Coastal Counties Workforce, Inc. (CCWI) is a non-profit entity founded to administer and oversee workforce development programs in Maine’s six coastal counties (Knox, Lincoln, Waldo, Sagadahoc, Cumberland and York). CCWI is one of four Workforce Investment Boards in Maine. CCWI obtains funding for and implements workforce development programs and services including training, education and employment services.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) was authorized in 1998. Over the past 11 years, the public workforce system has long awaited reauthorization of the Act in order to address evolving workforce and economic needs of job seekers and employers in this country. The reauthorization, known as the “Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act” (WIOA), will be in effect for the next five years (2015-2020) and seeks to address former limitations in WIA with respect to training, funding and service delivery design.

The passage of WIOA provides a chance for the workforce system to reflect on its roles, strategies and intended outcomes. WIOA outlines a new direction for the workforce system that is not only exciting but also challenging as it requires new thinking and solutions.

Coastal Counties Workforce, Inc. (CCWI) has been fully engaged in the implementation of WIOA in Maine. This has involved staff participation on the State Board’s WIOA Steering Committee and being active on other implementation workgroups. In addition to this work, CCWI has had multiple changes to make with respect to governing documents, board member compliance, financial manuals, contracts and policies. Although the passage of this Act has resulted in much administrative work, there will be a number of benefits to working under this new law.

For example, WIOA removes certain restrictions imposed by former WIA Policy and prompts innovation, supports change and, importantly, promotes continuous improvement – all key components of WIOA. Provisions within the new law ensure that Workforce Boards and the Department of Labor work together to share promising and proven practices; to evaluate and disseminate information regarding such practices; and to identify and address knowledge gaps.

New Location for Portland Workforce Solutions Center

On April 8, 2015, Coastal Counties Workforce, Inc. (CCWI) announced that its service provider, Goodwill Industries of Northern New England, relocated its Portland-based Workforce Solutions Center to a new location across the street at 190 Lancaster Street in Portland, Maine.

The office serves as the One-Stop Center, or American Job Center, for Cumberland County and the Coastal Counties Region. The new location offers all of the services previously found at Goodwill’s collocated offices at the former Portland CareerCenter. Job seekers visiting Goodwill’s new office space have access to an Information Center with nine computers to assist with job search and resume development as well as information on job training and other services available at Goodwill and other CareerCenter programs. A photocopier, fax machine and phones are also available for employment-related needs. The new office contains several meeting spaces to accommodate large groups as well as small interview rooms where individuals can meet confidentially with public and private service providers, employers and program staff.

For more information about job seeker or business services or available training, please call (207) 370-3900 or visit Monday through Friday, 8:00 am to 4:00 pm.
The purpose of WIOA is to better align the workforce system with education and economic development in an effort to create a collective response to economic and labor market challenges on the national, state and local levels. WIOA continues the trend in workforce legislation to engage the private sector to lead local workforce development efforts and focuses on introducing increased flexibility and accountability of board members. WIOA encourages an improved response to labor market needs by connecting board performance to outcomes that require an understanding of the correlation between training investments and economic return. Changes in WIOA prompt Workforce Boards to be increasingly engaged in the business of collaboration, convening and partnership. A 2015 Report of the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB) Workforce Roundtable emphasized the following points as WIOA is implemented:

- Workforce Boards cannot just focus on community colleges as the only training provider.
- They need to look to CBOs, e-learning, for-profits, adult education and in-house training;
- Must engage in regional economic development issues and work with entities such as local chambers of commerce and economic development agencies.
- Need a common intake with core programs linked through technology;
- Build system capacity — technology can enable Workforce Boards to serve more customers with less staff and still be effective;
- Need to encourage Workforce Boards to talk “big picture,” not just programs;
- Need to understand changes in labor economy;
- Career pathways are a game changer. Workforce Boards need to understand career pathways and be a convener in the development, communication and implementation of pathway systems;
- Robust employer-driven data and performance metrics;
- Need to define and align business service: strategic purpose (Board level) and front-line/door-to-door must be in sync; and,
- Need to define and develop industry-recognized skills and competencies.

WIOA puts Workforce Boards in the center of these community systems like never before and ascribes to the Workforce Boards’ responsibilities implied in WIA but now clearly articulates the boards’ responsibility as a convener and charges the boards with hosting community conversations to better align workforce resources and better understand the complexity of their regional markets. In essence, Boards will begin to serve as Activist Boards with the opportunity to have a greater impact on their communities.

As policy makers, the White House and Congress have presented us with a great challenge in the new Act: “...Workforce Boards will now be responsible for tapping innovation and opportunity in their communities to drive positive social and economic change.” We owe it to our nation’s job seekers and businesses to live up to the opportunities this new legislation provides to our collective systems. WIOA fills the gaps of WIA with amazing flexibility. Where WIA did not allow Local Boards to seek non-federal funds that would allow the board to expand and sustain its workforce initiatives, WIOA does. Where WIA required One-Stop mandatory partners based on the programs they provide, WIOA requires regional collaboration that makes sense based on the needs of the employers that make up the region’s economic landscape.

CCWI seeks to increase innovation – innovation in how the system works collaboratively to serve both business and jobseekers; innovation in increasing opportunities for the most marginalized populations, especially those with disabilities, to access competitive employment; and innovation in how we use technology to increase the prosperity of workers (both urban and rural).

CCWI seeks to increase opportunities – opportunities for businesses to fill their open positions with highly skilled, highly qualified job applicants; opportunities for individuals with taxing barriers to employment to access education and training that leads to employer-recognized credentials and jobs that pay well; and opportunities to align the workforce system with social services, education and economic development.

CCWI Receives Three New Employment & Training Grants

This flurry of activity represents real opportunity for both workers/job seekers and employers in our region. CCWI has worked diligently to obtain these grant awards knowing full well that, despite the much improved unemployment rate, there is still a great need for workforce development training in our region.

- PY 2015 WIOA: $2,921,407 serving approximately 900 workers/job seekers.
- As the Workforce Investment Act’s (WIA) successor, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act’s (WIOA) efforts are industry-focused reemployment services that support job training, credential attainment, job search guidance and activities, and employer engagement.

Working with our WIOA Service Provider, CCWI distributes the regional allocation ($2,921,407) between three programs: Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth. All three programs have varying benefits but are designed with specific populations in mind. For example, the Dislocated Worker program is focused on those individuals who have lost a job due to no fault of their own and would like to reenter the workforce quickly and in a high-growth job sector. While WIOA’s general focus is on reemployment and training services to prisoners whose scheduled release dates are within 180 days. PREP will serve 100 transitioning offenders over a 24-month period, during which time staff will work directly with participants to develop work readiness skills and competencies in order to prepare them to obtain employment prior to or immediately upon release. Paid work experiences will be provided for eligible participants. PREP will measure performance outcomes and outputs based on specific performance targets set by the USDOL.

The Pre-Release Employment Project (PREP):

- $499,941 serving 100 transitioning offenders.

This U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) Grant was awarded to CCWI for the purpose of creating an American Job Center in the Cumberland County Jail. PREP staff will be housed in the jail and in the Community Corrections Center for the purpose of providing workforce development and re-entry services to prisoners whose scheduled release dates are within 180 days. PREP will serve 100 transitioning offenders over a 24-month period, during which time staff will work directly with participants to develop work readiness skills and competencies in order to prepare them to obtain employment prior to or immediately upon release. Paid work experiences will be provided for eligible participants. PREP will measure performance outcomes and outputs based on specific performance targets set by the USDOL.
SP-NEG is not solely for purposes of bolstering capacity for dislocated worker services but also includes regional sector planning and strategies (up to 25% of the total funds). Demand-side, or industry-focused, regional planning is imperative in order to increase workforce and economic development opportunities and improve partnerships between industries, workforce investment boards, government entities, economic districts and community colleges. Emphasis is placed on on-the-job training (OJT), and work-based learning models continue to demonstrate the importance of hands-on, industry-driven employment tools. These techniques allow individuals to quickly return to work, retain or learn the skills necessary for the position, and begin earning income the day their training begins. Incumbent worker training adds a component of services not formerly utilized. Funds may be used for training purposes to move employed individuals up in their career, making room to backfill positions for new hires. This addition is positively viewed by both employers and employees as a way of moving individuals through their career path.

**...Existing CCWI Projects**

In addition to the deployment of newly-obtained grant funding (see previous article), CCWI staff is busy ensuring the fulfillment of established multi-year grant projects.

**Make It in America Grant (MIIA): $1.3 million serving 150 incumbent workers and 80 unemployed workers.**

CCWI’s MIIA Grant is a 3-year H-1B Jobs Accelerator awarded to CCWI in October 2013. Working in partnership with the Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) and the Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority (MRRA), CCWI acts as the lead agency for this United States Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration program. Based on the current and projected growth and expansion of businesses at Brunswick Landing and the surrounding 50-mile radius, this grant targets the industry sectors of Advanced Materials/Composites, Aviation/Aerospace, Biotechnology and Renewable Energy.

Participants will receive a combination of paid internships and classroom training, leading to eventual employment. In addition, MEP will collaborate with Maine businesses to provide companies in these sectors with specialized employed worker training so employees can gain specialized training and advance along their career pathways. The program’s goal is to ensure training leading to meaningful employment in order to provide the region with a skilled workforce, thereby reducing the need for H-1-B visa use by these companies.

**Midcoast Technology Occupations through Pathway Strategies (TOPS): $5 million serving 370 workers/job seekers.**

The TOPS project provides education, training and job placement assistance related to high-growth fields in which employers are currently using the H-1B non-immigrant visa program to hire foreign workers in sectors such as Advanced Manufacturing, Information Technology and Composites Technology (specifically, Aerospace Product and Parts Manufacturing, Medical Equipment and Supplies Manufacturing, Computer Systems Design and Related Services, and Scientific Research and Development Services).

This $5 million TOPS grant complements the employer partners’ current recruitment and selection activities. This project provides an opportunity to identify, assess and refer a broad range of potential job applicants to reduce or eliminate the likelihood that the region’s advanced technology companies will have to resort to hiring foreign workers via the H-1B visa program. Targeted recruitment is conducted by Goodwill Industries Workforce Solutions Team (CCWI’s service provider) and Southern Maine Community College (SMCC) through their existing networks. The funds are being used to offset the cost of on-the-job training for employers, which can be significant. Companies such as Kestrel Aviation, Resilient Communications and Mölndlycke Health Care are business partners in this grant effort. TOPS funding will also support costs for courses through Southern Maine Community College, which is starting a new campus on the Brunswick site.

The program’s goal is to retrain 370 people for occupations that include advanced manufacturing, composites technology, medical equipment manufacturing, computer systems design and scientific research and development. Participants are unemployed individuals who have advanced degrees or experience suited for the targeted occupations.

**Job-Driven National Emergency Grant (JD-NEG): $943,435 serving 108 dislocated workers.**

This grant is helping CCWI expand capacity for dislocated workers in the region. It has been shown that individuals who are long-term unemployed increasingly have difficulty finding jobs and, therefore, the intention of the grant is to address these challenges and reemploy residents who have struggled to find work. Through resume review and interview coaching, job search activities, training initiatives and credential attainment, the JD-NEG program has expanded WIA/WIOA funding and garnered an opportunity to focus on the long-term unemployed. It is the goal of the program to enroll 108 individuals, many of whom will be enrolled in on-the-job training (OJT). OJT is used to bridge skills gaps among individuals who may just need that extra training or certification in order to be fully qualified for employment.

**Many are Making It in America**

The Make It in America (MIIA) Grant has been providing outstanding opportunities for many Maine residents and companies for the past two years. During this time, Maine businesses have recruited skilled workers through the Integrated Unemployed Worker Training (IUWT) program and upgraded the skills of their current incumbent workforce through the Targeted Incumbent Worker Training (TIWT) programs. Both of these components of the grant have provided significant improvements in the career advancement opportunities of over 100 individuals and nearly 40 companies.

During the second week of May, 50 individuals experienced 16-hour classroom training sessions entitled “Root Cause Analysis.” Root cause analysis is a collective term that describes a wide range of approaches, tools and techniques used to uncover causes of problems in a manufacturing setting. With funding available through the MIIA grant, 14 companies sent members of their workforce to attend this training delivered by Duke Okes, the book of the author on this subject. The American Society for Quality (ASQ), Pine Tree State section, certified participants with an industry-recognized credential for their intense two-day involvement in the course. Participant feedback was extremely positive, and many of the techniques learned were put to immediate use in company settings, offering improved processes for the companies.

Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP), a MIIA partner agency, coordinated the sessions based on feedback from their clients who expressed the vital need for this training for their employees. MIIA was able to respond to this need, resulting in a positive outcome for all involved.

98 employees representing 14 different Maine companies participate in training sessions on Root Cause Analysis. This specialized training is designed to help companies accurately diagnose and correct inefficient manufacturing processes.
Ryan Conant: After graduating from the University of Maine with a degree in Electrical Engineering Technology, Ryan out-reached to find help in obtaining a position in his field of study. Although he had a great deal of hands-on experience through school projects and internships, Ryan had no “real-world” work experience. Apex Engineering was impressed with Ryan’s dedication in school and felt his personality was a great fit for its growing firm. However, Apex Engineering also understood that Ryan would need a great deal of training. After learning more about CCWI’s TOPS grant through a Goodwill Business Service Representative (BSR), assisted her with a paid internship under the Make It in America (MIA) Challenge Grant. Emily assisted Fluid Imaging with research to collect data about company instrumentation. She says that the program, with its many benefits, is helping Maine residents looking to move into STEM occupations who might not have had a way in previously and is also offering a great deal of support for start-up and small businesses in need of qualified, educated workers but who do not necessarily have the capital to support hiring them.

Emily Cooper: Currently finishing her senior year in Biology at the University of Southern Maine, Emily was recently hired as a laboratory support technician at Fluid Imaging Technologies in Scarborough. Prior to her full-time employment, CCWI, through its service provider Goodwill Workforce Solutions (GWS), assisted her with a paid internship under the Make It in America (MIA) Challenge Grant. Emily assisted Fluid Imaging with research to collect data about company instrumentation. She says that the program, with its many benefits, is helping Maine residents looking to move into STEM occupations who might not have had a way in previously and is also offering a great deal of support for start-up and small businesses in need of qualified, educated workers but who do not necessarily have the capital to support hiring them.

Ryan Hand: After becoming unemployed, Ryan needed help with job search activities. He had previous experience as a machine operator but needed help landing a job in a large production environment in a more technical role. Through the assistance of the TOPS grant, a BSR was able to provide career assessment and guidance. After completing a successful interview for a position at Archer Machine, Ryan was given a chance. “There is a need for good machinists in the area and, when Ryan stopped in, I wanted to hire him even though his experience at other facilities was different than required here,” writes Mike Hanes, President of Archer Machine. “The programs administered through Goodwill Workforce Solutions greatly reduce the burden of training candidates with good character who need training in one form or another. These candidates bring strong skill sets to the shop that we don’t have access to in other ways. It really is a win-win.” Through several weeks of OJT under the TOPS program, Ryan received hands-on learning with CNC machines including ecomometrics and cutting speeds. This learning has fully supported Ryan’s transition from machining operator to skilled CNC Machinist.