



Board Report

August 5, 2020

COVID-19: Regional Update

COVID-19 was confirmed to have reached the state of Indiana on March 6, 2020. Due to its rapid spread, and out of concern for our staff and customers, Region 8 began limiting customer access to our local WorkOne offices as of March 16th. The Bloomington, Bedford and Linton offices remained open to a reduced number of customers at one time. All other WorkOne locations began providing services only via phone and email.

On March 23rd, DWD announced it would close all WorkOne centers to the public until further notice to reduce the spread of the virus. During the office closures, Region 8 staff provided services to customers through a virtual format utilizing telephone, voicemail, and email contact. Region 8 continued to provide services in this manner until the process of re-opening the offices began on June 8th per the Governors "Back on Track" guidance. Prior to returning, staff were provided with additional training to ensure proper protocol was followed to maintain social distancing, use of PPE and identification of potential COVID-19 symptoms.

WorkOne offices have remained closed to walk-in traffic due to the Governor's delay of the final stages of reopening. WorkOne staff continue to have the option of providing virtual services with the addition of video conferencing, or staff may meet clients in person by appointment with appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Social Distancing standards in place.

The amount of Unemployment Insurance claims filed already in 2020 is nearly three times the number of claims filed in Region 8 during the recession in 2009. With current unemployment numbers that are nearly triple the normal rate, Region 8 anticipates a significant increase in the demands placed on our WorkOne system once our offices are re-opened to the public. The COVID-19 pandemic has made it necessary for staff to devote significant amounts of time to maintaining a safe and healthy environment for customers and WorkOne employees. Region 8's re-opening plan calls for constant cleaning of WorkOne premises and management of maximum numbers of customers in the office at a given time.

To help maintain a safe environment in our WorkOne locations, Region 8 applied for and received Dislocated Worker Grant – Disaster Recovery funding to hire dislocated workers as temporary employees in our offices. The funding received allows for temporary positions in the Bloomington, Bedford, Linton and Orange County WorkOne offices. These positions are responsible for cleaning and disinfecting; maintaining social distancing parameters between customers; tracking customers to maintain the allowable number of individuals at the

location; checking in customers with appointments; and providing basic over the shoulder assistance with computer use, website log-in assistance, etc. in resource areas as time allows. At this time, two individuals have been hired, one in Bedford and one in Bloomington. Two additional participants have been selected and are scheduled to start in the near future.

Vincennes University is also in the process of hiring 4 additional Career Advisors for WorkOne locations in Bloomington, Bedford, Owen County and Brown County. The hiring of these individuals should vastly increase the ability for Region 8 to meet the employment and training needs of the customers in Region 8.

Region 8 County Unemployment Rates

County	January	February	March	April	May	June
Brown	2.6%	3.3%	3.3%	16.2%	12.5%	11.0%
Daviess	2.4%	2.8%	2.7%	8.4%	5.6%	5.7%
Greene	3.8%	4.5%	4.5%	12.8%	9.0%	9.2%
Lawrence	3.4%	3.7%	3.6%	17.6%	11.3%	10.0%
Martin	2.1%	2.4%	2.8%	8.8%	5.9%	6.6%
Monroe	2.7%	3.2%	3.3%	10.1%	7.8%	9.0%
Orange	3.1%	3.8%	3.7%	25.8%	18.5%	20.2%
Owen	3.5%	4.0%	4.0%	12.1%	8.9%	9.4%

As of June, Indiana’s unemployment rate dropped to 11.2%, slightly above the national rate of 11.1%. Most of the Region 8 county unemployment rates have remained below the state rate, with the exceptions of Orange and Brown Counties. This is likely due to the heavy reliance upon tourism to support the economies of these counties.

Region 8 staff have been answering basic UI questions and scheduling individuals to use WorkOne computers to file claims. Customers who need additional assistance are required to call or email the UI Contact Center at DWD. Customers at the Linton and Bloomington WorkOne locations have the option of using the BAT phone to speak directly with an Unemployment Specialist at the UI Contact Center. Customers using this service are reporting shorter than average wait times. Customers have also been given the option to file by phone if they do not have access to a computer or smart phone to file online.

Labor Market Review: UI Claims

Indiana's unemployment rate from January to mid-March was one of the lowest rates in the nation. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the entire state had a drastic increase in initial and continued UI claims near the end of March 2020. To provide a better understanding of unemployment benefits, DWD hosted a Facebook Live Event with agency leaders on April 8 to discuss the latest available details on the federal stimulus package (CARES Act) and how it changed and provided additional Unemployment Insurance benefits.

Hoosiers who were receiving regular unemployment insurance benefits were qualified to receive an additional \$600 weekly payment from the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) program. FPUC was payable effective March 29, 2020, for any week of unemployment until July 25, 2020.

The Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) also created a temporary federal unemployment insurance program for individuals not otherwise eligible for UI benefits, including the self-employed, independent contractors, gig economy workers, those seeking part-time employment, and individuals lacking sufficient work history but who would be able to work and looking for work were it not due to COVID-19. PUA benefits are set to end on Dec. 25, 2020.

Additionally, PEUC (Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation) is also a federal program that provided up to 13 weeks of benefits to claimants who had exhausted their regular UI benefits.



The South Central Region 8 Workforce Board has been awarded \$125,000 of second year option funding to continue helping homeless veterans find meaningful employment. The Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) grant will serve eligible veterans in Brown, Daviess, Greene, Lawrence, Martin, Monroe, Orange and Owen counties. In addition to the Region 8 counties, the grant also will assist eligible veterans in Morgan County.

Region 8 has hired Jerry Sonheim to serve as the HRVP Coordinator. Jerry will begin his new role on August 5th and will oversee the planning and implementation of outreach activities to promote recruitment for the HVRP program. He will coordinate with community agencies and service providers to help eligible Veterans become enrolled in the program. Jerry will also work closely with local WorkOne staff to ensure enrollment numbers and outcomes are met/exceeded and will provide regular progress reports to Region 8 management staff.



Next Level Jobs: Rapid Recovery Grant

As a part of the Indiana Governor's Workforce Cabinet (GWC) "Rapid Recovery for a Better Future" initiative, the Governor has dedicated funding available through the CARES Act to increase short-term training opportunities for more than 10,000 Hoosiers. Regional Workforce Boards were provided the opportunity to submit a proposal for funds to offer these training programs to individuals and employers in their regions. As a result, the current Next Level Jobs Workforce Ready Grant program will be temporarily expanded through 12/31/20 in the following ways:

- Hoosiers with two and four-year degrees are eligible to receive short-term WRG training
- New certificates have been added to the current list of eligible programs
- Additional certificate programs have been approved based on meeting immediate, regional, and emerging workforce needs
- The funding cap per individual has been raised from \$5,500 to \$10,000

Region 8 has been awarded \$582,000 in Workforce Training funds to support training costs, required classroom supplies and work experience wages. Region 8 identified occupations within the key industries of Healthcare, Manufacturing, Information Technology, Construction and Transportation that are needed by area employers. Region 8 will partner closely with Adult Education and other training providers for the proposed WRG training. Region 8 is also currently collaborating with Eleven Fifty Academy to offer training opportunities for students who wish to pursue certifications in computer support and internet security. As of 7/30, staff have already obligated \$81,000 of funding for customers to attend training throughout the region. Upon completion of their training program, approximately 50 students will have an opportunity to participate in a paid work experience activity with a host employer to gain hands-on experience in their field.

The Employer Training Grant provides funding to help cover employer training costs associated with training new employees and/or incumbent workers who need specific skills to perform their job duties more effectively. The current Next Level Jobs Employer Training Grant will be temporarily expanded through 12/31/20 in the following ways:

- The maximum amount of funding available to an employer has been raised from \$50,000 to \$100,000
- \$5 million will be allocated specifically for Minority-, Women-, and Veteran-owned businesses

Region 8 was awarded \$944,000 for the Employer Training Grant funds to reimburse employers for training new employees and/or upskilling of incumbent workers. Region 8 anticipates serving approximately 17 employers with ETG funds, resulting in about 170 workers in the region being trained. This grant also provides an opportunity for Business Services staff to develop partnerships with Women, Minority, and Veteran-Owned businesses. Region 8 Business Services staff are working with Chambers of Commerce, Economic Development Partners, and other business organizations to assess the needs of local companies. Thus far, 2,305 employers have received promotional information regarding the Employer Training Grants. Thus far, 10 companies have completed on-line applications for a potential obligation of \$460,000 to train approximately 102 employees. Of the 10 companies who have applied, 2 are Women, Minority or Veteran-Owned businesses.