

## Upper Savannah Workforce Area: Strategic Plan 2020-2024 Executive Summary

### Background

To compete in the global economy, companies must become more efficient and maintain quality. A skilled workforce is necessary. Collectively the economic development agencies in Abbeville, Edgefield, Greenwood, Laurens, McCormick, Newberry, and Saluda counties are focusing on attracting manufacturing businesses because they enhance the tax base and provide good paying jobs with benefits.

At the same time, the workforce system has a responsibility to residents. People want to earn enough to support their families. Quality of life is important. Most workers want to avoid long commutes.

**It is the goal of the Upper Savannah Workforce Board to help businesses meet the current and future hiring needs and to help job seekers find work.**

### Opportunities

Just prior to the start of the pandemic, there was record demand for workers. Nearly everyone who wanted a job was working except for:

1. Individuals without reliable transportation
2. Individuals who have poor basic skills or who do not have a high school credential
3. Individuals with disabilities
4. Individuals with criminal backgrounds
5. Individuals who cannot pass a drug test
6. Young people without prior work experience

Since March, thousands have lost their jobs due to COVID-related closures, market disruptions and uncertainty. Many of those displaced have skills.

### Resources

As the region tries to get unemployed individuals into the workforce and tries to reduce key skills gaps, it has resources. Sixteen different agencies have united to support the Upper Savannah SC Work System. Currently five organizations staff SC Works Centers providing a total of 35 workers. Budgets across the 16 partners vary (and not all budgets are earmarked exclusively for workforce activities.) The primary program responsible for workforce development is the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) which has a yearly budget of about \$1.5 million.

The area's system has established infrastructure. There are SC Works Centers in each county. Piedmont Technical College has a campus in each county and offers hands-on industrial training in three counties.

## Needs

Upper Savannah has a workforce of 116,973. There are 4,258 businesses established. The population of the area is slightly less affluent and less educated as the state as a whole.

## Goals and Strategies

The current budget for the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act translates to about \$14 per worker in the region. Some training programs cost more than \$10,000 per person. To make a meaningful change in the region, the workforce board must set priorities. Below are goals and related strategies.

1. Reach at least 12% of the workforce each year by offering free basic services for all job seekers. Promoting job listings and providing information about training opportunities is inexpensive and can help potential workers make good career choices.
2. Reduce transportation barriers by having centers in all counties and by encouraging training vendors to offer courses in each county.
3. Promote careers in manufacturing by working with businesses, schools and relevant community groups.
4. Invest in those with the greatest potential to change including individuals from groups underrepresented in the workforce. This will be done by having policies that target the most in need. The Upper Savannah Workforce Development Board can set criteria for serving Adults through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. The board has selected to give priority to residents with poor work history.
5. Increase the basic skills levels of potential workers by encouraging GED attainment.
6. Invest in training that has the greatest potential for graduates to find work which pays a self-sufficiency wage. The Workforce Development Board has selected diversified manufacturing and healthcare as the sectors most likely to generate the best outcomes. (A chart showing the area's training policies is attached.)
7. Help employers efficiently recruit and screen workers by utilizing the [www.scworks.com](http://www.scworks.com) job matching database and social media campaigns.
8. Offer training grants to businesses to help them maintain a competitive workforce by tapping into state grant funding.
9. Help workers advance the career ladder (and open the bottom rung for newcomers) by encouraging businesses to establish apprenticeship programs and participate in work-based learning.
10. Communicate employer's expectations for soft skills to job seekers by communicating with schools and other organizations which help job seekers.
11. Offer education and job training for youth who are high school dropouts or who have completed high school but have not yet found a suitable job.

12. Encourage communication between partners to serve clients holistically, not just with services from one agency. The board expects to track 1,200 referrals per year.

#### Pandemic Response

All workforce centers are open. An appointment system is being used to ensure customers have enough space. The workforce board amended the supportive services policy so that computers can be furnished to trainees who are learning remotely.

If the economy does not quickly rebound when everything re-opens, more resources will be needed. Originally funding was to be cut by \$233,000. Upper Savannah has access to discretionary grants from the state workforce board which will re-coup the difference. Upper Savannah has applied for and received \$100,000 for On-the-Job Training expansion and \$126,011 for recovery work experience. Upper Savannah is applying for FEMA funding for COVID-related costs.

#### Measurement and Use of Data in Program Design

The Workforce Development Board is responsible for meeting key performance indicators for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and to enhance the system as a whole. The performance indicators look at the percentage of program completers who go to work, stay at their jobs and get an educational credential. Post program wages are gathered.

Because WIOA accounts for a fragment of the workforce, the Workforce Board will also gather information on participation in Wagner Peyser (job seeker services provided by the SC Department of Employment and Workforce), the Vocational Rehabilitation Department and the seven adult education programs.

#### Comment Process

Individuals or organizations that wish to comment on the strategic plan are asked to contact the workforce division of Upper Savannah Council of Governments. Please contact Ann Skinner at 864.941.8050 or [work@uppersavannah.com](mailto:work@uppersavannah.com).

The complete plan will be at [www.uppersavannah.com](http://www.uppersavannah.com) no later than September 1, 2020. Upper Savannah staff are available to talk with county councils and other groups.