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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**January 24, 2022 – Rockford, IL:** The Workforce Connection Board (TWC) today released modifications for its comprehensive local and regional workforce development strategic plan. The Workforce Connection Board is one of 22 local workforce boards established by the Governor of the State of Illinois pursuant to the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and its Board of Directors and Chief Elected Officials are made up of regional employers, educational institutions, economic development, public partners, and publicly elected officials, which guides the efforts of the organization and system.

Utilizing Federal, State, and donated funds, TWC provides a system for individuals to get employed with training and/or education, and works with employers to find skilled workers and access other services which support the retention, acquisition, and growth of talent in Boone, Stephenson, and Winnebago Counties. TWC is committed to providing a workforce that meets the needs of the business community. The plan was developed through a robust collaboration with business, economic development, education and workforce development stakeholders, and will align efforts across the Northern Stateline Economic Development Region which includes Boone, Winnebago, Stephenson and Ogle counties.

TWC leveraged its expertise and passion for workforce initiatives to develop a regional plan that fosters collaboration and ensures that training programs deliver value for employers and workers. The regional plan also meets a requirement of WIOA, which funds workforce development initiatives and aligns efforts with the State Unified Plan. Governor Pritzker's outlined goals for the State include uniting workforce development partners around regional strategies; preparing Illinois workers for a career, not just the next job; and connecting employers with the talent they need.

With the ongoing COVID-19 National Health Emergency and a continued effort to ensure workforce equity is addressed in all areas, TWC has made modifications to the data, strategies, and overall efforts identified in the 2020-2024 plans.

In modifying the regional plan, TWC first undertook a thorough economic and workforce analysis which identified the following regional workforce issues:

- Like many around the United States, the region has a declining and aging population.
- Women statistically exited the workforce at a higher rate than other demographics, and child care persists as a significant barrier for re-entrance into the workforce.
- The need for digital literacy and digital equity has been illuminated throughout the pandemic, as many schools, training providers, and workplaces made the shift to a remote or hybrid environment, leaving many in our region at a disadvantage.
- Statistics indicate a high level of working poor, with income disparities between African American households and other groups.

To address these workforce realities, the regional plan identified the following goals and strategies, aligned to the State's Unified Plan:

- Unite partners by developing a regional strategy centered around high-impact clusters and in-demand occupations. Industries targeted include manufacturing; health care & social assistance; transportation, logistics, and warehousing; leisure & hospitality; IT; agriculture; government; and educational services.
- Prepare the workforce for careers – not just their next job – by increasing apprenticeship opportunities; addressing training and employment barriers; and setting/supporting equity goals for post-secondary education and training.
- Provide digital literacy training to individuals and equitable access to technology needed to apply for jobs, telecommute, complete work training, and education.
- Connect career seekers with employers by shortening timeframes from credential to employment and integrating workforce services across program providers.

In addition to a regional plan, TWC developed a four-year local action plan to direct strategies and investments in Boone, Stephenson and Winnebago counties, which makes up its local workforce area. The local plan focuses on scaling education programs like GED, basic skills, Integrated Career and Preparation System (ICAPS) through local community colleges, Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, English as a Second Language and credentialing; providing career-seekers with Essential Workplace Skills training to meet regional employers' needs; marketing segments of the labor force such as mature, under-employed, and second chance workers; and rapid response activities for dislocated and laid off workers.

The strategic plan will be available for review and public comment until February 23, 2022 at [www.theworkforceconnection.org/2022-regional-and-local-workforce-plan-modifications/](http://www.theworkforceconnection.org/2022-regional-and-local-workforce-plan-modifications/). Comments can be submitted online or by e-mailing [publiccomment@theworkforceconnection.org](mailto:publiccomment@theworkforceconnection.org).

The updated plans will be presented to The Workforce Connection's Board and Chief Elected Officials for approval on March 1, after which time it is submitted to the Governor's office for review. Once approved by the State, the regional and local plan modifications would be effective July 1, 2022. For more information or a copy of the plans, please contact Amanda M. Sink, Strategic Initiatives Manager at (815) 395-6688 or [asink@theworkforceconnection.org](mailto:asink@theworkforceconnection.org).

### **About The Workforce Connection**

The Workforce Connection (TWC) Board is one of 22 local workforce boards established by the Governor of the State of Illinois pursuant to the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Utilizing Federal, State, and donated funds, TWC provides a system for individuals to get employed and also works with employers to find skilled workers and access other services, including education and training for their current workforce in Boone, Stephenson, and Winnebago Counties. TWC is committed to providing a workforce that meets the needs of the business community.

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