

1. Project Description and Overview

A. Executive Summary

The Connecticut Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS) proposes the **Strengthening Sectoral Partnerships Initiative (SSPI)**, which progresses a flagship initiative of the Connecticut Governor’s Workforce Council (GWC): **Regional Sector Partnerships (RSPs)**. RSPs are coalitions of employers who define and champion an agenda for developing talent pipelines in target industries with support from a coordinated team of public partners in education, workforce development, and economic development, to collaboratively advance the industries’ competitiveness. The state’s ten RSPs are the organizing platform for Connecticut’s SSPI, the goal of which is two-fold: 1) To strengthen unique RSPs in each region, and the RSP network overall; and 2) To train and place over 2,000 people – particularly historically underserved populations, areas, and communities – in quality, in-demand jobs on career pathways in three priority sectors: Manufacturing, Information Technology (IT), and Healthcare.

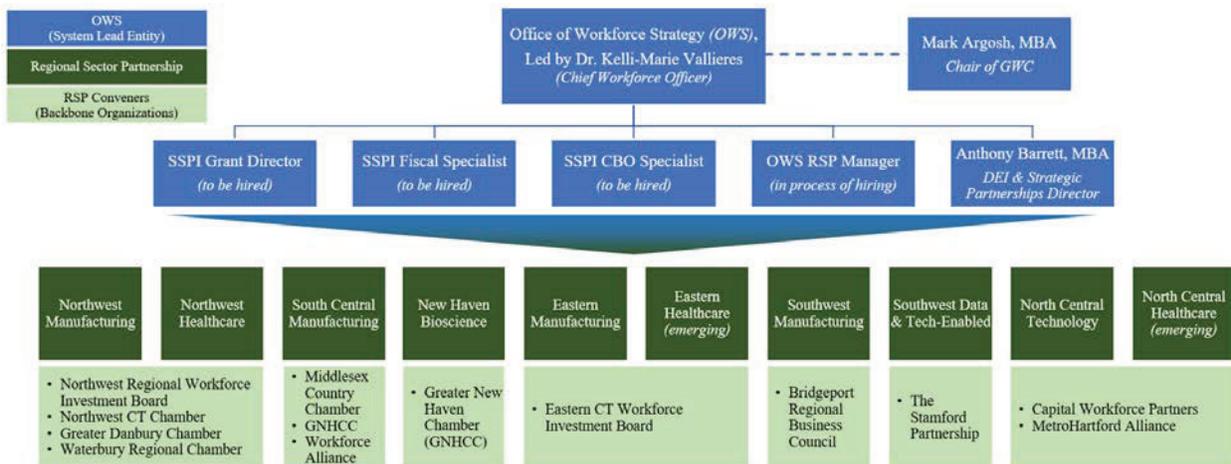
OWS supports the GWC in executing its *Workforce Strategic Plan 2020*, advises the Governor on workforce policy, and coordinates workforce-related activities across state agencies. OWS will also act as the SSPI System Lead Entity. The GWC Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee, overseen by OWS, will ensure that all SSPI programming promotes equity, engages with community-based organizations (CBOs), and pursues specific equity hiring goals.

EDA funds will leverage significant Connecticut investments and support all three RSP phases: 1) System development (statewide and regional capacity and systems); 2) Program design (employer engagement, curriculum development, training capacity); and 3) Program implementation (recruitment, assessment, remediation, support services, training, and job placement).

B. System Lead Entity and Backbone Organizations

To achieve the two SSPI goals (strengthen RSPs and train/place people into quality jobs), the SSPI will work at two levels: a) Statewide, with OWS as System Lead Entity; and b) regionally, where each RSP’s conveners will serve as Backbone Organizations responsible for their unique programming and deliverables (see Figure 1). OWS will coordinate the system of RSPs across the state to ensure minimal duplication and maximum alignment with the *Workforce Strategic Plan*.

Figure 1. Connecticut’s Regional Sector Partnerships System



About OWS: Governor Ned Lamont informally established OWS in September 2020, giving OWS broad authority over Connecticut’s workforce development system and dedicating staff to support the GWC. In July 2021, OWS was codified via Senate Bill 881, which also codified the Chief Workforce Officer (CWO) as the OWS agency head. The CWO serves as the “the principal advisor for workforce development policy, strategy and coordination to the Governor,” and liaison between the Governor, the GWC, and local, regional, state, and federal workforce stakeholders. CWO Kelli-Marie Vallieres will oversee the SSPI on behalf of the state. Dr. Vallieres: a) owns two manufacturing companies, where she served as President and CEO for 14 years; b) earned a doctorate in Education Leadership and Adult Learning; c) has served on the boards of the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board, Manufacturing Innovation Fund, Eastern Advanced Manufacturing Alliance, and Connecticut Manufacturers’ Collaborative; d) helped design the nationally-recognized Eastern CT Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative; and e) has combined her roles in industry and education to develop industry-recognized curricula and pathway programs.

Grant- and state-funded employees will support the SSPI, including three full-time grant-funded staff (Grant Director, Fiscal Specialist, and Community-Based Organization (CBO) Specialist) and two full-time state-funded staff (OWS RSP Manager (*in-process of hiring*), and DEI & Strategic Partnerships Director Anthony Barrett). Mr. Barrett has 20+ years of experience community organizing, and co-founded a non-profit that prepares underserved populations for STEM careers. GWC Chair Mark Argosh will provide high-level oversight. Mr. Argosh is now Executive Director of Social Venture Partners Connecticut; his career has included community organizing, leading CBOs focused on economic development in underserved communities, and financial sector consulting and executive leadership.

OWS will leverage a Connecticut Department of Administrative Services (DAS) team to support back-office function and capacity as it relates to SSPI. DAS support will include human resources administration, fiscal management, legal review, reporting support, and auditing procedures.

OWS, through the GWC, convenes the stakeholders necessary to develop a robust statewide workforce training system. Current GWC members include: 24 c-suite industry representatives, 10 state agency commissioners, 5 university presidents and other statewide higher education administrators, 5 organized labor leaders, 5 CBO directors, and 2 elected officials, among others (e.g., school superintendents, foundation presidents, graduates of training programs). The GWC also leverages a robust network of approximately 700 volunteers and industry experts.

OWS supports seven GWC committees charged with overseeing progress and providing continual feedback relative to the 19 initiatives outlined in the *Workforce Strategic Plan*. SSPI will specifically leverage and advance four of these initiatives: 1) *Regional Sector Partnerships*; 2) *Skills-Based Hiring & Training Systems*: Strategies that expand the talent pool while de-risking the hiring process through accelerated placement of qualified jobseekers; 3) *Career Pathways*: Career growth and advancement, including a well-articulated system of learning, training and job opportunities; and 4) *Sector-Based Training*: Strategies that address specific workforce shortages or skills mismatches that limit business profitability and growth, ensuring an equitable and inclusive workforce spanning all initiatives. The SSPI will leverage the following OWS initiatives:

- **CareerConneCT** – OWS’s flagship initiative investing \$70M in federal ARPA funds to foster collaborative partnerships to deliver statewide, short-term, training solutions aimed at getting approximately 8,400 individuals back to work. CareerConneCT targets those most affected by

the pandemic and those who have been historically underrepresented in the workforce. CareerConneCT will complement SSPI funding by supporting short-term training programs (i.e., less than three months), whereas SSPI will support a range of training programs and systems-building activities.

- **OWS State Bonding Priorities** – OWS was authorized \$40M in state bond funds during Connecticut’s 2021 legislative session. OWS plans to devote a portion of this funding to match SSPI investments by providing startup support for RSPs, expanding pre-hire job training programs, and providing funding for companies to invest in incumbent worker training.
- **GWC Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee** – Launched in October 2021 and consisting of representatives from over 50 workforce CBOs, the DEI Committee focuses on closing gaps, addressing barriers, providing tailored supports, and increasing workforce participation among the state’s most underserved populations: BIPOC, youth, re-entry, veterans, and persons with disabilities, as well as other sub-populations (e.g., homeless, food insecure, undocumented, women, and LGBTQ+). OWS plans to invest up to \$2M of its above state bonding funds to support SSPI-related priorities developed by the DEI Committee, guaranteeing that Connecticut’s RSPs are both industry-driven and equity-driven.
- **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Funding** – The SSPI will leverage \$34M of federal WIOA funding to ensure the American Job Center ecosystem provides job training, case management, recruitment, job placement, and career readiness support to individuals who qualify under WIOA specifications. These funding sources will support youth, adults, dislocated workers, and individuals with basic skills deficiencies.
- **Eastern CT Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI)** – The SSPI will replicate and scale lessons learned from the Eastern CT MPI, which has earned national recognition as a workforce development model, including the 2020 National Association of Workforce Boards Chair’s Award for Outstanding Achievement in Partnership “for demonstrating the value of collaboration by working together to advance the future of workforce development” through: a) industry assessments to identify promising candidates; b) industry-designed and validated training curriculum; and c) alignment to the immediate hiring needs of employer partners.

OWS roles related to RSP development and implementation include: a) championing the RSPs to stakeholders; b) brokering connections to private and public partners; c) partnering with a team of coaches responsible for capacity building, training and peer-to-peer learning across RSPs; d) curating resources for RSP success (such as the requested EDA funding); e) tracking and understanding common themes, needs and products from RSPs that can be scaled statewide; and f) making responsive shifts in state programs and policy to align with regional industry needs. The SSPI represents a foundational component of OWS’ plans to build a system of sustainable RSPs that impact jobseekers, companies, and regional economies within an accelerated timeframe.

About the RSPs: Each RSP is convened by regional organization(s) that provide backbone support (also referred to as “conveners”). Prior to RSP development, these backbone organizations, along with the target industries, were selected via transparent, regionally-driven processes that engaged regional teams of partners across various systems in the decision-making process. This was essential to building buy-in and support for RSPs as “shared tables” at which public partners understand and respond to industry needs with a coordinated approach. Each regional team jointly

made decisions about which organization(s) were best positioned to serve as neutral conveners, working on behalf of the region and targeted industry. Depending on the region and industry, RSP conveners aptly represent a mix of workforce development, chamber of commerce, and economic development organizations, reflecting the cross-systems emphasis of Connecticut's RSPs. Figure 1 (page 1) lists each RSP and its corresponding backbone organization(s).

Connecticut's 10 RSPs have convened **more than 250 stakeholders** including: ~175 employers and ~90 other organizations (See Table 1, Page 5). The attached memoranda of understanding (MOU) provide detailed information on each RSP's regional boundaries, history, membership, and strategic priorities, and describe commitments from OWS and each backbone organization to build on efforts to champion the development, expansion, and impact of sustainable RSPs through the SSPI. These MOUs also highlight each RSP's business champions, employer partners taking an outsized employer partner role in driving the agendas and advancing the needs of the industries.

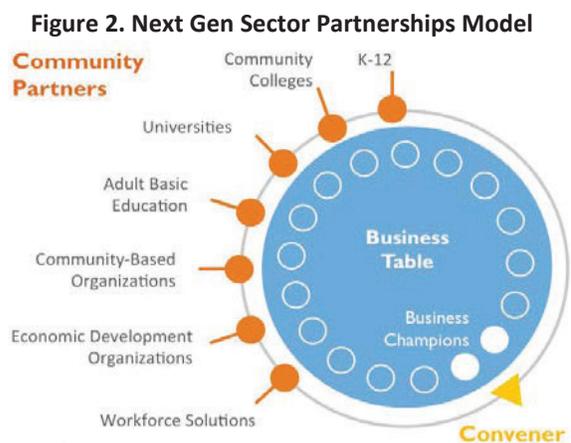
2. Employer Leadership & Commitments/Other Stakeholders and Partnerships

A. Employer Leadership & Commitments

Connecticut's RSPs utilize the industry-driven, community-supported [Next Gen Sector Partnerships](#) model, a style of sector partnership known for engaging not just the largest employers in a region, but also the small and mid-sized. Distinguishing features of the Next Gen model include: a) the agenda is driven *entirely* by business leaders who define the priorities, which ensures sustained (vs. transactional or time-limited) industry commitment; b) business leaders craft their own solutions and *personally* champion priorities (vs. providing input only), leading action teams that drive results, and; c) the partnership is supported by a coordinated team of partners representing regional workforce development, education, community-based, and economic development organizations who together respond to industry needs with an integrated approach. Therefore, the partnership serves as a coordinating body to respond to industry needs and build career pathways that connect people to jobs. Next Gen Partnerships primarily focus on the education and workforce training needs of an industry, but also on other issues related to an industry's competitiveness and ensuring broad and long-term engagement. An agenda that constantly adapts to the changing needs of industry is key to sustaining the partnership and the commitment of business leaders.

Next Gen Partnerships are active in 19 states across the country and have demonstrated impact along multiple dimensions: a) *For students, jobseekers and workers*: Increased/improved attainment of industry-relevant credentials, work-based learning opportunities, and job placement and quality; b) *For businesses*: Improvements in internal operations, reduced time-to-hire, shared costs, and new product lines, services, or markets; c) *For public programs and systems*: Reduced duplication and improved coordination; and d) *For regional economies and communities*: job creation, more local people hired to local jobs, companies retained and stabilized in the region, business investments in community projects, and improvements in social support systems like childcare and transportation.

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OWS is committed to the success and sustainability of the Next Gen Partnership model; industry-driven solutions are a pillar of the GWC *Workforce Strategic Plan*. During 2021-22, the state and private philanthropy invested nearly \$500,000 in technical assistance and coaching from national experts to help launch high-quality RSPs. OWS is dedicated to continuing to collaborate with the Next Gen team to coordinate socialization sessions with key stakeholders to rapidly expand RSP infrastructure across Connecticut, and has designated funding for a full-time RSP Manager to manage the existing, and facilitate the development of new, RSPs across the state.

Connecticut’s 10 RSPs (despite most launching in 2021), already boast 250 employer and industry association members. The attached MOUs list all current partners of each RSP. The attached letters from 50+ RSP employer partners include commitments to: a) share current and future skills needs with the RSP to inform training development; b) provide subject matter experts to advise curriculum development; c) recruit and hire from a diverse pool of applicants with a specific focus on underserved populations; d) utilize business resources to support RSP growth; e) support the recruitment of additional employer partners; f) participate in RSP meetings; g) help ensure participants with barriers to employment have access to needed wrap-around services h) refer promising applicants in need of skills upgrades to training programs; i) host work-based learning participants; j) sponsor registered apprentices; k) host company tours and demonstrations; and l) participate in mock interviews, panel discussions, and job fairs.

The letters also document commitments by employer partners to conditionally hire over 2,500 qualified participants. Specifically, OWS and the GWC have engaged several large employers including Electric Boat, Lockheed Martin, Yale New Haven Health, and Hartford HealthCare, who have collectively made hiring commitments for over 2,000 participants. These commitments align with the hiring needs of employers in SSPI target industries (See Section 3).

B. Other Stakeholders and Partnerships

Connecticut believes that the breadth of influential state and regional stakeholders, including the education, workforce training, and economic development partners all invested in workforce issues, enables long-term success and sustainability of the RSPs. Table 1 shows 84 non-employer stakeholder organizations who currently participate in the state’s RSPs, and delineates the roles of each stakeholder, as documented in the attached letters from 50+ non-employer partners.

Table 1. CT RSP Stakeholders/Partners with Roles and Responsibilities

Role/Responsibility	CT RSP Stakeholders/Partners by Type (# of partners in parenthesis)						
	CBO (13)	Workforce Board (5)	Gov’t Agency (3)	Chamber/Econ Dev (18)	Regional Council (4)	K-12 (16)	Higher Ed/ Training (25)
Attend RSP meetings	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
RSP coordination (Backbones)		✓		✓			
Recruit RSP members	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Training /curriculum development		✓				✓	✓
Assessment development		✓				✓	✓
Participant recruitment	✓	✓				✓	✓
Provide wrap-around services	✓	✓					
Deliver training	✓					✓	✓
Provide job placement support	✓	✓					✓
Collect participant data	✓	✓				✓	✓
RSP evaluation & improvement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Support RSP sustainability	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Connecticut's RSPs mobilize support and investment from critical non-employer support partners with a shared stake in the success of the target industry and on behalf of jobseekers in their communities. This requires significant coordination of resources and cultivation of relationships. Each RSP has a unique network of support partners, appropriate to the target industry and region, who plug in resources and expertise where needed. For example, regional entities of the following types are mobilized around the employers in each RSP: a) *Five regional workforce development boards (WDBs)* serve as backbone organizations for six of the 10 RSPs. WDBs bring a critical set of targeted programs (including 13 authorized and required WIOA programs), trainings, apprenticeships, special grants, and the statewide network of 18 American Job Centers – which typically serve 80,000+ residents each year – as a primary recruitment source, coordinator of training providers, and provider of wrap-around services, including job placement support; b) *The Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) 12 community colleges* (which served 67,000+ students during 2019-20 – more than half of whom were students of color), offers the ability to deliver both non-credit and credit industry-responsive training and scale effective offerings statewide to its role as a critical SSPI training provider; c) *Connecticut's 15 private colleges and universities*; d) *The state's 17 Technical Education and Career schools*; and e) An array of chambers of commerce, business councils, economic development organizations, and Councils of Government.

The SSPI will leverage a range of state, regional, and local investments to augment an EDA award, including: a) the \$70M CareerConneCT program; b) \$40M in State bond funding; and c) \$34M in federal WIOA funding (See pages 2 and 3).

3. Regional Description

The SSPI includes 10 RSPs across three priority sectors and the state's five economic regions. These sectors, even in a state as small as Connecticut, do not all look the same across the state's distinct economic regions. For more detailed information on each of the state's RSPs, including a brief history, list of partners and strategic priorities, please refer to the attached MOUs.

Connecticut's RSPs currently target three critical industry sectors, the same sectors identified in the *GWC Workforce Strategic Plan* as projected to experience an annual statewide staffing shortage of 26,000+ qualified employees: Manufacturing (6,000), Healthcare (7,000), and IT/Business Services (13,000). Research affirms that “70 percent of Connecticut's working-age adults should have some form of postsecondary work credential by 2025 if we are to meet the needs of our modernizing economy,” and notes “several [industry-specific] trends accelerating the need for reskilling and upskilling the workforce,” including: Manufacturing – an aging workforce and a historic increase in defense contracts; Healthcare – a rapidly aging population and aggressive competition for both employees and patients; and IT/Business – emerging roles required to keep pace with business innovation, inability to retain college graduates in-state, and need for incumbent workers to enhance their digital skills consistent with evolving business services jobs.¹

Connecticut's economy has rebounded from the pandemic, but several indicators show room for continued growth: a) The unemployment rate increased from 3.7% in February 2020 to 6.4% in October 2021²; b) The labor force participation rate declined from 66.5% in February 2020 to 63.0% in October 2021³; c) Economic output in Connecticut contracted 4.1% in 2020, compared

¹ [DECD Manufacturing Innovation Fund 2021 Annual Report](#)

² U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

³ CT Department of Labor, Office of Research. [Help Wanted Online Data](#)

with a nationwide pullback of 3.5%⁴; and d) The 38% of the state's households with income below what was needed to pay for basic necessities before the pandemic fared far worse in the pandemic than those of higher-income.⁵

Connecticut employers, particularly those in priority industries, have found it increasingly difficult to hire the skilled workers they need. For example: a) During the week ending December 18, 2021, there were 9,040 new job postings in the state, an increase of 134% compared to the same week in 2020, with far and away the most new postings in healthcare and social assistance⁶; b) The job openings rate in Connecticut increased 50% from October 2020 to October 2021⁷; c) Annual demand for new healthcare workers exceeds 7,000, with major shortages in nursing, nursing assistants, skilled technician roles, and long-term and home health care; d) According to a 2021 survey of Connecticut manufacturers, 88% report difficulty finding and/or retaining workers, with skills shortages cited as the main reason for difficulty finding workers; 41% call the labor shortage their main obstacle to growth⁸; and e) The CT Department of Labor (CTDOL) Office of Research reports that, "Employees with critical IT skills are particularly hard to come by."⁹

Workforce supply and demand data suggest that effective large-scale, sector-based training interventions present a massive opportunity to connect the many workers considering new careers to high-quality jobs on career pathways in priority industries. On the supply side, the rate at which Connecticut workers are quitting their jobs has reached historic highs: In late 2021, more than 40,000 people quit their jobs in each of three consecutive months – a first in the past decade.¹⁰

On the demand side, major Connecticut employers have large long-term hiring needs, and are engaged in statewide and regional workforce training efforts to meet those needs. For example: a) Electric Boat (EB) plans to hire 15,000 workers by 2030, with corresponding growth among its nearly 450 suppliers statewide. EB is the anchor employer in the Eastern Manufacturing RSP, having hired 1,300+ workers through the RSP since 2016; b) Infosys has pledged to create 1,000 technology jobs in Connecticut. Infosys participates in the North Central Technology RSP, and Infosys President Ravi Kumar chairs the GWC Career & Education Committee; c) The two largest private-sector employers in the state, Yale New Haven Health System (YNHHS) and Hartford HealthCare (HHC), consistently rank among those employers with the highest statewide job openings.¹¹ The CEOs of YNHHS and HHC serve on the GWC. The attached employer letters document the commitments of these and many other employers to hiring SSPI participants.

The SSPI aligns with the priorities of Connecticut's regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS). To give two examples: a) The Southeastern Connecticut CEDS includes goals to prioritize investment in growing industry sectors and to practice demand-driven workforce development¹²; and b) The MetroCOG CEDS prioritizes addressing "substantial labor shortages, particularly within...target industry clusters" including healthcare and manufacturing.¹³

⁴ CT Voices for Children, [The State of Working CT](#), September 2021

⁵ CT United Way, [2020 ALICE Report](#)

⁶ Ibid

⁷ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, [State Job Openings and Labor Turnover Data](#), December 17, 2021

⁸ CT Business and Industry Association, [2021 CT Manufacturing Report](#)

⁹ Source: <https://www1.ctdol.state.ct.us/lmi/sectors/information.asp>

¹⁰ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

¹¹ CT Department of Labor, Office of Research. [Help Wanted Online Data](#)

¹² Source: <https://www.secter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CEDS-for-website.pdf>

¹³ Source: MetroCOG website: <https://ctmetro.org/>

4. Impacts of the Regional Workforce Training System

A. Project Components

The SSPI will include all three Good Jobs Challenge components: system development, program design, and program implementation, in an effort to together tackle Connecticut's main workforce challenges as defined by the *Workforce Strategic Plan*: a) 70% of the state's working-age adults should have a post-secondary credential by 2025 if the state is to meet the needs of the modernizing economy; b) Several priority sectors are experiencing large-scale statewide staffing shortages; and c) Many residents from historically marginalized populations face significant barriers to securing a quality job on a career pathway. Below are a few high-level proposed projects that will be undertaken in SSPI to simultaneously address local employers and job seekers' needs:

- **Solidify each RSP's role as a pillar of the regional workforce system.** Bolster active RSPs (which engage 250 stakeholders) to deepen industry engagement, strengthen public partner teams, and position RSPs as the go-to forum for the targeted industry via RSP websites and communications materials.
- **Understand critical occupations, skills, and high-demand credentials.** RSPs address disconnects between high-demand skills and available training by engaging employers, conducting skills gap analyses, and reviewing data to understand high-demand skills in their industry and thereafter build industry-driven pathways into employment.
- **Deeper engagement of community-based partners.** SSPI funding will support regional teams in garnering support from partners rooted in underserved communities to ensure that workforce solutions promote equity and access for underserved and historically marginalized populations. OWS will hire a full-time CBO Specialist to coordinate this work.
- **Promote careers in the industry.** All RSPs have identified a need to increase awareness of career pathways existing within their industries and to specifically market high-demand SSPI programs, with a focus on reaching historically marginalized populations to promote equity.
- **Provide demand-driven training.** All system development and program design activities serve the purpose of informing the development and delivery of accessible, demand-driven training programs that prepare workers – including those with barriers to training and employment – for immediate, quality job opportunities on pathways to family-wage careers.

Connecticut's investments in the Next Gen model over the past two years has laid the foundation to efficiently and successfully accomplish SSPI programming. Section 4.d (pages 11 and 12) provides detail regarding Connecticut's, and specifically OWS's, history of success in tackling these problems, further evidence for the viability of SSPI goals. Section 5.b. (pages 13-15) summarizes the major activities to be implemented by each RSP in each phase, based on their customized needs, in more detail, as do the Budget Narrative and MOUs.

B. Alignment with EDA Investment Priorities

The SSPI meets EDA's *Recovery and Resilience investment priority* by building a workforce that increases Connecticut's economic resilience to, and long-term recovery from, economic shocks. The proposed project will re-train (mostly low-wage) workers from industries that have been most-impacted by the pandemic (e.g., leisure and hospitality) for higher-wage jobs in priority industries identified in the *GWC Strategic Plan* that promote economic resilience.

- **Information Technology.** The pandemic has illustrated the benefits of developing a larger, more highly-skilled IT workforce. The transition to a largely remote economy promises to endure well beyond the pandemic, meaning that disaster-proof IT job opportunities will continue to grow and regions with strong IT sectors will be more resilient to future economic disruptions.
- **Healthcare.** The need for workers with traditional and new healthcare skills has increased, but employers struggle to meet their workforce needs due to the aging healthcare workforce, frontline worker burnout, workers' reluctance to enter the healthcare workforce during the pandemic, and a lack of skilled replacement workers.
- **Manufacturing.** Manufacturing has long been an economic engine in Connecticut. As noted in Section 3, the state's manufacturing industry is primed to continue its pre-pandemic expansion if employers can access the skilled workers they need. A strong manufacturing sector will prop up and diversify the state economy while giving the state an increased ability to produce supplies that may be needed during a disaster. Manufacturing in Connecticut takes on greater significance due to the state's concentration of defense OEMs and suppliers.¹⁴

The SSPI also meets several **additional EDA investment priorities**:

- **Equity.** Equity represents a primary driver of all GWC and OWS activities. For example: a) To ensure an equity lens in implementation of all *Workforce Strategic Plan* activities, the GWC created a DEI Committee with 50+ members from non-profits and CBOs (including paid community members with lived experience), each of whom sits on one of five sub-committees: BIPOC, youth, re-entry, veterans, and persons with disabilities; b) The GWC Equity & Access Committee focuses on systems changes that remove barriers to workforce participation; c) OWS hired a full-time DEI & Strategic Partnership Director in November 2021 to ensure that all OWS initiatives properly address and incorporate DEI in their goals and objectives; d) OWS will hire an SSPI CBO Specialist focused entirely on building capacity with CBOs; and e) All workforce training proposals funded by Connecticut's \$70 million ARPA program must, according to OWS's request for proposals, "provide tailored solutions to upskill or reskill those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and to increase the workforce participation of specific populations that have been historically marginalized." The CBO Specialist and GWC DEI Committee **will ensure each RSP is not only industry-driven, but also equity-driven**, with each job training program establishing and progressing towards a specific equity hiring goal (See Table 2 on page 10). See Section 4.e. for more information on how the SSPI will reach and successfully serve underserved populations, and Section 5.c. for a description of proven strategies the SSPI will use to address barriers to employment.
- **Workforce Development.** SSPI is, at its core, a demand-driven workforce project directly connected to the needs of the business community that will result in well-paying, quality jobs.

C. Jobs Available to Participants

The SSPI will place 2,000+ workers who successfully complete training into jobs on high-quality career pathways. The SSPI will accomplish this through 10 RSPs that leverage relationships with partners, including: a) Employers, who will share skills and hiring needs to inform training

¹⁴ Connecticut ranks 6th among the 50 states in terms of total defense spending per capita as a share of real Gross State Product per capita (Source: Pew Charitable Trusts calculations using data from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Annual State Personal Income and Employment, "Personal Current Transfer Receipts (SA35),")

program curriculum development, refer promising candidates, interview and hire participants, and provide work-based learning and on-the-job training opportunities; b) Regional WDBs, who will provide case management services and match trainees with employer partners; c) Education and training providers, who will work to ensure curricula include in-demand skills and coordinate career exploration and job placement events; and d) CBOs, who will provide training and wrap-around services to address barriers to employment and ensure equitable outcomes.

SSPI training programs promise to produce high placement rates thanks to an evidence-based, demand-driven design that effectively aligns the labor supply with the employer demand to prepare workers for jobs at which known vacancies exist. OWS will (with support from CTDOL and other workforce data sources) provide real-time labor market information to RSPs to supplement the skills and hiring needs shared by employer partners that inform training development and delivery.

Table 2 shows SSPI projections for the number of people placed in quality jobs with a demographic breakdown. These projections are based on hiring commitments from 20+ employer partners, the historical performance of the SSPI’s program model, economic forecasts, and publicly-available information about the long-term hiring needs of major employers in RSP target industries.

Table 2. SSPI Job Placement and Wage Outcome Projections with Target Demographic Breakdown

Industry	# Placements ¹⁵	Avg. Entry Wage ¹⁶	Avg Wage Gains ¹⁷	Target Demographic Breakdown	
				% Historically Marginalized	Includes the state’s most underrepresented populations: BIPOC, youth, re-entry, veterans, and persons with disabilities, as well as other sub-populations (e.g., homeless, food insecure, undocumented, and LGBTQ+).
Manufacturing	841 (90%)	\$17.21	32%	80%	
Healthcare	677 (90%)	\$17.95	38%	80%	
IT/Data	916 (70%)	\$20.00	54%	80%	
Total	2,433 (81%)			80%	

Table 3 lists several jobs for which SSPI employer partners are committed to hiring, along with regional employment size and historical growth rates for each occupation. This excerpt is part of a larger analysis generated by OWS and validated by RSP partners to inform the training programs included in the SSPI and ensure alignment with employer needs.

Table 3. Excerpt of SSPI in-Demand Analysis Performed During Initiative Planning¹⁸

Region	Industry	Entry / Mid-Level Role	Employment Base		Growth	
			2016	2020	#	%
Capital	Healthcare	Home Health and Personal Care Aides	8,240	10,860	2,620	31.8%
Capital	Healthcare	Pharmacy Technicians	1,000	1,200	200	20.0%
Capital	Healthcare	Nursing Assistants	6,490	7,160	670	10.3%
Northwest	Manufacturing	Miscellaneous Assemblers and Fabricators	1,630	2,110	480	29.4%
South Central	Manufacturing	Machinists	1,400	1,780	380	27.1%
Southwest	Manufacturing	Machine Tool Setters, Operators, and Tenders	270	510	240	88.9%
Southwest	Data & Tech	Computer User Support Specialists	1,530	1,770	240	15.7%
Southwest	Data & Tech	Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists	2,580	3,330	750	29.1%

¹⁵ Assumptions are based on both historical placement rates for similar Connecticut workforce training programs in conjunction with strong hiring commitments made by employers in the Manufacturing and Healthcare space.

¹⁶ Source: <https://www1.ctdol.state.ct.us/lmi/wages/statewide2021.asp> (Q1 2021 average wages for related entry-level roles).

¹⁷ Based on Avg. Entry Wage (annualized) in comparison to Connecticut’s current \$13.00 minimum wage (annualized). Wage gains are likely even higher for those who were unemployed or working part-time prior to training for these entry-level roles.

¹⁸ Source: <https://www1.ctdol.state.ct.us/lmi/wages/>

D. Evidence of Achievability

Connecticut believes several factors indicate a high likelihood that the proposed partnerships and systems, as well as the participation and job placement outcome forecasts, are achievable.

First, the RSPs represent the flagship initiative of the GWC *Workforce Strategic Plan 2020*, described within as “the core leadership organizations for building a business led workforce agenda that provides for effective alignment of business needs, education and training programs and other supportive services in pursuit of an effective, inclusive workforce system.” Governor Ned Lamont is personally invested in the success of the RSPs (see quote at right), OWS and private philanthropy have invested over \$500,000 to launch the RSPs, and OWS has budgeted for future supports through both the use of state bonding dollars and by hiring an RSP Manager with state funds to help sustain the RSPs during and after the EDA grant period.

“Connecticut’s regional sector partnerships will create new career pathways for thousands of good-paying jobs that are currently available in IT, advanced manufacturing, and other industries in the state. By upskilling and reskilling our residents, we can prepare them to capitalize on these great jobs to fuel growth in the Connecticut economy now and well into the future.”
- Governor Ned Lamont, July 21, 2021

Second, all Connecticut RSPs utilize the Next Gen Sector Partnership model, which has successfully built sustainable, industry-led RSPs in more than 75 regions nationwide. See Section 2.a. (page 4) and the attached Next Gen letter for evidence of the effectiveness of this model.

Third, Connecticut’s RSPs have already engaged 250+ members. Over 100 of these partners have submitted letters of support expressing their commitment to the RSP process and the SSPI. EDA funding will help the RSPs continue to expand this already broad-based support.

Fourth, OWS will leverage the home-grown Eastern CT Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI) as a program prototype. The MPI has proven effective in achieving EDA’s goal for the Good Jobs Challenge: “building training programs that meet the existing and emerging skills needs of employers and that help workers enter quality jobs and advance along their chosen career path.” Since 2016, the MPI has placed 2,000+ people (80% with no manufacturing experience) into employment at more than 250 different employers, including 92% of training completers. A national evaluation firm found that in MPI’s demand-driven model, “employers were the driving force behind the MPI initiative,” and employer partners had high satisfaction levels.¹⁹ Electric Boat (EB), which has hired 1,300+ workers through the MPI, found that attrition rates for its early MPI hires were 50% lower than for workers hired via traditional channels, and EB reports it now relies on MPI as a key component of its hiring strategy. SSPI employer partners in each RSP will similarly benefit from receiving access to quality candidates in a timely manner.

Fifth, programs that utilize sectoral approaches to solve workforce challenges (e.g., Year Up, Project Quest) show strong evidence of effectiveness, with outcomes including increased quarterly earnings²⁰, degree and credential attainment²¹, and mid-level job placement rates²². In 2020 and 2021, OWS and several backbone organizations successfully coordinated the execution of over 20

¹⁹ Public Policy Associates, Inc., “Eastern CT Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative Final Evaluation Report,” September 30, 2019. Pages 42 and 47.

²⁰ MDR, [Sector Strategies for Success: Meeting the Needs of Workers and Employers](#), November 2020

²¹ The Annie E. Casey Foundation, [Embracing Sector Strategies: Workforce Boards Share Lessons](#), May 2017

²² Brookings Institution, [Do sectoral training programs work? What the evidence...](#), January 2022

sector-based, short-term training programs through two rounds of federal CARES Act funding. These programs trained over 1,300 individuals across high-demand sectors and leveraged best practices (e.g., recruitment, assessment, case management, supportive services such as childcare and transportation, and job placement support) to achieve a 95% completion rate and over 60% job placement rate. Seventy percent of participants trained were from historically underrepresented communities and over 85% of participants qualified as low-income. Key learnings from these programs will inform SSPI training programs to be developed by the RSPs.

Finally, strong employer hiring needs bode well for the achievement of SSPI job placement forecasts. Section 3 includes evidence of demand for skilled workers in the RSP regions and sectors, as well as specific employer partner hiring needs. The attached employer letters include SSPI employer partner commitments to hire 2,000+ participants.

E. Target Population

The SSPI will serve nearly 3,000 residents from across the state, with a focus on historically underserved populations, low-income people who benefit from federal and state programs (e.g., SNAP, TANF, WIC) and other populations with barriers to training and employment.

The SSPI will leverage four resources dedicated to engaging members of underserved populations in Connecticut's workforce system: a) A full-time, to-be-hired CBO Specialist, focused on engaging with and enhancing the capacity of CBOs; b) OWS's existing, full-time DEI & Strategic Partnerships Director, who will ensure all initiatives properly address DEI and reach underserved populations; c) The \$70M OWS CareerConneCT program (See Section 1.b.) includes an \$800,000 statewide marketing campaign to raise awareness of ARPA training opportunities among underserved populations, including through the engagement of key champions (e.g., faith leaders) in underserved communities; and d) Connecticut's five regional WDBs (backbone organizations for 6/10 RSPs) recently received a \$2.53 million USDOL Dislocated Worker Grant that features "statewide, regional, and local outreach campaigns to increase awareness of workforce system services among marginalized populations."

5. Funding Request and Program Design and Implementation

A. Estimated Funding Request

Table 4 (next page) summarizes the OWS SSPI funding request, broken out by RSP and phase. Several factors justify the budget request, including: a) broad statewide reach; b) a high number of RSPs across three industries; c) promotion of customized budgets for all three phases of each RSP; d) projected number of job placements (2,000+); e) leveraging of significant prior investments in the launch of the RSPs; and f) leveraging of \$1.4 million in future cash and in-kind contributions from partners (exclusive of OWS CareerConneCT or state bonding dollars). See the Budget Narrative and attached letters for details on the funding request and leverage commitments, respectively.

Table 4. SSPI Funding Request – Broken Out by RSP and Phase

Awardee	Staffing	System	Program	Program	Indirect	Total	Individuals Trained			
		Development	Design	Implementation			Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Office of Workforce Strategy	\$1,500,000				\$150,000	\$1,650,000				
Northwest Manufacturing	524,483	50,000	222,500	1,500,000	46,464	2,343,447	20	50	80	150
Northwest Healthcare	526,583	50,000	315,000	1,687,500	51,979	2,631,062	50	75	100	225
South Central Manufacturing	512,741	50,000	290,000	1,190,000	65,149	2,107,891	21	52	72	145
New Haven Bioscience	358,500	50,000	195,000	1,355,000	60,350	2,018,850	16	30	50	96
Eastern Manufacturing	86,265	21,000	433,051	1,248,831	157,445	1,946,592	138	158	178	474
Eastern Healthcare	151,230	21,000	539,283	1,270,377	174,406	2,156,297	34	87	140	261
Southwest Manufacturing	445,500	50,000	330,000	1,538,800	82,550	2,446,850	55	55	55	165
Southwest Data & Tech	586,500	50,000	170,000	1,675,000	80,650	2,562,150	236	390	542	1,168
North Central Technology	485,762	50,000	163,500	1,820,000	80,269	2,599,531	25	58	58	140
North Central Healthcare	485,762	50,000	153,750	2,193,000	85,260	2,967,773	25	75	70	170
Total	\$5,663,327	\$442,000	\$2,812,084	\$15,478,508	\$1,034,523	\$25,430,442	620	1,030	1,345	2,994

OWS will oversee the tracking of program implementation metrics by each RSP. An OWS Grant Director and Fiscal Specialist will support sub-awardees as they collect, track, and analyze performance data, including demographic data to track performance relative to each RSP's equity goals. Each backbone organization will hire or assign staff to collect performance data, including participant demographics, from RSP partners responsible for participant outcomes (e.g., enrollment, completion, job placement), and will report this data to OWS. OWS will track post-exit employment outcomes (e.g., job placement, wages, wage growth, worker retention) using access to the State wage file through an agreement with CTDOL.

OWS prioritizes performance management, as “accountability and data management” represents one of the four overarching strategies of the GWC *Workforce Strategic Plan 2020*, and the GWC Data & Performance Sub-Committee supports OWS to enhance the State workforce performance management platform. OWS will leverage already-developed performance management tools and best practices from its CARES Act and CareerConneCT programming.

B. Anticipated Projects

The bullets below summarize several planned projects that align with each RSP's current stage, regional landscape, and industry needs, and connect to the funding request (Table 4 above). The Budget Narrative contains further detail on project budgets, including funding for wrap-around services to address barriers to participation, particularly for underserved populations.

- ***Northwest Manufacturing RSP (NM-RSP)***: Launched in February 2021, the NM-RSP business leadership team has outlined the following strategic priorities and anticipated projects: a) Host events to engage additional partners and to increase awareness of manufacturing education and career pathways among youth; b) Work with subject matter experts to enhance and/or develop curricula to better meet the in-demand skills identified by employers and adapt to the growing use of emerging technologies; and c) Expand training delivery for entry-level, in-demand roles (e.g., Machine Operators, Assemblers). Danbury Community Action Agency and the local sites of Cities Alliance will help recruit participants from historically marginalized populations.
- ***Northwest Healthcare RSP (NH-RSP)***: The NH-RSP initial launch meeting will occur in Q1 2022. NH-RSP conveners have worked with OWS, healthcare industry consultants, and Next Gen consultants to develop preliminary goals and SSPI projects to address those goals. The NH-RSP plans to: a) Engage new partners, particularly smaller workforce non-profits and CBOs, to support diversity and equity planning; b) Utilize subject matter experts and educators to enhance the existing training programs, with a focus on ensuring improved consistency and transferability among entry-level healthcare roles to address racial inequities in the healthcare workforce by promoting upward mobility for minority populations; and c) Support training for

entry-level, in-demand roles to ease unprecedented healthcare staffing shortages.

- *South Central Manufacturing RSP (SCM-RSP)*: Launched in March 2021, the SCM-RSP plans to expand the successful *Skill Up for Manufacturing* program (which replicates the Eastern CT MPI) via a partnership with the Manufacturing and Technical Community Hub (MATCH). MATCH will build new training facilities in two low-income, majority-minority communities to significantly reduce transportation barriers for community members. The SCM-RSP and MATCH are actively pursuing additional funds to leverage for rent payments and equipment purchases, as well as tuition and wrap-around support funding for participants (many of which will be available on site), securing soft commitments of \$200k+ to date.
- *New Haven Bioscience RSP (NHB-RSP)*: The NHB-RSP will focus on developing BioLaunchCT, which offers high school graduates and GED holders an opportunity to prepare for lab support roles through four months of training followed by two months of work-based learning, creating a unique on ramp to a Bioscience career path without the typically-required bachelor's degree. The NHB-RSP will work with its 15+ engaged bioscience employers, industry associations, and ConnCAT (a high-quality education provider) to develop the curriculum and certify its relevance to employer needs. EDA funds will help stand up the BioLaunchCT, purchase required equipment, and support tuition and wrap-around services.
- *Eastern Manufacturing RSP (EM-RSP)*: The EM-RSP, which has earned national acclaim (including from two U.S. Labor Secretaries) since its formation in 2008, transitioned to the Next Gen model in 2021 in alignment with the work of the GWC. Under the SSPI, the EM-RSP will leverage the RSP framework to expand its Youth MPI program, which prepares workforce-bound high school students for immediate employment incorporating adult MPI best practices and a dual enrollment model. The EM-RSP will update YMPI curriculum to ensure alignment to employer needs, deliver YMPI at 17 existing and four expansion high schools, and provide other services (e.g., remediation, added trades training, supportive services).
- *Eastern Healthcare RSP (EH-RSP)*: The EH-RSP is in the early stages of transitioning a longstanding, informal regional healthcare sector partnership to the Next Gen model. The EH-RSP will perform development and design work while advancing a Youth Healthcare Pipeline Initiative (YHPI) that replicates the YMPI model by offering high school students in-school training that results in industry-recognized credentials and creates immediate employment opportunities on healthcare career pathways. The YHPI creates the earlier healthcare career on-ramps needed to adequately address healthcare employer hiring demands.
- *Southwest Manufacturing RSP (SM-RSP)*: The SM-RSP will advance several priorities it has identified since its mid-2021 launch, including: a) Enhance MakeItCT (www.makeitct.com), a private-sector-driven, public-sector-supported campaign to increase awareness of manufacturing careers among students, young professionals, and re-careering adults. The SM-RSP will host networking events with area manufacturers and young professionals' associations; and b) Expand pre-hire (primarily community college) training programs for entry-level manufacturing roles; and c) Increase on-the-job training opportunities.
- *Southwest Data & Tech-Enabled RSP (SDT-RSP)*: Launched in late 2021, the SDT-RSP plans to: a) Foster a diverse and inclusive talent pipeline by recruiting new businesses that are well-connected to diversity and equity planning; and b) Deliver demand-driven training that results in industry-recognized credentials and immediate employment opportunities (e.g., TechFWD, CSCU AWS and Google certificates, UConn CITI bootcamp). To accomplish these goals, the

SDT-RSP will continue to: a) partner with the City of Stamford (primarily the Mayor’s Youth Services Program) to create a direct link from non-college-going seniors into programming and further supporting cohorts via wrap-around services; and b) provide skills remediation and ESL training through existing collaborations with the Ferguson Library and the Boys & Girls Club.

- *North Central Technology RSP (NCT-RSP)*: Convened in the spring of 2021, the NCT-RSP plans to: a) Enhance training models and curricula to increase alignment with industry demand; b) Launch and deliver training, including new apprenticeship and dual track programs; c) Build on-ramps and bridge programming into entry-level IT roles for underserved populations (e.g., Opportunity Youth) through training in digital literacy and other foundational IT skills; d) Provide barrier removal services (e.g., case management, career coaching, wrap-around services); e) Offer upskilling opportunities for incumbent IT support workers; f) Provide pathway development for youth and adult learners; and g) Promote skill-based hiring to increase employment opportunities for pre-baccalaureate workers (disproportionately persons of color).
- *North Central Healthcare RSP (NCH-RSP)*: The NCH-RSP is transforming the existing MetroHartford Healthcare Alliance to the Next Gen model. The NCH-RSP plans to: a) Enhance training models and curricula; b) Deliver demand-driven training programs; c) Work with CSCU and the CT League of Nursing to address racial inequities by facilitating clearer career pathway options for entry-level workers through more accessible training scheduling for full-time workers and credit articulation and competency/experience recognition within upskilling programs; d) Provide upskilling opportunities for incumbent workers; and e) Support on-ramps to prepare underserved populations for further training in entry-level programs.

C. Anticipated Barriers to Worker Participation

A rigorous evaluation of the Eastern CT MPI model that serves as an SSPI program prototype found that several program components effectively addressed barriers to participation, including transportation, childcare, income, and basic skills deficiencies. The final MPI evaluation report concluded: “The availability of support services, including mileage reimbursement, training stipends, childcare support, work boots and clothes, appeared to be helpful for training retention and completion. Many of the participants that provided perspectives through the surveys and during focus groups pointed to these supports as critical to their ability to participate in the training as well as their ability to complete the training.”²³

SSPI training programs will draw on other MPI core components (in addition to the wrap-around supports mentioned above) to: a) address basic skills deficiencies by offering contextualized basic skills remediation training to participants whose assessment scores fall below the threshold required for enrollment in training; b) provide placement services both during and after the completion of training; and c) offer post-placement on-the-job training opportunities.

The SSPI will leverage efforts of the GWC Equity & Access Committee, whose objective is “to address persistent barriers that undermine access to sustainable work and training arrangements,” including “childcare, transportation, and access to behavioral health services.” Five subcommittees spearhead initiatives related to early childhood education reform, expanding affordable transportation to students and jobseekers, and expanding the SNAT E&T program, among others.

²³ Public Policy Associates, Inc., “Eastern CT Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative Final Evaluation Report,” September 30, 2019. Page 82.