



**WAYNE COUNTY
WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT
STRATEGY 2024**



Letter from Strategy Leader

Dear Wayne County Community Stakeholders,

I am excited to share with you our WayneWorks workforce development strategy. This strategy is the result of a partnership with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government and community stakeholders who have come together to establish a process of creating learning opportunities for students and adult jobseekers to ensure that our community can provide an ongoing workforce pipeline for local business and industry. The process was led by a steering committee that included economic development, business and industry, and educational leadership who studied data, stakeholder input and a review of best practices from other rural communities to develop a tangible plan that we can implement and that will quickly make an impact in Wayne County. I would like to acknowledge our community sponsors who helped make this work possible: Wayne County Chamber of Commerce and Industrial Development Authority, Airco Industrial Services, Chemours, City of Jesup, City of Screven, Coastal Pines Technical College, Diversified Technical Solutions, EAM/Domtar, Georgia Power, Great Southern Wood Preserving, Healthy Pet, RYAM, Wayne County Board of Commissioners and Wayne County High School.

We are blessed to be located in the Best State for Business where Area Development Magazine has ranked Georgia #1 for the last 10 years! And workforce development success is one of the top factors that have helped our state come out on top. We have wonderful employers here that provide meaningful employment to jobseekers, and we desire to provide a talent pool to ensure success for them in the future. Workforce development is important in Wayne County as well as the rest of Georgia, affecting the future success and growth of our community, employers, workers and their families, and prospective business and industry.

We invite you, the community, to be a part of this strategy to ensure generations to come have the education and opportunities to remain in Wayne County and succeed in meaningful careers for both their employers and their families.

Sincerely,

Candee Harris

Economic Development Coordinator
Wayne County Industrial Development Authority



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Thank you to the project sponsors: Airco Industrial Services, Carl Vinson Institute of Government's Georgia Workforce and Economic Resilience Center, Chemours, City of Jesup, City of Screven, Diversified Technical Solutions, Inc., EAM/Domtar, Georgia Power, Great Southern Wood Preserving, Healthy Pet, RYAM, Wayne County Board of Commissioners, Wayne County Chamber of Commerce, Wayne County Industrial Development Authority.

Project facilitation, documentation, data analysis, and stakeholder engagement provided by Rebecca Hunt, Bennett Hardee, and Kristen Miller of the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government. Editing by Hannah Hussain. Project management provided by Candee Harris of the Wayne County Industrial Development Authority.

Project Overview

The Wayne County Industrial Development Authority has partnered with the UGA Carl Vinson Institute of Government to create and implement a community workforce development plan. The process to date has involved stakeholders from across the community, including leading educational partners and major employers, committing to steering committee meetings, site visits, and interviews to build evidence and develop an action-driven plan. Throughout late Winter and Spring of 2024, the Institute of Government team conducted industry tours/interviews, three separate community visits, and listening sessions with students, educators, and employers.

Community Visits

Three community visits in February and March 2024 to visit employers, engage with educational partners, and participate in steering committee meetings

Industry Tours/Interviews

Toured educational facilities and businesses to help assess the current state of the workforce pipeline and discover the most pressing needs of local employers

Listening Sessions

Gathered additional feedback through listening sessions with students, administrators and teachers at Wayne County High School, and both large and small businesses across the community

In addition to soliciting feedback from community stakeholders, the Institute of Government facilitated three steering committee meetings. These meetings were designed to (1) kick off the project, help the group understand the goals of the project, and share relevant data; (2) conduct an analysis of existing community assets and opportunities, along with risks to the process and the aspirations of the steering committee; and (3) determine the focus areas and identify action items within the the Wayne County Workforce Development Strategy. This work was primarily led by and would not have been possible without the commitment of the WayneWorks steering committee.

Members of the steering committee are listed below:

- Deena Bennett
- Raymond Brown
- Kristina DeLeGal
- Paul Drawdy
- Patrick Edwards
- Tonya Elium
- Nick Ellis
- Bill Freeman
- Sam Griffis
- Candee Harris
- Nick Harris
- Dell Keith
- Kara Lopez
- Shaun O'Quinn
- Matthew Parker
- Kelly Shanklin
- Pete Snell
- Chad Swanson
- Alan Volskay
- Jason Weaver

THE CASE FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Economic, Education, and Demographic Data

Workforce development is an increasingly key concern when developing plans for long-term community economic growth. As labor shortages made their way across the country following the COVID-19 pandemic, many companies scrambled to find talent and further develop their existing workforce pipelines. When companies look to new locations for facilities or headquarters, the availability of talent and labor costs are often two of the top factors for these decisions. However, workforce development efforts do not just benefit incoming companies, but can have a positive impact across communities in many different ways. For example, workforce development can help existing employers retain their employees and keep good jobs in your local community. It can also help local schools and technical colleges, as students have more chances to learn about career opportunities and build bonds with local companies through work-based learning and other exposure programs. It can help reconnect with out-of-work adults, or create awareness of resources to help workers build skills and gain experience. In total, workforce development can be a useful tool to strengthening your community across the board.

Why is workforce development specifically key for Wayne County? There are some notable considerations, including its strong industrial base, its robust educational partnerships, its growing workforce, and its current status as a commuter community.



Strong Industrial Base

Manufacturing has been a key industry in Wayne County for decades. In fact, it is the #1 source of private employment, providing over 1,400 jobs to residents in 2022. These jobs also often pay more than the median income, with average earnings reaching over \$86,000 annually. With large local manufacturers maintaining or growing their footprint, the importance of the industry and the associated jobs is likely to continue to grow moving forward. With proper attention, Wayne County can ensure that these employers offering premium wages and good careers continue to find the talent they need from local ranks.



Growing Workforce

In 2023, the Wayne County workforce was the largest it had ever been at 12,432 individuals in the labor force. This number is coupled with one of the lowest unemployment rates in local history at 3.5%. Wayne County is also expected to see its overall population increase by around 9% by 2050 and, unlike most counties in Georgia where population growth is driven largely by the elderly, the number of individuals in Wayne County under age 25 is expected to keep growing too. This indicates that, with proper planning and management of this growth, Wayne County employers should be able to tap into the workforce pipeline to reach a growing supply of young job seekers in the future.



Robust Educational Partnerships

Wayne County is fortunate to have two high-quality educational institutions in the community: Wayne County High School and Coastal Pines Technical College. These organizations collaborate with each other frequently and have helped reduce barriers for their students, such as free busing for students to be transported between the high school and technical college and a growing number of teacher certification & articulation agreements. From successfully leveraging partnerships with industry at WCHS to investing in new lab space for the welding program at Coastal Pines, both institutions have shown a commitment to providing students and local businesses the resources and instruction necessary to be successful. Continuing to invest in these programs and partnerships will only continue to strengthen Wayne County's workforce pipeline.



Community Commuters

While over 44% of Wayne County residents also work in the community, a large number of residents currently commute outside of the county and region for work. In fact, 9% of residents commuted to Chatham County for work, with another 6.4% traveling to Glynn. Together, these make up over 1,500 workers that could otherwise be working and furthering their careers in Wayne County. This indicates that, although job numbers are growing and at historical highs, more residents could be encouraged to remain in Wayne County and lend their talents to local employers in need of skilled and experienced workers.

Wayne County Workforce Development Strategy

VALUES AND FOCUS AREAS

In their first meeting, the steering committee spent time identifying values to guide the workforce development strategic planning process. These values will help direct the implementation of the strategy and decisions during the implementation phase. From here, the steering committee developed three primary focus areas and an assortment of short- and long-term action items that they determined would move the community forward on workforce development and ultimately work to bring full implementation of the Wayne County Workforce Development Strategy to fruition. Below are the values and focus areas developed by the steering committee.

VALUES

- Trust
- Partnerships
- Measurable
- Agile
- Collaboration
- Realistic
- Persistence
- Innovative

Focus Area 1
Adults &
Awareness

Focus Area 2
Youth & Young
Adults

Focus Area 3
Skills & Career
Readiness





FOCUS AREA 1: Adults & Awareness

Spread awareness about careers and create opportunities for adult job seekers to live and work in Wayne County.

Action Items

Short-Term (2024–2025)

- Continue to exhibit and increase marketing for WayneWorks Career Expo, bringing in more local employers and creating a comprehensive plan for outreach.
- Increase marketing for and establish the Coastal Pines Welding Competition as an outreach tool to workers seeking to reenter the job market with a message pushing the opportunities available for local job seekers in the skilled trades.
- Resume the Industry Roundtable group and designate a coordinating entity (i.e. IDA, CoC, WorkSource Wayne) to ensure small and large employers are on the same page and in the loop on workforce development activities.

Long-Term (2025+)

- Create an outreach program to adult job seekers facilitated by WayneWorks that highlights average/median salaries/wages, retirement/healthcare benefits, and opportunities for promotion at different local companies/businesses.
- Begin a “Stop the Commute” campaign to raise awareness about job opportunities in Wayne County and the benefits of working within the community, utilizing marketing tools such as billboards, car stickers, and other signage. Longer-term, Wayne County should explore options for creating a dedicated “Stop the Commute” website, which could serve as both a marketing tool and an exclusive job board. This process would involve meeting with website vendors and may require additional time to identify the requisite resources before launch.



FOCUS AREA 2: Youth & Young Adults

Strengthen the pipeline from local educational institutions to local employers to keep students and early career professionals in Wayne County.

Action Items

Short-Term (2024-2025)

- Ensure “This Girl Can” gets off the ground and continues as an annual or bi-annual event. This program introduces 8th-12th grade female students and an adult female partner to non-traditional female career opportunities such as engineering, welding, automotive and more.
- Highlight TCSG “commitments” in the Wayne County High School signing day event.
- Create a Chamber of Commerce youth/young adult “lunch & learn” on a consistent basis to reach out to employers, particularly industrial/manufacturing firms, to help educate them about Georgia’s “Under 18” work-based learning policy and other connections to local youth programs, such as student employment opportunities and industry tours run by the high school and/or Coastal Pines.

Long-Term (2025+)

- Create a “This Guy Can” event for careers underrepresented by men to correspond with “This Girl Can.” This program introduces 8th-12th grade male students and an adult male partner to non-traditional male career opportunities such as nursing/health, culinary and more.
- Utilize YouScience for tours and targeted awareness/outreach to students through increased data collection and matching interest/aptitudes with opportunities. Some opportunities include targeted outreach to students for WBL opportunities that match their aptitudes and industry tours marketed to students with displayed interest.

FOCUS AREA 3: Skills & Career Readiness



Create opportunities for Wayne County residents to build foundational skills and advance their careers through increased instruction and industry exploration.

Action Items

Short-Term (2024-2025)

- Market the Math & Welding Competitions run by Coastal Pines to the entire community. With the former being limited to youth and the latter open to both youth and adult job seekers, this is an opportunity to highlight different skillsets in need across the community.
- Continue to market and increase awareness among both employers and students/job seekers about the Apprenticeship Program at Coastal Pines Technical College, such as creating an outreach plan to local businesses and a strategic plan to increase the number of participating employers and apprentices over time.

Long-Term (2025+)

- Introduce Teacher Externship programs to WCHS and bring educators into local facilities to create connections to industry and bring awareness further into the classroom.
- Create a WayneWorks Career Bootcamp marketed to local high school seniors preparing to graduate. Bootcamp will begin shortly after graduation and will offer skills training and opportunities with local employers to prepare them for the workforce as quickly as possible.

Conclusion and Next Steps

In order for the Wayne County Workforce Development Strategy to succeed and materially strengthen the County's workforce pipeline, the work begun by the steering committee must continue. It is only through forming beneficial partnerships, engaging in collaborative action, and gathering sufficient resources that this strategy will make an impact upon full implementation. WayneWorks will continue to work as a team to bring in more representation and expertise from across the community and ensure that all partners have a say and a responsibility in putting this Strategy into work.

The implementation of the Wayne County Workforce Development Strategy will go into full effect in August 2024 and has been preceded by a substantial amount of data collection, deliberation, and decisions made by the steering committee with facilitation through the Institute of Government. The Institute of Government will remain a key partner through the beginning stages of the implementation phase, working to help build momentum, reflect changes to the strategy, and stay committed to making progress on each of the three major focus areas. The action items developed for these focus areas are designed to be completed in one to three years, with a mix of short- and longer-term goals to accomplish. This time frame was chosen in order to focus on solutions that address important needs right now while helping build the foundation for stronger partnerships to tackle future work. Upon completion of the action items in each focus area, the Institute of Government and the Wayne County Industrial Development Authority are committed to re-evaluate this process and determine other potential focus areas and related action items to pursue next. This will be an ongoing process that may see changes over time, highlighting the commitment of the Institute of Government to remain a planning and thought partner with Wayne County moving forward.

