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# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## **Upper Savannah Workforce Development Board 2011-2016 STRATEGIC PLAN**



Prepared by  
Corporation for a Skilled Workforce





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## Introduction

Through the process of developing this comprehensive strategic plan, the Upper Savannah Workforce Development Board had the chance to connect with a number of this region's leadership and critical stakeholder groups. Connecting has led us to better understand the region's assets and resources as well as the workforce challenges we face.

Our strategic plan is intended to not only inform but also help mobilize the many resources to impact those challenges while simultaneously aligning our resources to directly provide training to our broad based workforce that will help meet the needs of our businesses. By doing so, we plan to help create a competitive workforce advantage that can compete and make us a region of choice.

The strategic plan is focused around five critical areas, with education as the foundation for all of the strategic priorities.

- 1. Sector Strategies**
- 2. Youth Development**
- 3. Skill Gaps**
- 4. Soft Skill Development**
- 5. One-Stop System**
- 6. Education as the Foundation**

These areas of focus will drive our agenda, our advocacy, and our plan of work.

We look forward to moving this agenda and plan of work forward with our partners and with the same leaders and stakeholders that helped with the valuable input to make this plan possible.



## Upper Savannah Workforce Brief Highlights

Part of developing the Upper Savannah five year strategic plan included conducting a thorough examination of the region's demographics, a description of its industries and sectors, and a description of the leading occupations, all of which determine the existing assets and resources as well as the challenges for the region. The following provides a quick snapshot of the analysis of that brief.

- **The decline of traditional industries and occupations poses a challenge for future growth.** Industry modeling shows that traditional goods producing industries, primarily in manufacturing, are declining. Other key industry trends include:

- ◆ Of the industries that have regional strength, jobs are declining rapidly.
  - ◆ Service providing industries comprise more jobs than goods producing industries in the region, and the gap is widening.
  - ◆ In 2001, approximately 4.6% of South Carolina's goods producing firms were located in the Upper Savannah region. Seven years later, this share dropped by 0.5%.
  - ◆ Though manufacturing still makes up a large share of total jobs (20%), this percentage dropped by 3.5% between 2002 and 2008.
- **The region faces current and future labor force quality challenges.** Employers rely on the knowledge and skills of the existing workforce to support their firms. Identifying gaps and comparing the regional concentration of knowledge and skills adds additional context and areas to build upon that knowledge. Occupational modeling revealed that significant knowledge and skill gaps exist between the top 20 occupations requiring more than a high school diploma and the fastest declining occupations in the Upper Savannah region. The top occupations require more customer and personal service, English language, and computer and electronics knowledge. Active listening, writing, judgment and decision making are examples of skills gaps between the declining and growing occupations. Other key trends include:
- ◆ Generally the region has knowledge concentration in science, manufacturing, liberal arts, and health, indicating the top occupations requiring more than a high school diploma have a solid foundation to build upon. This is particularly true for science knowledge, boding well for medical occupations, which are expected to grow in the Upper Savannah region. The region's particularly strong Biology knowledge is perhaps the result of the presence of the Greenwood Genetic Center.
  - ◆ The region scores high on technical skills, such as repairing, programming, and equipment maintenance, all necessary for manufacturing jobs.
  - ◆ Regional skill competencies reveal that the workforce is stronger than the national average in technical skills, especially repairing, programming, and equipment maintenance, all necessary for manufacturing jobs. Yet these skills are most prevalent in the declining occupations.
- **Barriers persist in transitioning skills and knowledge for the current and future workforce.** Critical demographic data can serve as indicators of how resilient the workforce is to changing industry demands. Investment into critical areas could support a skilled workforce. Key labor force trends in the region include:
- ◆ A population that is older, with lower educational attainment, and experiencing more poverty than the state and nation as a whole.

- ◆ Unemployment rate that is generally higher than state and national trends.
- ◆ A large potential workforce as labor force and employment numbers have decreased over the past 10 years.
- ◆ A future labor force (youth) that is impoverished and under-educated.
- **The capacity for the region to innovate lags behind South Carolina and the United States average.** Today's knowledge-based economy holds both challenges and opportunities for communities to turn new ideas into thriving jobs. Strategic investments can help the region become more competitive.



## Sectors Driving the Upper Savannah Economy

Part of our planning effort included the analysis of our region's demand generators and industry sectors that will drive our economy through new capital investment and job creation. The analysis was derived in part directly from the region's economic development organizations and through the analysis that went into creating the Upper Savannah Workforce Brief.

In addition, we were able to determine the top in-demand occupations that will support the region's sectors. These occupations were then mapped to the educational skills sets as outlined in the strategic plan appendix.

This information will prove beneficial to both secondary and post-secondary education and training institutions for creating and aligning their appropriate education and training curricula. If a student graduates and/or certifies with the proper credentials, then that student will have a better chance to meet the needs of the region's businesses for skilled employees.

### INDUSTRY SECTOR FOCUS

Often regional economies have a concentration or cluster of industries that serves as their economic base. Looking at major industry sectors offers information on where most of the jobs are in the region, and where efforts should be concentrated to aid transitions.

Occupational trend analysis can identify occupations that have potential to employ a greater number of individuals, pay well, and thrive in the future economy, as well as the skills and knowledge required to attain them.

The following categories represent the best potential to advance job creation and labor transitions in the Upper Savannah Region:

- **Transportation Equipment Manufacturing** (inclusive of automotive and aerospace)
  - **Bio Medical**
  - **Advanced materials** (inclusive of metal fabrication, machining, textiles, plastics, high end wood products)
  - **Agribusiness** (inclusive of food processing)
- Small Business** (The board will focus on small business development as a sector that can be grown and increase employment opportunity with the proper development of supporting assets and resources)



## Upper Savannah Workforce Board Five Year Strategic Plan: 2011 to 2016

The five strategies that are detailed in this plan are represented by the five blue circles, with education as the foundation supporting those strategies:

- 1. Sector Strategies:** Develop and implement sector partnerships as a way to effectively meet the needs of workers and employers in industries important to our region.
- 2. Youth Development:** Reach more youth under 16 years of age to help them to better understand career options, job opportunities, career navigation, and the foundational requirements for finding and keeping a job.
- 3. Fill Skills Gaps:** Identify gaps between specific skills possessed by the existing workforce and the skills required for existing and emerging sectors and develop both workforce and employer strategies to close the identified gaps.
- 4. Soft Skills Development:** Demonstrably improve the “soft skills” of the region’s emerging and existing workforce, as identified by employers’ retention rates.
- 5. One-Stop System:** Ensure the One Stop delivery system provides excellent and fully accessible services to both employers and job seekers.
- 6. Education as the Foundation:** Increase the educational attainment of the region’s youth and adults.

## Strategic Priorities

### Strategic Priority #1: Sector Strategies

#### Meet the workforce needs of the business community through regional sector strategies

Hundreds of regions across the nation are developing and implementing sector partnerships – often referred to as regionally targeted industry strategies – as strategic frameworks for workforce and economic development. The key characteristics of sector partnerships include focusing on an industry that is important to the regional economy; engaging firms in a “wholesale” manner, as multi-firm partnerships; serving regions that make sense to the industry based on labor sheds, supply chains, etc. (i.e. not based on geo-political boundaries); creating a public-private partnership; being demand-driven/industry-led; focusing on problem solutions, not programs; and understanding the critical role of an intermediary in aligning public resources and engaging employers.

**Goal #1: The Upper Savannah region will act as the intermediary/ convener to develop and implement at least two sector partnerships, beginning with manufacturing and then expanding to healthcare.**

### Strategic Priority #2: Youth Development

#### Help develop the region’s emerging workforce (youth) to be prepared for *both* higher education and careers

For many years, parents and the community at large have encouraged youth to attend college in order to qualify for a “good” job, irrespective of the course of study. Post-secondary success is an increasingly important goal, but there are several paths to attaining skills beyond high school, including apprenticeships and the military. Whether or not a graduate attends college, high school today is only preparatory to the regimen of life-long learning that must follow.

There cannot be “winners and losers;” all youth need to be winners coming out of our educational system. Basic skills are still key but youth need to be armed with up-to-date information in order to explore their options and make good choices for their future. The local community must be prepared to help guide the youth population and to involve the stakeholders that have both a vested interest in their own future as well as the future of our communities.

**Goal #1: The Upper Savannah region will reach more youth who are younger than 16 years of age to help them better understand career options, job opportunities, career navigation, and the foundational requirements for finding and keeping a job.**

**Goal #2: The Upper Savannah region will enhance its collaborative efforts between education and business to prepare more youth for careers in the skilled trades.**

### **Strategic Priority #3: Filling Our Region's Skills Gaps**

#### **Identify and fill the specific skills gaps that are identified by employers**

Even in times of high unemployment, many jobs go unfilled because employers cannot find workers with the skills they need. The tragedy of South Carolina's manufacturing jobs loss is that many semi-skilled workers are finding they do not have the skills to compete for jobs in high demand, known as "middle-skill" occupations. Many middle skill jobs, which require more than a high school education but less than a four year degree, are going unfilled because of the skills gaps that exist. These jobs are predicted to grow faster than high skill jobs at about 12.7%, compared to 7.8%. Middle-skill jobs are often high wage, such as jobs in health care, advanced manufacturing, or technology services. These are knowledge jobs, not blue collar jobs. The lost manufacturing jobs represented many of the traditional middle-skill jobs that offered family-supporting wages but did not require extensive education and training.

**Goal #1: The Upper Savannah region will identify gaps between specific skills possessed by the existing workforce and the skills required of existing and emerging sectors and develop both workforce and employer strategies to close the identified gaps**

### **Strategic Priority #4: Soft Skills Development**

#### **Increase the level of "soft skills" competence in the incumbent and emerging workforce**

For decades, employers have expressed frustration that new job entrants, as well as many existing employees, do not have the soft skills necessary to be effective and productive. These skills include work ethic related skills such as showing up on time, effectively relating to co-workers and supervisors, and dressing appropriately. But soft skills also include being able to solve problems, learning to think and perform in a team-based environment, thinking critically, communicating effectively, being flexible and adaptable, and perhaps most important, learning how to learn. As the nature of teaching and learning and knowledge acquisition are being transformed by fast-paced research and technology, and as the business environment gets ever more competitive, soft skills have become increasingly critical.

**Goal #1: The Upper Savannah region will have demonstrable improvement in the workforce population's soft skills, as identified by employer**

**feedback, and ultimately, the region's workforce retention rate**

**Goal #2: The Upper Savannah region will collaborate with the South Carolina Workforce Investment Board to develop soft skills training that can be used both virtually and in classroom settings**

**Goal #3: Increase buy-in to WorkKeys and WorkReady SC and the related certification system with both business and education.**

## **Strategic Priority #5: The Upper Savannah One Stop System**

**The Upper Savannah Region will ensure the One Stop delivery system provides excellent and fully accessible services to both employers and job seekers**

The Upper Savannah Workforce Development Board strongly believes that the One Stop system is the board's flagship product. Therefore the One Stop locations must be operated by a business model that is market driven. The One Stop system should provide measurable identifiers to the board, the community's stakeholders, and to the participants as to its success and to show that it is meeting market needs.

**Goal #1: The Upper Savannah Region will create a market driven One Stop system to serve the needs of business and job seekers**

## **Education as the Foundation**

**Increase the educational attainment of the region's youth and adults**

The Upper Savannah Workforce Development Board strongly believes that in order to have successful outcomes in any of our strategic priority areas we must strengthen our education system and increase the educational attainment of our region's youth and adults. Without a strong foundation of academic, technical, and soft skills, we recognize that our workforce cannot be competitive or earn family sustaining wages. Even in the most successful regions, South Carolina's earnings trail the rest of the country. To close that gap, the future prosperity of South Carolinians relies heavily upon further enhancing workers' education and skills. Workers with no post-secondary education or credential are finding it increasingly difficult to compete for jobs in high wage occupations. Additionally, as discussed previously, middle skill jobs are projected to grow at a rate 12.7% and present numerous opportunities for jobs that pay family sustaining wages in such fields as health care, advanced manufacturing, and technology services. Although the Workforce Board is certainly not positioned to directly influence the increase in educational attainment in our region, the board is committed to supporting our education partners in this goal in any way possible.

**Goal #1: The Upper Savannah region will promote the development of career pathways that support their sector partnerships in industries important to the region**

**Goal #2: The Upper Savannah Workforce Development Board will collaborate with its K-16 education partners to identify ways that the board and the business community can support the work of the schools, and to discuss what skills/competencies are needed in today's workplace.**



## **Closing Thoughts**

The intention of the Upper Savannah Workforce Development Board is to use this plan to build collaborative partnerships across the region that can work in parallel to make sure our region is viewed as the community of choice for people and businesses to call home. Through our network of public and private investment, we believe the plan described here is the catalyst to make sure that happens.





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