



Partner4Work

2023 – 2025 Strategic Plan

Facilitated by: Third Plateau



PARTNER WORK

The Workforce Development Board for the Pittsburgh Area

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OVERVIEW

Introduction

Partner4Work (P4W), formerly Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board, was established by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA) and was later reauthorized by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in 2014 (WIOA). In its 20+ years, Partner4Work has delivered innovative solutions and supported local partners to develop a thriving workforce in Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh. From its initial focus as a small think tank, P4W has evolved its focus to include the development of strategic and systemic workforce solutions and funding key workforce partners including PA CareerLink(R) Pittsburgh/Allegheny County. With a budget of more than \$25 million in public and private workforce funds, Partner4Work delivers a comprehensive portfolio of programs and initiatives to meet the current and future needs of employers and job seekers.

In the last few years, Partner4Work has doubled in size and has been adaptive and responsive to the needs of businesses and jobseekers in a rapidly changing economic and political landscape. Under the new leadership of CEO Robert Cherry and with the support of a diverse, committed, and experienced board, Partner4Work is poised to explore strategic opportunities to build a more robust, equitable, and sustainable workforce development ecosystem. This strategic plan represents an intentional pause to identify and articulate key priorities for the next three years. The first priority leverages Partner4Work's programmatic successes to deepen its programs to strengthen the employment continuum and build more equitable career pathways. Priorities two and three outline opportunities for Partner4Work to position itself as the authority on local workforce development and, as the leading authority, influence and advance fieldwide innovation. Finally, priority four outlines the important work of bolstering Partner4Work's organizational infrastructure, including the structures and conditions needed to advance innovative and sustainable impact.

Methodology

Partner4Work engaged Third Plateau, a social impact strategy firm, to facilitate its strategic planning process in 2022. In partnership with a Strategic Planning Steering Committee, made up of P4W board and staff, Third Plateau engaged in a three-phase planning process. The learning phase focused on understanding Partner4Work's current state, including the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. As part of the process, Third Plateau conducted 12 virtual interviews with a diverse set of stakeholders, including staff, board, and key partners. Using this information, Third Plateau facilitated a three-day planning retreat to revisit Partner4Work's vision and mission and identify three-year goals for the organization to make significant progress toward its vision in the coming years. The steering committee participated in strategy brainstorms to flesh out key priorities, strategies, and tactics. A survey was sent out to gather feedback on the draft strategic plan from Partner4Work staff and the steering committee. From there, a subset of the steering committee developed implementation timelines and milestones for each priority area.

PARTNER WORK

The Workforce Development Board for the Pittsburgh Area

OUR PURPOSE

Our Vision

- Partner4Work envisions a thriving and prosperous community, where all residents have access to expansive career opportunities and all businesses have access to a talented workforce.

Mission

- To develop a thriving workforce, Partner4Work drives and delivers strategic investments, provides expertise, and creates opportunities for businesses, job seekers, agencies, and policymakers in Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh.

Who We Are

- Partner4Work is a 501c3 nonprofit that:
 - Leads the workforce development system for Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh;
 - Builds employers' capacity to find, retain, and develop talent;
 - Connects adults and young job seekers with career opportunities;
 - Proactively positions community organizations for success through funding, information, and professional connections;
 - Interprets and shares labor market information, data, trends, and promising practices to advance data-informed strategies and policy development;
 - Convenes cross-system partners, including employers, labor unions, job seekers, educators, agencies, and policymakers, to learn, collaborate, and strategize solutions to strengthen the local workforce.
- Partner4Work is guided by the knowledge, expertise, and leadership of its diverse board of directors, which is jointly appointed by the Allegheny County Executive and the Mayor of Pittsburgh. The board represents leadership among employers, educators, labor unions, policy makers, and community-based organizations.
- As an organization that holds the unique position of connector, convener, and bridge builder, Partner4Work values collaboration, inclusion, and bold thinking.

OUR STRATEGIC FOCUS

To advance our mission and vision over the next three years, Partner4Work will focus on the following four priorities:

Priority 1: Advance and deliver effective, inclusive, and user-centered programs that build a stronger regional workforce.

Priority 2: Convene and influence local leaders to support data-informed decision-making and fieldwide innovation.

Priority 3: Expand our name recognition, credibility, and value proposition among our key partners.

Priority 4: Bolster our organizational infrastructure to support innovative programs and sustainable impact.

To make progress on our priorities (**bolded in blue**), we will pursue the targeted strategies (**bolded**) and tactics (underlined) below.

1. **Advance and deliver effective, inclusive, and user-centered programs that build a stronger regional workforce.** Partner4Work strives to be an excellent provider, partner, and steward in developing a thriving workforce development ecosystem that creates opportunity and prosperity for all. We will use evaluation data to continually improve the user experience, quality, and impact of our engagements, partnerships, and services. We will strengthen networks, build relationships, and seek strategic alignment to build a more regionally coordinated and integrated workforce development system.

To accomplish this, we will:

- a. **Ensure services and programs produce valuable and meaningful outcomes for employers, jobseekers, and partner organizations.**
 - i. Codify and promote proven and promising practices for workforce services. Drawing on our team’s expertise and Partner4Work’s research and analysis, we will codify and publish best practices related to business solutions and program delivery. We will procure providers that adopt proven practices.
 - ii. Leverage youth funds to provide career exploration and work-based learning opportunities, including apprenticeships, with local employers and labor unions. We will leverage WIOA Youth funds to support transition-aged youth to complete work-based learning opportunities that lead to employment. We will invest TANF YDP funds to support career exploration and funnel youth to WIOA-funded opportunities.
 - iii. Establish a framework to assess employer needs and current workforce practices. By understanding employers’ workforce needs, practices, values, and philosophy, we will be better equipped to deliver practical and impactful support. This framework will help us to identify forward-thinking employers that align with our values and priorities and are ripe for creative partnerships.
 - iv. Build strong occupational and work-based training tools and practices. To better engage businesses, we will develop employer-based training opportunities to support on-the-job training and apprenticeships.
- b. **Build processes and make programmatic decisions based on data, customer feedback, and established research.**
 - i. Gather employer, provider, and jobseeker feedback to support more robust and actionable program evaluation. To assess programmatic strengths, opportunities, and gaps, we will set quality assurance benchmarks and conduct regular evaluation. We will gather regular feedback to hear from the employers, providers, and job seekers that we serve.
 - ii. Strengthen the ability to track and influence WIOA common measures.

- iii. Synthesize disparate data sources into meaningful dashboards.
 - iv. Strengthen our programs to better meet user needs and outcomes. Drawing on our evaluation and assessment data, we will conduct ongoing program improvement to be more inclusive, accessible, and effective for our participants, including those with barriers to employment, and employers. We will work with our contracted providers to set clear goals and accountability measures, to support user-centered program improvement.
- c. Strengthen the integration, coordination, and accessibility of local workforce services.**
- i. Co-locate services within our one-stop centers and affiliated sites. We will increase physical proximity of career services, to reduce barriers and improve jobseekers' ability to access comprehensive service needs.
 - ii. Build the interest and capacity of service providers to make referrals and linkages. We will support service providers to assess job seekers' needs and make linkages to other career services, social services, and resources.
 - iii. Continue to build a network of partner organizations, including employers and labor unions, that meaningfully works together to improve the workforce development system. Partner4Work will develop relationships with and among employers and providers that together, support job seekers along the continuum of employment. To discourage silos and a fragmented system, we will design programs that encourage coordination with the broader ecosystem of providers, to better serve their shared participants. We will contract providers to work towards network-level outcomes in addition to individual outcomes.
 - iv. Seek strategic alignment with education, including the K-12 system. In an effort to increase student awareness of, interest in, and pursuit of career pathways in

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Partner4Work is committed to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within our organization and across regional employers, organizations, and partners. We envision a diverse workforce with equal opportunities and safe and inclusive work cultures for all people. To achieve this, we support our partners to set more equitable criteria and standards for employment, contracts, and business service activities.

To advance diversity, equity, and inclusion, we aspire to embody the following values throughout all of our work:

- Embrace change;
- Respect and value differences;
- Act with transparency and fairness; and
- Promote safe and respectful environments.

key industries, we will build stronger relationships with superintendents, training providers, and higher education. We will share key information with these decision-makers to pass to guidance counselors, teachers, parents, and students at scale. At the systems level, we will seek to align programming with PA Career and Work Standards and state-wide policies that pertain to career readiness in schools.

- v. Continue to build a strong employer network, particularly with Black-owned and women-owned providers and vendors, to support individuals on a career pathway.

d. Advance inclusive practices and meet the unique needs and characteristics of diverse customers and partner organizations.

- i. Equitably serve people of all backgrounds. We will gather data to measure the impact of our programs for subgroups of jobseekers, including single mothers, ensuring that Partner4Work’s program outcomes are true for all. Additionally, we will draft and publish a statement of inclusion that guides our programs.
- ii. Increase our presence and reach in communities with the highest needs. Drawing on Allegheny County’s Community Needs Index, we will identify and strengthen our presence in geographic areas experiencing high rates of poverty and unemployment.
- iii. Partner with providers to reach priority audiences and support pathways to target industries. With a goal of increasing accessibility to higher paying jobs for Black, brown, female, and other underrepresented youth, we will procure and contract providers who effectively serve priority audiences of youth and deliver services needed to complete career pathways in healthcare, technology, construction, manufacturing, and financial services.
- iv. Build and advance PACareerLink’s One-Stop System. We will establish more opportunities for adult, youth, and young adults to access PACareerLink services and position the system as a resource at any stage of a person’s career trajectory.

2. Convene and influence local leaders to support data-informed decision-making and fieldwide innovation. Leveraging our unique cross-sector position and expertise, we will convene community leaders to navigate challenges and build a shared agenda to support a more cohesive, effective, and sustainable workforce. We will elevate issues and practices to advance economic justice, job quality, and mobility. We will create and disseminate timely data, resources, and analyses to ensure the region is up to date on the latest trends and practices.

To accomplish this, we will:

- a. **Conduct research and analysis to track emerging trends and be the preeminent information source on regional workforce development.**

- i. Gather and document information from local communities, businesses, and policymakers related to current needs, challenges, and priorities.
 - ii. Follow regional and national trends related to economic and workforce needs, best practices, and innovative strategies.
 - b. **Inform and advise the region on emerging research, data, trends, and evidence-based practices.**
 - i. Convene stakeholders to share the latest data, tools, trends, and best practices. We will host events and panels to equip key stakeholders with the knowledge and data they need to make strategic decisions about the workforce.
 - ii. Increase output of written publications, reports, and infographics. We will develop and design informational resources to build the knowledge and capacity of the region.
 - iii. Increase the reach and readership of our published materials. Through traditional media, social media, and our networks, we will develop and disseminate relevant stories and data to inform our partners' strategies and programs.
 - c. **Influence cross-sector relationships and strategic collaboration in service of a more cohesive and effective workforce system.**
 - i. Create opportunities to support cross-sector learning, collaboration, and strategy. We will create spaces for partners across business, community, education, policy and beyond to come together to share their experiences, challenges, and align on opportunities for collaboration and coordination. We will partner and work collaboratively with experts in their fields, recognizing that strength comes from supporting others.
 - ii. Facilitate cross-sector employer interactions between key leadership and decision-makers. We will convene business leaders and policymakers on a regular basis to build a shared agenda and support a regional workforce development strategy.
 - iii. Engage providers, agencies, and institutions to align on cross-sector workforce development strategies. We will build relationships and understanding with universities, training providers, service providers, and youth and adult community programs to ensure that, collectively, we are taking an inclusive and holistic approach to building a coordinated workforce development system that meets the diverse needs of the many communities we serve.
- 3. **Expand our name recognition, credibility, and value proposition among our key partners.** We will position Partner4Work as the local authority on workforce development. Through communications and intentional relationship building we will clarify who we are and what we do. We will increase Partner4Work's visibility and ensure business and community agencies, institutions, leaders, and providers to understand how we can be a resource and trusted partner.

To accomplish this, we will:

- a. Create and implement a business-to-business communications strategy to generate brand recognition and understanding of our offerings and expertise.**
 - i. Develop messaging and service descriptions for key audience segments.
 - ii. Create assets and run a communications campaign.
 - iii. Increase media engagement among Partner4Work leaders to increase visibility and name recognition. By increasing name recognition and familiarity with Partner4Work's staff and board members, key stakeholders will gain familiarity with the faces and values of Partner4Work.

- b. Deepen our credibility among key partners.**
 - i. Elevate the outcomes and impact of our programs. We will elevate our impact and return on investment to build buy-in, credibility, and interest among key partners in collaborating with and learning from Partner4Work.
 - ii. Increase targeted outreach and regular communication with key leaders and decision-makers. By increasing our touchpoints with business executives, community leaders, policymakers, and philanthropic entities, we will deepen relationships and trust with key individuals. With persistent and consistent engagement in these strategic spheres of influence, Partner4Work will gain visibility as a critical partner, advisor, and resource for all efforts related to workforce development.
 - iii. Serve on local business and community boards. To claim a seat at the table, gain visibility, and have a voice in strategic discussion and decisions related to workforce development, we will strengthen our staff and board member representation on local and regional boards.

- c. Build the infrastructure and capacity to amplify our efforts and value to the field.**
 - i. Expand the communications team. We will expand our team capacity to support our communications and branding efforts.
 - ii. Increase board member confidence and capacity to represent and champion Partner4Work. Acknowledging it takes time to understand our work, we will provide support to board members to get to know our programs, services, and approach. We will create talking points and encourage board members to be engaged and active spokespeople within their networks and communities.
 - iii. Standardize and streamline internal processes, communication, and language to improve consistency and responsiveness to client needs. We will establish a clear internal process for communication and decision-making to ensure we respond to incoming requests and needs in a timely, efficient, and clear manner.

- 4. Bolster our organizational infrastructure to support innovative programs and sustainable impact.** Partner4Work has grown and changed significantly over the last few years. To continue to be a forward-thinking innovator in the space of workforce development, we will need the organizational people, structures, systems, and funding to do so. We will take measures to de-silo team structures, to support a more collaborative and motivating workplace. We will diversify our funding streams and continue to seek unrestricted funds that allow us the necessary sandbox to explore and innovate.

To accomplish this, we will:

a. Increase unrestricted funding.

- i. Explore a fee-for-service model. We have the opportunity to monetize our work with business, philanthropy, providers, and/or universities. We will explore avenues for a fee-for-service model, determining one or two avenues to explore further and potentially pilot.
- ii. Increase philanthropic financial support. We will deepen our relationships with local and regional philanthropy, including members of the Funders' Collaborative. Where we see shared goals and values, we will pursue strategic partnerships, funding opportunities, and grants to support new and innovative programming.
- iii. Explore a fundraising commitment for Partner4Work's board. By fundraising for the organization's most innovative ideas, Partner4Work's board of directors has the opportunity to accelerate efforts to increase unrestricted funding.

b. Bolster fiscal and programmatic integrity.

- i. Ensure increased compliance with funding guidelines. To build long-term confidence in Partner4Work, we will adopt policies and procedures that promote accountability to compliance standards and achieve a clean annual monitoring report.
- ii. Build system capacity to meet compliance standards. We will strengthen provider training opportunities to ensure organizations have the knowledge and skills to successfully meet rigorous funding requirements.
- iii. Revise contracts to clarify compliance requirements. We will review contract language and, where appropriate, adjust to reflect clear compliance requirements and accountability measures.

c. Become an exemplary employer in the region.

- i. Promote internal cross collaboration and communication. In an effort to break down silos, we will create cross-functional teams to tackle our strategic priorities, provide cross-training, establish internal communication norms, and improve our flex-work model.
- ii. Establish and operationalize Partner4Work's cultural values. Through a collaborative process, we will revisit our organizational values and explore the

ways in which we practice our values in our daily work. We will identify next steps on individual, team, and structural levels to increase alignment with our values to strengthen team connectedness and employee satisfaction.

- iii. Establish human resource policies that promote job quality and diversity, equity, and inclusion. We will work to remove unconscious bias in recruitment and hiring. More broadly, we will audit organizational practices to ensure they are welcoming to the diverse workforce we seek to attract and retain. We will establish clear policies regarding promotion and career advancement. We will explore ways to create supportive space for all team members, such as through employee resource groups.
- iv. Audit benefits and compensation on a regular basis. Retaining a talented team is imperative to Partner4Work's success. We will ensure that our benefits and compensation packages are competitive to similar roles in the region.

d. Build the team's capacity.

- i. Invest in professional development opportunities. We will leverage the talent on our team by providing staff members with opportunities to learn and strengthen skills.
- ii. Identify and fill gaps in staff capacity to meet regular workload needs and advance our strategic priorities. Based on critical needs and priorities, we will identify missing roles and under-resourced teams. We will promote, recruit, and hire for key roles to build a strong and effective team that has the capacity, skills, and support necessary to deliver on our key priorities.
- iii. Revisit our organizational structure. As our team grows and changes, we have an opportunity to revisit our internal structures. We will consider adjustments to our staffing model to optimize collaboration, effectiveness, and creativity.