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[Region targets Kentucky Work Ready Community certification](#)

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ASHLAND — Educators and economic development officials in Boyd and Greenup counties are laying the groundwork to pursue certification as a Kentucky Work Ready Community.

The certification serves as quality measure of the county's workforce and could help attract and retain businesses and industry. Communities must gather local support and commitments while meeting criteria in six areas including high school graduation rates, educational attainment, soft-skills development, digital literacy, and National Career Readiness Certificate rates.

Ashland Alliance CEO Bill Hannah said certification will likely be sought first for Boyd County followed by Greenup County. Certification takes three years so officials want to be well-prepared before they formally begin the application process with the Kentucky Workforce Investment Board, he said.

Certification will involve multi-year commitments from political leaders, local businesses and industries, along with higher education and K-12 education, said Larry Ferguson, dean of resource development and external affairs at Ashland Community and Technical College. "All of those folks have to be linked synergistically for us to even start this process."

"The timing of how we begin is critical, and having all the right people at the table is critical," said Hannah, noting only preliminary meetings have been held with ACTC representatives and Ashland Independent Schools Superintendent Steve Gilmore.

Officials will also be reaching out to Fairview and Boyd County districts as well as other higher educational partners soon, and have already enlisted the help of a representative with TENCO Workforce Development Solutions.

"The concept is to get communities to the point where they are addressing the skills gaps in their communities, so that they can meet the needs and demands of business and industries for their workforce in that community," explained Ferguson. "It's very important that we show that outwardly."

"Whenever you have employers or you have site locators for companies, that is what they look for, those designations. We never know when our area is being filtered out just because we don't have this designation," added ACTC President Dr. Kay Adkins.

"It is basically something that keeps you in the race longer. It lets that potential employer know that we have a workforce that is ready to go to work for those companies and that can be trained or retrained to meet those needs," she said.

"We are just wanting to make our region more competitive. That is really what it is all about — being competitive for economic development and promoting that we do have a workforce that is ready to go to work," said Adkins.

Ferguson said just gathering data to see where the community is now in relation to the six criteria will be challenging. But many of the education criteria are areas that have already been targeted by other initiatives, said Ferguson.

“I don’t think there is anything new there that is not being focused on through a different level or agency,” agreed Adkins. “It all fits with the goals we have tasked before us, whether it is a national, state, or local requirement. This fits in to our mission,” she said

In 2012, Kentucky became the third state to certify counties as work ready and its program is among the most rigorous. Of Kentucky’s 120 counties approximately 75 have completed the process of certification or are at some stage of doing so. Applicants for certification are reviewed by a KWIB-appointed panel.

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