.9
Oconee	77	38.9	26	19.7	51	58.0
Pickens	71	13.3	21	5.8	50	20.7
Saluda	26	56.6	7	22.6	19	90.5
Spartanburg	252	25.6	60	8.8	192	42.3
Union	27	41.1	12	28.6	15	53.6
Link Upstate Total	1,277	34.2	365	15.6	912	52.7
State Total	3,919	26.6	1,139	11.4	2,780	41.7
Source: SC Department of Public Health, Teen Birth Rates						
*Rates calculated per 1,000 female population						

The State’s teen pregnancy rate for those 15-19 years old was 26.6% or 3,919 pregnancies. Of those ages 15-17, the rate averaged 11.4% or 1,139 pregnancies. In the Link Upstate Area, the number of pregnancies for ages 15-19 1,277 or a rate of 34.2%. Potential challenges that pregnant and parenting youth face include poverty, homelessness, malnutrition, complications of pregnancy, emotional problems such as depression or drug and alcohol use, lack of a support system, lack of childcare, and lack of education.

5. EX-OFFENDERS

In FY2023, there were 6,881 individuals on the Probation, Pardon and Parole caseloads in the Upstate Link region, constituting approximately 41.3% of the State’s Probation, Pardon, and Parole caseload. These individuals may have been out of the workforce for a substantial amount of time and may need additional assistance with job search and interviewing skills.

6. HOMELESS

According to 2024 SC State of Homelessness Report provided by the SC Interagency Council on Homelessness, there are 1,424 homeless individuals in the Link Upstate region, which make up approximately 35.1% of the estimated total state homeless population. Approximately 21% of the counted

Link Upstate WIOA Region

population is chronically homeless, 9.7% are Veterans, 10.6% are survivors of domestic violence, and 39% have a disability. Approximately 7,181 children experienced homelessness during the reporting period. Individuals who are homeless may have difficulty finding and keeping a job, and they may have difficulty attending training to obtain new skills and increase their employability.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES & ANALYSIS

Developing a workforce to meet the demands of business is vitally important to the Link Upstate economy. Each Local Workforce Development Area in the Link Upstate Region has similar partners to the rest of the state. Wagner-Peyser and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity program provide services for the public. Partners, including SC Vocational Rehabilitation Department, Adult Education, and the Department of Social Services have additional services and support of targeted groups of job seekers. The technical college system is an important partner in our workforce system, as they provide training for our participants.

Many of the training programs offered at the two-year Colleges are no longer on the eligible training provider list which prohibits us from utilizing WIOA funds for the training; however, many of the programs have free tuition. Some training providers find the eligible training provider listing requirements too invasive to the personal information of their students and too cumbersome, so they elect not to participate.

This is especially true in the Upstate Workforce Development Area as most all training programs are now free at Spartanburg Community College. Spartanburg Methodist College also provides free tuition. Union County Government will pay for students to attend USC Union tuition free. The Upstate Workforce Board now focuses on on-the-job training with local employers along with co-enrolling students to provide supportive services in need of these services along with providing case management. These WIOA services greatly help with college retention.

Promoting lifelong learning in the Greenville County Workforce Development Area provides opportunities for students and adult workers to further their educational goals. Our robust technical college system is compared to none and the benefits of lottery tuition assistance programs and other state-funded workforce training scholarships leaves no stone unturned for growing our economy and aligning workforce skills with industry demand. Individuals with post-secondary training histories who never finished their degree are also afforded linkages to continuing education resources such as the South Carolina Student Loan (SCSL) BOLD Career Pathways Program. The GCWDB has collaborated with the BOLD Program to promote how adult learners can have their college loans paid for by a future employer. The programs enable workers to graduate with less debt and a job lined up. The SCSL also offers Teacher Loans and Forgiveness programs for undergraduates or graduate students pursuing a degree in education or who want to be a teacher. The GCWDB has also collaborated with the Hollingsworth Foundation in support of establishing a local College Unbound Program. College Unbound (CU) is a non-profit educational institution based in Providence, RI, with additional student cohorts in Chicago, IL, Camden, NJ, **Greenville, SC**, Philadelphia PA, Wilmington, DE, and Washington state. CU helps adults re-enter and stay in college and earn their Bachelor of Arts degree with a unique approach and comprehensive wrap around support services. CU's academic content and instruction build on a student's prior studies, life experiences, and interests to create a student-driven curriculum.

Additional scholarships offered through the State legislature have allowed WorkLink to serve additional participants through cost-sharing expenses for students. Tri-County Technical College covers a portion and WorkLink covers a

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portion of an eligible student's continuing education programs of study. This has also allowed WorkLink to provide additional supportive services and focus on work-based learning opportunities.

Upper Savannah applied for a National Dislocated Worker Grant through U.S. DOL called CAREERS to serve most in need Dislocated Workers and those with significant longer-term barriers to employment. Our region also partnered with the Pee Dee Region on an H1B Rural Healthcare Initiative Grant where we served 120 EMT's, Paramedics and Nurses in the Upper Savannah Region over the past 2 years with great success and outcomes.

Although not comprehensive, below are key workforce development activities and programs offered in the Link Upstate region.

CLASSROOM BASED EDUCATION & TRAINING ACTIVITIES

K-12 SYSTEM

Career and Technology Centers

Career and Technical Education Centers for the K-12 system are offered throughout the State of South Carolina. Link Upstate K-12 students have access to eighteen Career and Technical Education Centers and a variety of programs of study. Career pathways are clearly identified for students to be able to identify the skills and knowledge they will need to pursue to be able to succeed on the job, in the military, or in post-secondary education in their career field of choice.

Dual Enrollment

High School Juniors and Seniors can enroll in post-secondary classes while completing their high school education. They will receive college credit towards an Associate's Degree or Bachelor's Degree for successfully completing college courses. These courses may include English, Computer Technology, History, Mathematics, Psychology, Allied Health Sciences, Welding, Automotive Technology, Engineering Graphics Technology, Building Construction Technology, among others. Many of the local colleges (including private, public, two-year and four-year) in the Link Upstate region offer dual enrollment opportunities for students, including the four Technical Colleges that serve the Link Upstate region: Greenville Technical College, Piedmont Technical College, Spartanburg Community College, and Tri-County Technical College. The Link Upstate Region has partnered with our Regional Workforce Advisors to provide services to students getting ready to graduate from K-12 so they are connected to SC Works Services that will help prepare them for their Next Steps to College, Advanced Vocational Training, Apprenticeships, or work. Upper Savannah created a Next Steps Resource Guide that has been given to all K-12 Seniors for the past three years alerting them to all services available in the community. WorkLink will be adopting this Next Step resource model to release to graduating Seniors in 2025.

Career Readiness Assessments

The State of South Carolina has re-engaged WIN as our statewide Career Readiness Assessment. WIN, much like WorkKeys, provides a Skill Gap Analysis to better understand Job Seekers strengths and skill gaps. Link Upstate partners with Adult Education in all 14 counties to deliver WINS Testing.

SOFT SKILLS

Soft Skills: WIN Learning Software

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In addition to students having access to the Ready to Work career assessments, Link Upstate promotes the three core assessments to adults in the region. As a result, the WIN Learning software is available to help individuals prepare for the career readiness assessments through a variety of partners, such as SC Works, Adult Education, the Technical Colleges, and SC Vocational Rehabilitation.

ADULT EDUCATION

Integrated English and Literacy

A variety of partners offer Literacy and English as a Second Language instruction in the Link Upstate region. Each program seeks to improve the skills of the students they serve in writing, reading comprehension and, in the case of those with Limited English Proficiency, in understanding the spoken word. Both have integrated components of workforce preparation, workforce training, and concurrent and contextualized learning, meaning that students will read passages relevant to the world of work and be introduced to words and phrases that are common in the workplace. In the Link Upstate Region, the primary provider of English as a Second Language and Literacy is Adult Education, a division of the Department of Education; however, other public or private partners may also be providers, such as Greenville Literacy.

Integrated Education and Training

Adult Education, a division of the SC Department of Education, is the primary provider of education for those that have dropped out of traditional K-12 learning and wish to pursue a High School Diploma or its equivalent. Each Adult Education Center offers instruction to students to allow them to finish their High School Diploma requirements or prepare them to take the High School equivalency exam. Instruction includes workforce preparation, workforce training, and concurrent and contextualized learning. In the WorkLink area, i-Best programs offered at the Adult Education Centers allow GED students to earn an occupational credential through Tri-County Technical College as they study for the GED exam.

COLLEGES, UNIVERSITIES AND PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS

In total, the Link Upstate region offers 31 providers of training. Among those include three 4-year public universities: Clemson University, University of South Carolina (Upstate and Union), and Lander University. Other training providers include: eight private 4-year universities and twelve colleges, four technical colleges, and eight training providers that offer programs of study leading to credentials, but do not result in associate's or higher-level degree.

Technical College System

There are four technical colleges that serve the Link Upstate Region: Greenville Technical College, Piedmont Technical College, Spartanburg Community College, and Tri-County Technical College. The overarching mission of the Technical Colleges is to prepare students for the workplace. Each college offers programs of study relevant to businesses in the region, including credit courses that lead to an associate's degree or higher and continuing education courses for short-term training opportunities that lead to a credential such as an occupational license, certification, or credential.

Research Universities

Among the Universities and Colleges in South Carolina, two that are found in the Link Upstate region have been designated as research universities: Clemson University and University of South Carolina. Clemson University's

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research is based on the following innovation clusters: Advanced Materials; Cyber Infrastructure and Big Data Science; Energy, Transportation, and Advanced Manufacturing; Health Innovation; Human Resilience; and Sustainable Environment. As a result of the BMW relocation and Clemson's focus on research, CU-ICAR (a 250-acre campus) developed in partnership with automotive manufacturers to research innovative manufacturing solutions, but also to develop the workforce to meet the demands of business by engaging students in the process. Link Upstate is partnered with our Technical Colleges and Clemson University on a large Electric Vehicle grant that will, if awarded, enable the region to design and deploy EV Curriculums in various disciplines. The goal is to upskill ASE Certified Technicians to work on EV's, accelerate the numbers for new ASE EV Technicians needed, develop the courses to train EV Battery Production workers and train First Responders on how to combat EV Battery fires.

CU-ICAR is home to a graduate Department of Automotive Engineering. Here, over 200 Clemson University students are pursuing Master of Science and/or Ph.D. degrees in Automotive Engineering. Graduate students learn in an innovative research-and-educational program that focuses on the vehicle and its infrastructure from a systems-integration perspective. CU-ICAR has conferred more than 1,000 graduate degrees in the 15 years since the program was launched.

The University of South Carolina has two satellite campuses in the region, Union and Upstate. The hub of the University is in the Midlands area, and therefore, does not have the research presence that Clemson University does. However, students can participate in research through the University of South Carolina through one of their four focus areas: Health Sciences, Advanced Materials, Energy, and Environment and Sustainability.

WORK-BASED LEARNING AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

On-the-Job Training (OJT)

Offered by WIOA programs, SC Vocational Rehabilitation and SC Department of Social Services, On-the-Job Training offsets a portion of a new worker's wages that an employer will pay while the employee learns the skills required to perform necessary job duties. Seen as a monetary benefit to the employer to compensate for lost production while the individual is in the process of learning the skills needed to be proficient, the employee also benefits by earning while they learn.

Incumbent Worker Training (IWT)

Incumbent Worker Training is offered by Workforce Development Boards (or their contracted service providers) to employers that wish to Skill Up their workforce (when funds are available). Employees participate in training to learn new skills, allowing them to retain their jobs and upgrading their skills necessary for advancement. Employers can be reimbursed for a portion of the classroom training cost, offsetting company losses caused by taking employees away from their duties. Link Upstate Region has partnered with SC MEP and our Technical Colleges to develop customized curriculums to support a variety of needs across multiple sectors.

readySC™

A program offered by the technical college system, readySC™ provides business solutions to companies relocating to Link Upstate. A project manager is assigned to work with the company to identify the necessary solutions. Solutions may include assisting with coordinated recruitment, training the potential workforce to meet their needs, locating instructors to provide relevant training, and arranging for training to be conducted in offsite facilities. The SC Works Business Services teams often partner with readySC™ on recruitment. Employers that readySC™ has served in

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recent years include Michelin, First Quality, Bosch, Borg Warner, Prodigy Cabinetry, Lockheed Martin, Oshkosh Defense, and ZF Transmissions.

Apprenticeship Carolina™

A division of the Technical College system, Apprenticeship Carolina™ stands as a key resource for employers to create and maintain registered apprenticeships within their businesses. Individuals learn while employed, both on-the-job and in a classroom setting. At appropriate training benchmarks, such as attainment of a credential, apprentices may receive wage increases. Apprenticeships are available to all age groups; however, employers may have dedicated apprenticeships specifically for youth. Some successful Apprenticeships in the Link Upstate region include positions at BASF, Greenfield Industries, King Asphalt, Lonza, Renewable Water Resources, and ATS Logistics.

TAX CREDITS

E-Zone

The Enterprise Zone Retraining Program (E-Zone) offers a tax incentive through the Technical College system to employers that retrain their workforce on new equipment or technology in an effort to remain competitive. The business can claim the tax credit for retraining for up to \$1,000 per person per year. According to the Legislative Annual Report for Enterprise Zone Retraining Program, during calendar year 2022-23, six Upstate Link businesses were approved for the Job Retraining Tax Credit and were projected to retrain a total of 8,550 employees.

PROGRAM AND SERVICES FOR PRIORITY POPULATIONS

INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

The SC Vocational Rehabilitation Department (SCVRD) is the primary provider of employment and training services to those with Disabilities. SCVRD provides counselling and rehabilitation to individuals with cognitive, mental, or physical disabilities. A division of SCVRD, the SC Commission for the Blind serves those with low vision or blindness.

Job Readiness Training Centers

The South Carolina Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (SCVRD) has established Job Readiness Training Centers to equip job seekers with the skills needed for successful employment. These centers offer a dual benefit, supporting both job seekers and employers through hands-on training and collaboration.

Job Seekers gain valuable experience by working in a simulated manufacturing environment where they learn essential job duties and develop critical soft skills such as teamwork, communication, and professionalism. This practical training ensures they are well-prepared to transition into the workforce.

Employers can partner with SCVRD through job readiness contracts, which provide mutually beneficial opportunities. Job Seekers perform real work tasks, including assembling products, giving them firsthand experience with specific manufacturing processes. In return, employers gain access to a pipeline of potential hires who are already familiar with their operations and trained to meet their standards. Additionally, employers benefit from completed assembly work, which can support their production needs.

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The Job Readiness Training Centers exemplify SCVRD's commitment to bridging the gap between job seekers and employers, fostering workforce readiness while addressing the needs of local industries.

SC Department of Vocational Rehabilitation has established training centers to prepare job seekers for employment. Offering dual benefit to the job seeker and the employer, job seekers work for an established period of time, learning how to perform job duties in a manufacturing environment while learning essential soft skills. The employer can benefit by entering into a job readiness contract with SCVRD. The contracts provide work opportunities to job seekers within the Job Readiness Training Centers and provides in return to the employer opportunities to hire individuals that have experience with assembling their products as well as the finished product itself.

Job Try Outs/Work Experiences

The South Carolina Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (SCVRD) provides Job Tryouts, a program similar to On-the-Job Training, to help consumers develop the skills needed for specific roles at employer host sites. During these tryouts, individuals earn a stipend while gaining hands-on experience and learning job-specific skills in a real-world work environment.

Similarly, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs offer Work Experience opportunities, particularly within Youth Programs. These initiatives provide young participants with practical work exposure, helping them build foundational skills and improving their employability while addressing the needs of local employers.

OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH

WIOA out-of-school youth program strategies focus on equipping participants with the tools they need to succeed, emphasizing secondary school completion for dropouts, work maturity skills training, and occupational skills development in high-demand areas such as MSSC certification, forklift operation, technology, and healthcare.

Youth service providers are encouraged to design classroom training programs that integrate hands-on learning components, supporting the local area's goal of meeting work-based training expenditure requirements. While securing suitable worksites to sponsor work-based learning activities has been a challenge, we are optimistic that enhanced business engagement efforts will encourage more employers to offer these valuable opportunities to youth participants.

It is important to note that WIOA Youth training programs in the region are closely aligned with our sector strategies and career pathway models. This alignment ensures that youth participants receive training relevant to in-demand industries, preparing them for long-term success in the workforce.

Regional Workforce Advisors

The four local workforce boards maintain varying levels of partnership with their SC DEW Regional Workforce Advisors (RWAs). Many RWAs actively collaborate with local boards and youth service providers to enhance efforts in bridging the gap between secondary education and adult workforce development. Their contributions include offering technical expertise and guidance on career counseling and career pathways, as well as fostering business involvement within the secondary education system whenever possible.

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While detailed information about these partnerships may be outlined in individual local area plans, it is important to recognize the existing relationships between local boards and RWAs as a valuable asset for strategic planning and workforce development initiatives.

VETERANS

The South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce (SCDEW) provides specialized support for veterans through its Veteran Representatives, who assist individuals transitioning from military service to civilian employment. These representatives identify job opportunities and facilitate the placement of veterans into meaningful employment.

Additionally, Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) Specialists focus on supporting veterans with service-connected disabilities. They provide tailored resources, guidance, and assistance to help these individuals successfully navigate the transition into civilian careers. Through these dedicated programs, SCDEW ensures that veterans receive the tools and support they need to achieve long-term employment success.

LOW INCOME

SC Department of Social Services provides several services that assist families with financial stability. Those that qualify for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) may be eligible for cash assistance, employment and training services; those that qualify for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) can receive food stamps, employment and training services; those that qualify for Food and Nutrition Programs receive emergency food assistance, programs for seniors, healthy eating activities; and those that qualify for SC Voucher Program can gain access to childcare assistance.

EX-OFFENDERS

The Link Upstate Region is committed to supporting the successful reintegration of individuals transitioning from incarceration into the community. Through collaboration with community organizations, detention centers, and local employers, the region provides tailored resources and services designed to reduce barriers to employment and promote long-term success.

Programs within the region engage individuals pre- and post-release, offering job readiness training, career counseling, and connections to educational opportunities and supportive services. These initiatives focus on equipping participants with the skills and tools necessary to secure meaningful employment and achieve financial stability.

By fostering partnerships with employers, the Link Upstate region creates pathways for formerly incarcerated individuals to contribute to the workforce and their communities. These efforts not only reduce recidivism but also strengthen the local economy by expanding the pool of skilled workers and supporting inclusive workforce development practices.

The Link Upstate region has piloted successful Re-Entry Programs and Service Models funded by the State Workforce Development Board in previous years. Although the program designs and overall outcomes may be different, the overall goal of reducing the rate of recidivism was achieved.

STRATEGIES AND ANALYSIS OF WIOA ADULT/DISLOCATED WORKER ACTIVITIES

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The Link Upstate Region, encompassing 14 counties, is dedicated to implementing Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs that effectively address the needs of adult and dislocated workers. Through targeted strategies, innovative approaches, and ongoing analysis, the region seeks to enhance workforce outcomes, drive economic growth, and support equitable access to opportunities.

1. Data-Driven Workforce Planning

- **Labor Market Analysis:** Utilize labor market data and real-time analytics to identify high-demand occupations and skills shortages across the region, focusing on industries such as advanced manufacturing, healthcare, IT, logistics, and construction.
- **Participant Profiling:** Assess the skills, education levels, and barriers faced by program participants to design tailored interventions.

2. Enhanced Access to Services

- **SC Works Centers:** Reduce brick and mortar costs of SC Works Centers and introduce new virtual services to provide easily accessible resources for job seekers, including career counseling, job placement assistance, and training opportunities.
- **Digital Access:** Leverage virtual platforms to offer online workshops, job fairs, and training modules, ensuring accessibility for rural and underserved communities.
- **Mobile Services:** Deploy mobile workforce services to reach participants in remote areas, providing career support and training at their doorstep when needed.

3. Customized Training and Upskilling

- **Individualized Training Accounts (ITAs):** Continue providing ITAs to support training in high-demand fields aligned with regional labor market needs.
- **On-the-Job Training (OJT):** Expand OJT programs to help participants gain practical, job-specific skills while earning income.
- **Apprenticeships and Internships:** Strengthen partnerships with employers to increase apprenticeship and internship opportunities, particularly in growing sectors.
- **Short-Term Certifications:** Promote short-term credential programs in areas like forklift operation, welding, medical coding, and IT support to quickly upskill participants for in-demand jobs.

4. Employer Engagement

- **Business Advisory Councils:** Collaborate with regional employers to align training programs with industry needs and address specific workforce challenges.
- **Sector Strategies:** Develop sector partnerships to connect employers, educators, and workforce boards in identifying and solving industry-specific issues.
- **Workforce Incentives:** Provide wage subsidies, tax incentives, and hiring support to encourage employers to hire and retain WIOA participants.

5. Supportive Services for Success

- **Barrier Mitigation:** Offer wraparound services such as transportation assistance, childcare support, and housing referrals to remove barriers to employment.
- **Financial Literacy and Soft Skills:** Provide training in financial management, communication, and workplace etiquette to ensure participants are workplace ready.
- **Case Management:** Implement personalized case management to track participant progress and provide ongoing support and increase professional development training for staff.

6. Addressing Equity and Inclusion

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- **Targeted Outreach:** Focus outreach efforts on underserved populations, including individuals with disabilities, veterans, justice-involved individuals, and long-term unemployed workers.
- **Diversity Initiatives:** Partner with community-based organizations to ensure programs are culturally sensitive and inclusive.

7. Collaboration and Regional Alignment

- **Interagency Partnerships:** Strengthen collaboration with local government agencies, educational institutions, and non-profits to provide comprehensive services as well as regional cost saving approaches among the four Workforce Boards.
- **Shared Best Practices:** Facilitate knowledge-sharing among workforce boards in the region to improve program effectiveness.
- **Grant Opportunities:** Pursue state and federal funding to support innovative workforce initiatives.

8. Performance Metrics and Continuous Improvement

- **Outcome Tracking:** Regularly monitor key performance indicators such as job placement rates, credential attainment, and participant earnings.
- **Program Evaluation:** Conduct periodic evaluations of WIOA activities to identify areas for improvement and implement data-informed adjustments.
- **Participant Feedback:** Gather feedback from participants to refine service delivery and enhance program effectiveness.

STRENGTHS OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES IN THE LINK UPSTATE REGION

The Link Upstate Region excels in workforce development through its innovative strategies, collaborative partnerships, and targeted initiatives designed to meet the needs of employers and job seekers. These strengths reflect the region's commitment to fostering economic growth and building a skilled workforce ready to meet the demands of a dynamic labor market.

1. Strong Partnerships and Collaboration

The region benefits from well-established partnerships with key stakeholders, including local employers, educational institutions, economic development agencies, and community organizations. These partnerships:

- Enhance service delivery by leveraging resources and expertise.
- Strengthen the connection between workforce development and economic development initiatives.
- Foster alignment between industry needs and training programs.
- The four Link Upstate Workforce Board Staff are active participants in the Workforce Development Administrator's group. This group meets monthly to learn about State initiatives and to collaborate with peers from across the State.

Collaboration among the four local workforce boards—Greenville, Upstate, Upper Savannah, and WorkLink—ensures consistency and shared best practices across the region. This group meets quarterly.

2. Innovative Service Design and Delivery

The region prioritizes a customer-centric approach to workforce development, offering:

- **Comprehensive SC Works Centers:** Accessible locations providing job seekers and employers with career services, training resources, and hiring support.
- **Virtual Services:** Online workshops, virtual job fairs, and remote career counseling expand access to services, particularly for rural and underserved communities.
- **Mobile Workforce Units:** These units bring essential services to areas where access may be limited, ensuring inclusivity.

3. Targeted Initiatives for Specific Populations

The Link Upstate Region tailors programs to address the unique needs of diverse populations, including:

- **Veterans:** Specialized services to support transitioning military personnel and those with service-connected disabilities.
- **Youth:** Out-of-school youth programs that provide training, work experience, and career counseling aligned with sector strategies.
- **Re-Entry Populations:** Successful re-entry programs help justice-involved individuals reintegrate into the workforce, reducing recidivism.
- **Dislocated Workers:** Targeted initiatives support individuals impacted by layoffs, providing rapid-response services and retraining opportunities.

4. Job Fairs and Employer Engagement

The region organizes regular job fairs and hiring events, offering direct connections between job seekers and employers. These events:

- Address immediate hiring needs for local industries.
- Promote opportunities in high-demand sectors such as healthcare, advanced manufacturing, IT, and logistics.
- Strengthen employer engagement by showcasing workforce development resources available to businesses.

5. Pilot Programs and Innovative Approaches

Pilot programs across the region serve as testing grounds for innovative workforce strategies. Examples include:

- Re-Entry pilot projects that engage pre-release individuals in workforce training and provide post-release support. Example is the pilot project during 2024 in the Upstate Workforce Area. The Upstate Workforce Board partnered with SC Department of Employment and Workforce (SCDEW) on a grant for a pilot project at the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) in Union County. The funds allowed us to conduct career services for several cohorts of at-risk youth incarcerated in the DJJ facility so that they were more prepared when they were released or transferred.
- Youth-focused Pre-Apprenticeship and Apprenticeship programs integrating classroom learning with hands-on training leading to immediate employment
- Industry-specific training pilots, such as apprenticeships and certification programs in advanced manufacturing and healthcare.
-

These programs inform future workforce initiatives, allowing for data-driven improvements and scaling of successful models.

6. Sector Strategies and Career Pathways

The Link Upstate Region's commitment to sector strategies ensures alignment with regional labor market needs.

Key strengths include:

- Developing partnerships with employers in high-demand sectors to create training programs tailored to their workforce needs.
- Launched the Upstate Manufacturing Network led and driven by private sector manufacturers of the Link Upstate Region, see upstatemanufacturingnetworks.org to see an Advanced Manufacturing Sector Strategy at work.
- Implementing career pathway models that provide clear progression routes for job seekers, from entry-level positions to advanced roles.

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- Addressing industry-specific challenges, such as skills gaps, through targeted training and upskilling initiatives.

The Link Upstate Region demonstrates exceptional strength in its workforce development activities through collaborative partnerships, innovative service delivery, and a focus on targeted initiatives. By aligning its efforts with employer needs and regional economic goals, the region continues to build a resilient and inclusive workforce that supports long-term economic prosperity.

WEAKNESSES OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES IN THE LINK UPSTATE REGION

Despite the strengths of workforce development activities in the Link Upstate Region, several challenges hinder the effectiveness and accessibility of these programs. Addressing these weaknesses is crucial to creating a more equitable and efficient workforce system.

1. Limited Access to Childcare

- **Barrier to Participation:** Many job seekers, particularly women and single parents, struggle to access affordable and reliable childcare, limiting their ability to participate in training programs, job fairs, or employment opportunities.
- **Insufficient Resources:** While some supportive services address childcare needs, funding and availability are often inadequate to meet demand across the region.
- **Impact on Workforce:** This gap disproportionately affects low-income families, reducing their workforce participation and long-term economic mobility.

2. Transportation Challenges

- **Inadequate Public Transit:** Many areas in the region, particularly rural counties, lack comprehensive public transportation systems, making it difficult for job seekers to commute to SC Works Centers, training sites, or job opportunities.
- **Cost of Private Transportation:** For many individuals, the cost of owning and maintaining a vehicle is prohibitive, further limiting access to workforce programs and employment.
- **Geographic Barriers:** The region's expansive geography exacerbates these challenges, as employment hubs are often far from rural communities.

3. Geographic Disparities

- **Rural vs. Urban Divide:** Workforce development resources, employers, and training opportunities are often concentrated in urban areas like Greenville and Spartanburg, leaving rural communities underserved.
- **Access to Technology:** Rural areas face digital divides, including limited broadband access, which hinders participation in virtual training and job search activities.

4. Low Wages in Certain Industries

- **Wage Inequities:** Many entry-level or low-skill jobs in the region offer wages that do not support a living standard, particularly in areas with higher costs of living.
- **Retention Challenges:** Low pay contributes to high turnover rates, as workers seek better opportunities or leave the labor force altogether.
- **Mismatch with Skills:** Job seekers may complete training programs but face a lack of well-paying jobs in their fields, discouraging long-term participation in workforce initiatives.

5. Workforce Awareness and Engagement Gaps

- **Lack of Awareness:** Many job seekers and employers are unaware of the resources and services available through workforce development programs.

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- **Employer Engagement:** While some sectors are heavily involved in workforce initiatives, others remain under-engaged, limiting opportunities for job seekers.
- **Participant Retention:** Some individuals disengage from workforce programs due to a lack of follow-up support or perceived value.

6. Insufficient Focus on Soft Skills and Wraparound Services

- **Skill Gaps:** While technical training is widely available, many job seekers lack soft skills such as communication, time management, and teamwork, which are critical for workplace success.
- **Supportive Services:** Beyond childcare and transportation, other barriers such as housing instability, mental health challenges, and access to healthcare are not always fully addressed, limiting program effectiveness.

7. Systemic and Funding Challenges

- **Fragmentation of Services:** Workforce services can be siloed, with limited coordination among organizations, leading to duplicative efforts and gaps in service delivery that lead to frustration among employers.
- **Inconsistent Funding:** Workforce programs often depend on fluctuating grant funding, which makes long-term planning and sustained program delivery challenging.
- **Agility:** Public workforce programs are overly bureaucratic with layers of unrealistic rules in the eyes of employers; the system is not agile and able to respond to their needs in a timely manner.

Addressing these weaknesses requires a coordinated effort among workforce boards, employers, policymakers, and community organizations. Solutions such as expanding childcare and transportation services, bridging the rural-urban divide, increasing awareness of workforce programs, and addressing systemic inequities can strengthen the Link Upstate Region's workforce development activities and create a more inclusive and effective system.

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 the following:

- **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 Link Upstate Region, encompassing the Greenville, Upstate, Upper Savannah, and WorkLink Workforce Boards, aims to develop and expand sector initiatives targeting in-demand industries and occupations. This strategic plan focuses on leveraging data-driven insights, enhancing regional collaboration, and strengthening partnerships to address workforce needs and promote economic growth.

1. Current In-Demand Industry Sectors and Occupations

The region's workforce data indicates strong demand in the following sectors:

- **Advanced Manufacturing:** Industrial machinery mechanics, CNC operators, and robotics technicians.
- **Healthcare:** Registered nurses, medical assistants, and healthcare support roles.
- **Information Technology:** Software developers, IT support specialists, and cybersecurity analysts.
- **Logistics and Transportation:** CDL drivers, logistics managers, and warehouse associates.
- **Construction and Skilled Trades:** Electricians, HVAC technicians, and carpenters.

2. Status of Regional Collaboration

The region has made progress in fostering collaboration across workforce boards, community colleges, and economic development organizations. Regular meetings and joint initiatives are in place to align training programs and share resources. However, further integration is needed to optimize efforts and reduce duplication.

3. Current Sector-Based Partnerships

Existing partnerships include:

- **Industry-Specific Advisory Councils:** Advanced manufacturing consortia and healthcare alliances.
- **Training Providers:** Partnerships with technical colleges, such as Greenville Technical College and Piedmont Technical College, offering customized programs.
- **Economic Development Partners:** Collaboration with organizations like the Upstate SC Alliance to align workforce strategies with business recruitment efforts.

4. Data-Driven Sector Priorities

Regional labor market data drives sector initiatives, focusing on high-growth, high-wage occupations. For example:

- Analyzing job postings to identify skill gaps and refine training curricula.
- Reviewing employer surveys to prioritize workforce needs.
- Using real-time labor market analytics to forecast emerging trends.

5. Business Involvement in Current Initiatives

Business engagement has been robust, with employers participating in advisory councils, offering on-the-job training opportunities, and supporting apprenticeship programs. Some businesses have also collaborated on customized training solutions to meet specific workforce demands.

6. Potential Public-Private Partnerships

The region aims to deepen collaboration through initiatives such as:

- **Employer-Led Workforce Hubs:** Expanding business-led partnerships in target sectors to shape training programs.
- **Community-Based Organizations (CBOs):** Partnering with CBOs to enhance outreach to underserved populations.
- **Funding Collaborations:** Seeking grants and investment from private foundations to support workforce innovation.
- **Innovative Training Models:** Collaborating with businesses to design and implement earn-and-learn programs, boot camps, and stackable credential pathways.

7. Implementation Strategies

- **Regional Alignment:** Establish a unified regional strategy group to coordinate initiatives and share best practices.
- **Enhanced Employer Engagement:** Host industry forums and roundtables to strengthen ties with businesses and refine strategies.
- **Workforce Pipeline Development:** Invest in K-12 career awareness programs and dual enrollment opportunities to build long-term talent pipelines.
- **Technology Integration:** Use virtual platforms to expand access to training and career services across the region.

Through these plans, the Link Upstate Region seeks to create a highly responsive and sustainable workforce ecosystem that meets the needs of both businesses and job seekers, driving economic prosperity for the region.

- 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 address the following:**
- 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 Link Upstate region, comprising the WorkLink, Upstate, Upper Savannah, and Greenville Workforce Development Boards, collaborates to align with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requirements. These boards jointly develop comprehensive workforce plans, optimize resources, and implement shared initiatives like sector partnerships and data-driven strategies to enhance service delivery region-wide.

1. Existing Service Delivery Strategies:

The region has established a coordinated approach to workforce development, exemplified by joint initiatives such as the Sector Partnership grant awarded by the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce. This grant supports ongoing sector strategies and the development of new sector strategies and workforce solutions across the Greenville, Upper Savannah, Upstate, and WorkLink areas. Sector Partnerships bring business leaders together to tackle common issues that impact the competitiveness of their industry. Established in 2019, the Upstate Manufacturing Network (UMN) is comprised of business leaders across a 14-county area in Upstate, South Carolina. The partnership follows the Next Gen Model which follows a detailed plan. The UMN's goal is to tackle a range of issues including improving the workforce pipeline, aligning training with industry needs and facilitating business-to-business networking. The agenda is defined by business leaders, addressing the specific issues that matter most to their industry. Next Gen Partnerships focus on issues that no single company can fully tackle on its own and that require a collaborative approach. The UMN meets on a regular basis. Below is information regarding current action teams:

- **Education and Perception:** Collaborating to shift the perception of manufacturing occupations and careers for youth, parents, and guidance counselors.
- **Workplace Culture:** Working together to share best practices in positive workplace culture in the manufacturing industry.
- **Four Additional Action Teams were just added on December 12, 2024:**
 - Resource Mapping
 - Business-to-Business
 - Talent Pipeline
 - Training

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These topics shift based on needs. The UMN was recently able to host a lunch and learn regarding how local manufacturers responded to Hurricane Helene. As they address topics, new action teams are formed to ensure identified goals are met.

A broad network of partners representing education (K-12, Career and Technical Education, community and technical colleges and adult education), workforce development (workforce development boards, SC Works centers), Department of Social Services, Vocational Rehabilitation, economic development and other organizations support the work of the UMN. While not all of these partners play integral roles in the day-to-day operations, it is important to keep them engaged and informed so when their assistance is needed, they are ready.

In addition to the UMN, a new partnership is being formed to support the logistics industry. It is expected to launch in early 2025. This partnership will follow the same model listed above. New action teams will be formed to drive the work that the industry feels most passionate about.

2. Service Strategies to Address Regional Education and Training Needs:

To address evolving education and training needs, the WorkLink and Upper Savannah Workforce Development Boards released joint Requests for Proposals in November 2022. These RFPs aim to competitively procure employment and training services under the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA), focusing on One Stop Operations and Adult & Dislocated Worker Program Services. This joint venture has allowed Upper Savannah and WorkLink to align service strategies to better serve job seekers and employers. WorkLink and Upper continue to share staff resources as does Greenville and Upstate.

The Upstate Workforce Board and the Greenville Workforce Development Board also issue joint RFPs for the SC Works Operations in the four counties served by the two boards.

3. Strategies to Address Geographic Advantages:

The Link Upstate region leverages its strategic location and existing infrastructure to support workforce development. The region's proximity to major interstates and economic hubs like Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport positions it as a logistics and manufacturing hub. The current Sector Strategies initiative, called the Upstate Manufacturing Network, fosters relationships with manufacturers across the region and offers tailored workforce solutions for this sector. The logistics sector strategy partnership is being launched in January of 2025. Based on regional planning discussions around sector strategies construction, IT, and healthcare have been considered for the third potential sector strategy partnership for the Link Upstate Region.

4. Approaches to Improve Services to Hard-to-Serve Populations:

Each of the Boards are aligned in their goal of identifying the best strategies to conduct outreach to individuals with barriers, offering targeted assistance to rural job seekers, those with limited English-speaking abilities, those with disabilities, justice-involved individuals, and those with limited transportation or access to childcare. Each Workforce Board has established a priority populations committee dedicated to enhancing service delivery for individuals that are part of an identified priority group, such as Veterans, low-income, and those with disabilities. These committees make recommendations to facilitate the participation of customers from priority populations in workforce programs.

5. Strategies to Connect the Unemployed with Work-Based Learning Opportunities:

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The region assists employers and job seekers by offering a consistent menu of services such as recruiting, screening qualified candidates, and providing training and retention assistance. Each of the workforce boards has dedicated funding to offer Work Experience opportunities for Youth and On-the-Job Training programs that reimburse employers for a portion of training costs for new employees.

6. Strategies to Integrate Existing Regional Planning Efforts Among Core Partners:

As part of the planning process, core partners have an opportunity to provide feedback and input into how services are delivered in their communities. Department of Employment and Workforce, Adult Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Department of Social Services, among other partners, serve on each of the local workforce boards. Programs offered by our CORE partners that cover the entire Link Upstate region are identified and promoted within the region. Department of Employment and Workforce's Youth Employment Services (YES) and Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) focus on connecting youth, veterans, individuals with disabilities, and ex-offenders to tailored support, including career counseling and work-readiness training. Further resource mapping has been identified as a needed component of the Upstate Manufacturing Network and will be key to better communication across the CORE partnerships and leveraging of resources.

Through these collaborative efforts, the Link Upstate region aims to create a cohesive and responsive workforce development system that effectively meets the needs of employers and job seekers alike.

- 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 address the following:**
- **Current or proposed resource leveraging agreements and**
 - **The establishment of a process to evaluate cost sharing arrangements.**

The Link Upstate region has established a collaborative approach to managing administrative costs, including the pooling of funds to maximize efficiency and ensure compliance with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) guidelines. Current resource leveraging agreements focus on shared staff, training, and outreach to reduce redundancy and promote cost-effectiveness across the WorkLink, Upstate, Upper Savannah, and Greenville Workforce Development Boards.

Greenville & Upstate WDBs Share Several Positions for the SC Works Operations

The Upstate Workforce Board and the Greenville Workforce Development Board currently share the following positions:

- Project Director
- Project Accountant
- Accounting Specialist
- Operations Manager
- Regional Business Solutions Manager
- Business Solutions Consultant #1

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- Business Solutions Consultant #2
- Survey Coordinator (Temporary Position to conduct Business Surveys)
- SCWOS Coordinator

The two Workforce Boards have two signed agreements in place for the above sharing of staff positions. We also issue one grant for the SC Works operations in the four counties so that SC Works management only have one document under which they operate the centers.

In PY24, a joint Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued to procure a PY25 One Stop Operator. This RFP is currently active. The two boards also issue joint regional instruction letters when possible. The staff from the two boards meet quarterly to discuss the partnership, plan future endeavors and ensure that our coordinated efforts are working well. The Upstate and Greenville Boards also partner to jointly conduct staff training. The two boards are currently finishing a Super Vitamin grant that provided financial literacy and counseling to customers of the SC Works system in the two workforce areas. Our jointly funded Business Services staff coordinate job fairs that include all four counties once or twice a year when larger numbers of job seekers are required to satisfy the demands of the participating employers.

WorkLink & Upper Savannah WDBs Shared Data Coordinator Position

A key initiative is the creation of a shared Data Coordinator position, designed to streamline data collection, reporting, and analysis across the region. This position also includes oversight responsibilities for Equal Opportunity (EO) compliance and adherence to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Data Coordinator will:

- Provide data reporting support to WorkLink and Upper Savannah, and staff training and desktop monitoring of data entry into the SC Works Online System to ensure data integrity, consistency, and accuracy.
- Monitor compliance with EO and ADA requirements, conduct audits and provide training to staff.

Process for Evaluating Cost-Sharing Arrangements

To ensure the effectiveness of cost-sharing agreements, the region will implement a structured evaluation process, which includes:

- **Regular Reviews:** Quarterly assessments of cost-sharing outcomes to identify areas for improvement or new opportunities.
- **Performance Metrics:** Key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure the efficiency and impact of shared resources.
- **Stakeholder Feedback:** Input from workforce board staff and partner organizations to refine the scope and functions of shared positions, including the Data Coordinator role and Business Service Role.

This collaborative strategy promotes fiscal responsibility while enhancing regional capacity to deliver high-quality, inclusive workforce services.

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- 6. A description of how transportation, access to childcare, or other supportive services are coordinated within the region, as appropriate. Regions should address the following:**
- **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 Link Upstate region, comprising Anderson, Greenville, Greenwood, Spartanburg, and surrounding counties in South Carolina, has made strides in supporting workforce development and social services, but there is still room for improvement in transportation, childcare, and other supportive services. A robust and integrated approach can ensure that residents have better access to jobs, educational opportunities, and economic stability. Here's a detailed description of how transportation, childcare, and supportive services can be enhanced in the Link Upstate region.

1. Enhancing Transportation Services Regionally

Transportation is often a critical barrier for residents in rural and urban areas of the Link Upstate region to access jobs, childcare, education, and healthcare. An integrated regional transportation system can address these issues by enhancing access and ensuring economic mobility.

Recommendations for Enhancement:

- **Expand Public Transit Options:**
 - Monitor and advocate for additional investment in existing regional bus systems that connects major cities (Greenville, Spartanburg, Anderson) and neighboring rural areas.
 - Increase the frequency and coverage of buses and other transit options to accommodate early and late shifts for workers, ensuring accessibility during non-traditional work hours.
 - Introduce van pools and shuttle services tailored to large employers to transport their employees from central locations to work sites.
- **Affordable Rideshare Programs:**
 - Partner with local rideshare companies to offer discounted fares or subsidized transportation for low-income workers.
 - Launch community-supported carpool programs, facilitated through local workforce centers or non-profit initiatives.
- **Bike and Pedestrian Infrastructure:**
 - Promote initiatives to improve sidewalks, bike lanes, and walking paths to encourage eco-friendly transportation.
 - Develop safe pathways that connect residential areas with job hubs and commercial centers.
- **Employer-Led Transportation Initiatives:**
 - Work with large employers to develop on-site transit hubs or shuttle services that can transport workers directly from central locations across the region.

2. Access to Childcare Services

Access to affordable and reliable childcare is crucial for working parents, ensuring that families are economically stable and contributing to the workforce.

Recommendations for Expansion:

- **Increase Funding for Local Childcare Centers:**
 - Secure grants and government funding to expand the capacity of existing childcare facilities.

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- Provide tax incentives for employers that establish onsite childcare facilities or partner with local providers to offer services nearby.
- Inform employers about TOOTRiS. TOOTRiS is a childcare platform that we've had several meetings about in the Upstate Workforce Area. This program could benefit employees if businesses pay to participate. The cost is \$1 per employee per month. Employers may offer childcare stipends through the platform. We know of one employer in the Upstate Workforce Area using this program, and Volvo is a large employer in South Carolina that uses TOOTRiS. This program makes it easier for employees seeking childcare or after school care to find the care they need. This platform reduces absenteeism, improves retention and boosts morale. It is a platform that the Business Services Team members at SC Works should be educated about so they can inform businesses about TOOTRiS when they are meeting with the business customer. [Find Child Care, Daycare and Preschools Near You | TOOTRiS](#)
- **Support Family-Based and In-Home Childcare Services:**
 - Promote home-based childcare options that provide personalized care while ensuring compliance with state and federal childcare regulations.
 - Offer training and certification programs for individuals interested in becoming licensed childcare providers.
- **Sliding-Scale Payment Structures:**
 - Partner with local non-profits and government organizations to offer sliding-scale pricing models for families based on income levels.
 - Establish financial aid programs to assist low-income families with childcare costs.
- **After-School and Summer Programs:**
 - Develop community-supported after-school programs and summer camps to support working parents.
 - Collaborate with schools and community centers to provide safe and affordable options for older children during non-school hours.

3. Organizations Providing Supportive Services

Several local and regional organizations in the Link Upstate area currently offer or could potentially offer supportive services. Coordination among these organizations is essential to maximize the impact and availability of services across the region.

Existing and Potential Service Providers:

1. United Way:

- Offers community resources and partnerships aimed at enhancing workforce development and economic stability.
- Provides funding and logistical support to local nonprofits that offer transportation, childcare, and employment services.
- United Way's VITA program is an IRS program that provides free and accurate tax preparation services to low-to moderate-income taxpayers. Certified volunteers assist with tax preparation at public locations such as libraries, schools, and neighborhood centers in certain high-need areas. The program is available to individuals and families with household incomes up to \$64,000 annually.

2. Local Housing Authorities:

- Provide affordable housing and could incorporate childcare facilities on-site or close to residential areas.

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- Partner with local transportation services to ensure residents have access to job sites.
 - 3. **Non-Profit Organizations:**
 - Organizations such as AIM, Safe Families for Children, and Family Connections Upstate provide support for families and childcare services.
 - Local nonprofits could collaborate with businesses and government initiatives to provide integrated support services for transportation and childcare.
 - 4. **Educational Institutions (Technical Colleges and High Schools):**
 - Collaborating with the Technical Colleges and local high schools to implement programs that train childcare professionals.
 - Offer scholarships and work-study programs to attract young students into childcare careers.
4. **Establishing a Coordinated Process for Supportive Service Delivery**
Creating a unified and regional strategy requires a structured, collaborative approach involving local governments, service providers, businesses, and community stakeholders.

Recommended Process for Coordination:

1. Regional Advisory Committee:

- Establish a Link Upstate Workforce and Supportive Services Advisory Committee that includes representatives from:
 - Local transportation authorities
 - Employers
 - Childcare providers
 - Non-profits
 - Educational institutions
 - Government representatives
- This committee would be responsible for aligning efforts, setting regional goals, and tracking outcomes.

2. Community Resource Mapping and Data Collection:

- Conduct periodic assessments to map available transportation, childcare, and other supportive services across the region.
- Collect data on workforce needs, transportation gaps, childcare availability, and service outcomes to inform decision-making.

3. Integrated Service Platforms and Communication Networks:

- Develop a regional online portal and app that consolidates information about transportation routes, childcare availability, job postings, and community services.
- Provide hotline services and dedicated case managers to help individuals navigate these services seamlessly.

4. Regular Collaboration Meetings and Networking Events:

- Hold monthly meetings among service providers, employers, and government representatives to share updates, discuss challenges, and strategize collective solutions.
- Host regional networking events for job seekers, employers, and service providers to foster connections and partnerships.

By enhancing regional transportation, expanding childcare services, and promoting strategic partnerships among existing and potential service providers, the Link Upstate region can create a more connected and economically stable community. A collaborative, data-informed advisory committee will be central in ensuring that these services remain accessible, affordable, and tailored to meet the specific needs of families and businesses in the region. With

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integrated efforts across sectors, the region can reduce barriers to employment, improve job retention, and contribute significantly to regional economic growth and community well-being.

7. A description of how workforce development services are coordinated with economic development services and providers within the region. Regions should address the following:

- **Current economic development organizations engaged in regional planning and**
- **Education and training providers involved with economic development.**

Economic Development Organizations Engaged in Regional Planning

In the Link Upstate region, key economic development organizations are represented on each of the four workforce boards, ensuring their input in the development of regional plans. These organizations collaborate with workforce boards, educational institutions, and local businesses to align workforce training with the needs of industries such as advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and technology. Each economic development office plays an active role in promoting local economic growth and contributing to workforce development initiatives within their community. Additionally, regional organizations like Ten at the Top and Upstate SC Alliance offer a broader perspective on economic development efforts, supporting the workforce boards in shaping the Link Upstate regional plan. Local SC Works Business Services Team Leads work closely with ReadySC on recruiting applicants for new and expanding economic development projects. ReadySC serves as the lead on these efforts.

Educational Institutions Supporting Economic Development

Educational institutions across the region play a vital role in aligning training programs with regional economic demands. K-12 school districts, colleges, and technical institutions work closely with workforce boards and economic development organizations to provide career exploration, technical education, and work-based learning opportunities. Regional Workforce Advisors from the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce (DEW) play a crucial role in supporting educational alignment by facilitating collaboration between employers and educational providers. They help identify skill gaps, encourage curriculum adjustments, and promote training programs that meet the current and future needs of industries. Additionally, institutions like Clemson University, Anderson University, Tri-County Technical College, Piedmont Technical College, Spartanburg Community College, Greenville Technical College, and Southern Wesleyan University offer specialized training programs, certifications, and apprenticeships tailored to high-demand sectors, ensuring that the region's workforce remains competitive and responsive to industry trends.

8. A description of the region's plan regarding coordination of local performance negotiations. Each LWDA 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 Link Upstate region's plan for coordinating local performance negotiations involves a collaborative process among the four Local Workforce Development Areas (LWDAs), which includes WorkLink, Upstate, Upper Savannah, and Greenville. Each LWDA will continue to negotiate performance goals with the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce (DEW) to ensure that the region meets or exceeds the agreed-upon benchmarks.

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To ensure alignment, the LWDA's will engage in regular communication and coordination during the negotiation process, sharing insights and data to establish realistic, yet ambitious, performance targets. This collaborative approach will help ensure that the region's workforce development efforts are tailored to local economic conditions and industry needs. While each LWDA is ultimately responsible for meeting its individual performance goals, the region will work together to share best practices, provide technical assistance, and align strategies to collectively achieve regional workforce development objectives. This coordination ensures that local areas have the support they need to succeed while maintaining accountability for their respective goals.