KENTUCKY Work Ready COMMUNITIES

Initial Application

Effective January 1, 2021

All applications for Work Ready Community status submitted on or after November 19, 2020 must use this revised application and criteria.

Sponsored by: Kentucky Workforce Investment Board
Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet

Kentucky Work Ready Communities

Thank you for your interest in the Kentucky Work Ready Community certification! As part of Kentucky's overall strategic plan to transform the workforce development system, the state created this framework whereby communities can agree to meet certain educational, workforce development and collaboration goals in order to earn "Work Ready Community" certification.   By taking part in the effort, you will have the opportunity to transform your community's economy and gain a competitive advantage in attracting new businesses and jobs.

In order to qualify, communities must meet certain thresholds in criteria such as – but not limited to - graduation rates, soft-skills development program implementation, educational attainment rates, and internet availability and speed. In addition, successful communities must demonstrate the ability to create partnerships and synergy between various key public agencies and employers throughout the process. The process aligns education, workforce and economic development strategies for the state and within communities by using a collaborative approach.

The enclosed materials will help you communicate your intent to participate and act as your official application for Work Ready Community status.

The application packet includes the following documents:

1. **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)** – about the Work Ready Community program;
2. **Application Checklist** – a list of steps to take in preparing your application, information sources, and what to expect after your application has been submitted;
3. **Work Ready Community Criteria and Thresholds** – a list of requirements that must be met in order to become a Work Ready Community;
4. **Letter of Intent** – must be submitted at least 30 days prior to the application;
5. **Application Form** – the basic application information including measurable criteria and a listing of program participants and endorsees;
6. **Plan Narrative Forms** – instructions for completing plans that are required for some criteria, and
7. **Letter of Commitment** – a sample commitment letter for use with partner agencies, employers, etc.

As you will see, the certification requirements are challenging but not impossible to achieve. We will constantly strive towards making the program one that is forward leaning and holds relevance for you community both today and as you plan for the future.

Please feel free to submit questions via the email link on the program's web site: http://kwib.ky.gov/workreadycommunity.htm.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Kentucky Work Ready Communities

COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PROGRAM

1. **Does being a certified Work Ready Community help us?** Absolutely! Employers and potential employers who may consider your community as a location want to know about your workforce. Being certified answers many of their questions and indicates that your community is serious about meeting their needs.

2. **How were the new criteria and thresholds selected?** The Kentucky Work Ready Community Steering Committee, which consists of representatives from all major stakeholders in the project (including employers, education, workforce development, economic development, and more) worked to improve the criteria to best reflect 21st century priorities for workforce development initiatives. These changes were driven by the signals and demands of business and industry.

3. **Can multiple counties make a Work Ready Region?** YES – While Work Ready Regions are not officially a part of this program currently, as long as the counties each meet the Work Ready Community criteria individually and become certified, contiguous counties within Kentucky can promote themselves as a Work Ready Region.

4. **Can any unit smaller than a county apply (such as a city or region not defined by county lines)?** NO – the smallest unit allowed to apply is a county. The reason for this has to do with how data is gathered and tracked. Standardized data for the criteria included are generally tracked at a county level.

5. **Our community does not meet the minimum criteria yet – can we still apply?** YES – In order for the program to have real value for business and industry, the criteria are intentionally stringent. In fact, we expect only a handful of counties to meet the criteria and immediately achieve Work Ready Community status. Most communities will apply for Work Ready Community in Progress – with detailed plans to meet the criteria where they fall short.

6. **How long will we have to meet the criteria if we become a Work Ready Community in Progress?** You will have up to three years to meet the minimum criteria. You will need to show continuous improvement within this three-year period.

7. **What if a Work Ready Community in Progress does not meet their goals in three years – can we reapply?** If you can demonstrate continuous improvement, the selection committee may decide to extend your goal deadline. If the committee does NOT extend your deadline and you lose Work Ready Community in Progress status, you must wait one year before reapplying.

8. **If our community meets the criteria and becomes a Work Ready Community, how long will that status last?** Work Ready Community Status will last for three years, at which time each community must be recertified to ensure they have not fallen below required criteria levels. The recertification process will be a shorter process than the original application and should be fairly easy as long as the local committee stays actively involved.

9. **Is there any cost to apply?** No – there is no application fee.

10. **What is the process after we submit our application?** First, the Work Ready Community Review Panel will review the data to verify accuracy. Then the panel will review the narratives included. Based on this information, the committee will make a recommendation to the Kentucky Workforce Investment Board (KWIB), which will have final approval on granting Work Ready Community or Work Ready Community in Progress status. The process will vary in length depending on the timing of the application in relation to the next KWIB meeting. You will be notified of the outcome by the review panel.

11. **When can we apply?** You can apply at any time, though applications will be reviewed three times per year. The review panel will meet three times per year to review applications that have been submitted at least 30 days before the review panel meeting. Once established, the meeting dates, times and locations of review panel meetings will be posted on the program's web site.

CHECKLIST

Congratulations on your decision to apply for the Kentucky Work Ready Community program. This checklist includes recommended and required steps in completing your application.

☐ **Organize a Local Application Committee**

This committee will play many important roles in the application process as well as the long-term qualification and requalification process. The committee should include individuals from key stakeholders in the community including employers, local workforce investment boards, economic development representatives, education (secondary and post-secondary), and elected officials.

☐ **Complete and submit your Letter of Intent**

You may submit this document at any time, but it must be received at least 30 days prior to submitting an application. This document will assist counties in their organizational efforts and offers an opportunity to request technical assistance in the preparation of the application.

☐ **Gather Information**

Some of the required criteria are simple data points that can be gathered from official sources. These include high school graduation rate, educational attainment, and broadband access. See the Work Ready Community In Progress Criteria for the official data sources.

☐ **Create Plans and Complete the Required Narrative**

Several criteria require narratives to be completed that outline plans to reach established goals within a certain timeframe. Each of the required narratives and their details are outlined in the application materials. This step will require collaboration with members of the Local Application Committee.

☐ **Gather Letters of Commitment, Meeting Minutes, Attendee Lists & Signature**

Signatures and letters of commitment are required from community leaders as outlined in the criteria requirements document.

☐ **Compile the Application Materials and Submit**

You must submit the following items:

a. The completed application form;

b. additional high schools included and graduation rate calculations (only if you are including high schools not already in the state reporting graduation rate);

c. required and optional supporting plans/narratives;

d. letters of commitment, and

e. a list of meeting dates for any committee or subcommittee meetings, employer letters of support, or evidence of activities that have occurred in direct support of the Work Ready Communities program.

> **Once received, the Work Ready Community Review Panel will process your application, verify data, and review plans.**
>
> **If the committee approves status (either Work Ready Community or Work Ready Community in Progress) it will make a recommendation to the Kentucky Workforce Investment Board, which will have final approval.**

Please submit one hard copy and one electronic copy (thumb drive, email, or file transfer) of all materials via US mail or messenger and one electronic copy of the application page via email to:

Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board   **Email:** workready@ky.gov
Attn: Director, Kentucky WR Communities
500 Mero Street; 4th Floor Room 432
300 Sower Blvd. Frankfort, KY 40601

CRITERIA AND THRESHOLDS

HS Graduation Rate	High school graduation rate calculated with the method used in reporting for the State of Kentucky.
SOURCE: KYSTATS Work Ready Communities	**WORK READY COMMUNITY:** Must have achieved a 90%+ graduation of eligible HS students, with a plan of action to maintain a 90%+ rate throughout your certification.

Working Age Population without a HS Diploma or Equivalent (HSE)	Measurement of working age adults that do not have a high school diploma or equivalent education. Identifying and understanding this number can help you allocate resources towards adult education and upskilling.
SOURCE: KYSTATS Work Ready Communities	**WORK READY COMMUNITY:** Must objectively demonstrate 15% of population or less without HS diploma or HSE with a supporting plan of action to decrease that rate by 2% (13% or less) in three years.

Attainment of Some College Experience or Higher	Studies indicate that exposure to programs such as dual-credit courses in high school substantially increase educational attainment and workers with marketable skills in the current economy.
SOURCE: KYSTATS Work Ready Communities	**WORK READY COMMUNITY:** Must objectively demonstrate 43% or greater of population with some college credit/experience or higher, with a supporting plan of action to increase that rate by 2% (45% or more) within three years.

Attainment of Associates Degree or Higher	While High School level education is an important foundation, workers must strive to achieve at a post-secondary level to keep pace with business and industry demands.
SOURCE: KYSTATS Work Ready Communities	**WORK READY COMMUNITY:** Must objectively demonstrate 25% or greater with Associate's Degree education or higher, with a supporting plan to increase that rate by 2% (27% or more) within three years. Exception: The attainment rate can be modified to a goal of 22% if a majority of the county's 5-year job demand in approved KWIB sectors do not require an associates degree or higher. Evidence to verify the exception request should be provided in the Workforce Supply & Demand section of the application.

High School Work Ethic Seal	Employers note that many workers do not possess the work ethic to sustain a career, even through an entry-level position. This is a community's opportunity to step into building that intangible skill.
SOURCE: Local Boards of Education	**WORK READY COMMUNITY:** From currently implemented program, objectively demonstrate number of current enrollments/participants with a plan to increase the enrollments/awardees annually.

Kentucky Work Ready Communities

Kentucky Essential Skills Certificate, Career Readiness Certificates (NCRC, KCRC, etc.)	This is a community's opportunity to help people develop the soft skills necessary for long-term success in the workforce.
SOURCE: **WIN (Soft Skills Program)**	**WORK READY COMMUNITY:** From currently implemented program, objectively demonstrate number of current enrollments/participants with a plan to increase the enrollments/awardees annually.

Work Based Learning Opportunities	Apprenticeships, internships, and co-ops are valuable tools that expose our workers to on-the-job training as well as being highly effective recruiting programs for employers.
SOURCE: **KYSTATS Work Ready Communities**	**WORK READY COMMUNITY:** Identify the current number of Work Based Learning Opportunities available in your county and formulate a plan to increase the number and variety of opportunities.

Internet Availability and Speeds	Business is highly dependent upon technology and communities that have access to those resources will be best positioned for the workforce demands of the future.
SOURCE(S): **Federal Communications Commission Broadband Access**	**WORK READY COMMUNITY:** Population of 50K> (Urban): Must objectively demonstrate 25 Mbps availability to 90% of population. Population of <50K (Rural): Must objectively demonstrate 25 Mbps available to 60% of the population.

Engaging Underserved Populations	When seeking to increase the workforce participation rate, it is important to focus on underserved populations that may experience more barriers to entry. These populations include: Disabilities, Ex-Offender/Re-Entry, Foster Youth, Youth and Young Adults, Recovery, Homeless, Unemployed, Underemployed, Foreign Born/Immigrants, and Veterans
SOURCE(S): **See Work Ready Communities Criteria**	**WORK READY COMMUNITY:** Must objectively demonstrate execution/progress of plan of action to provide potential employment & engagement opportunities. Plan should address each of the underserved populations and potential barriers such as childcare, health, housing, and transportation.

Kentucky Work Ready Communities

Workforce Supply vs. Demand	The future of the Commonwealth rest in Manufacturing, Healthcare, Business Services/IT, Transportation & Logistics, and Construction. Communities must strategically pursue filling these needs together.
SOURCE(S): KYSTATS	**WORK READY COMMUNITY**: Work with local workforce board to review and analyze 5-year occupational industry demand to create a system which supplies industry with the talent pipeline needed. Identify key sectors and occupations, and explain how the community is producing a workforce ready to fill those positions..

Community Commitment	A measurement of commitment from community and government agencies, demonstrating true collaboration and progress toward achieving goals that bring all local stakeholders together.
SOURCE: Meeting Minutes Sign-in Sheets / Attendance News Articles Letters of Commitment	**WORK READY COMMUNITY**: Application must show support (signatures/meeting participation) from the following stakeholders (at least one participant and signature per category): **Economic Development** a. Heads of local Economic Development groups b. Other local economic development leadership **Elected Officials** a. County Judge Executive b. Mayor(s) c. Council Members **Education** a. Secondary Education Leadership Representative b. Post-Secondary Education Leadership Representative c. KY Adult Education Skills U Representative d. Area Technology Center Leadership Representative **Workforce Development** a. Local WIB Representative b. Area Development District Director/Leadership **Business and Industry** a. President, Chamber(s) of Commerce b. Local Area Business Leaders **Veteran, Disabled, Ex-offender, & Medicaid Population** a. Local OVR/OFB Representative b. Local CHFS/Medicaid Representative c. Representation from local re-entry council **Other methods of showing community support can come through letters, news articles, or other relevant sources.**

Kentucky Work Ready Communities

Letter of Intent to Participate

As part of Kentucky's overall strategic plan to transform the workforce development system, the Kentucky Workforce Investment Board and its strategic partners created this certification in order for counties to validate the skill level of the workforce. Participating in this effort offers counties the opportunity to transform the local economy and gain a competitive advantage in attracting new businesses and jobs.

In order to qualify, communities must meet or create plans to meet certain thresholds in criteria such as – but not limited to - graduation rates, soft-skills development program implementation, educational attainment rates, and internet availability and speed. In addition, successful communities must demonstrate the ability to create partnerships and synergy between various key public agencies and employers throughout the process. The process aligns education, workforce and economic development strategies for the state and within communities by using a collaborative approach.

For additional information about the program, please visit http://kwib.ky.gov/workreadycommunity.htm.

Participant Information

This Letter of Intent represents the first step in the process to achieving Work Ready Community status. It is a symbol of your community's commitment to validating and continuously improving the quality of your workforce and alerts state officials of this commitment so that technical assistance along with other resources (as available) can be made available to such communities.

Please complete the following information and forward a signed copy of this document as instructed at the end of the letter.

Name of County _____

Date _____

COUNTY TEAM LEADER
(This individual will serve as the primary contact for state officials with regard to opportunities, questions, and program updates.)

Name _____

Title _____

Organization _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ **Zip Code** _____

Daytime Phone _____

Email _____

COUNTY TEAM MEMBERS
(Please list the names and organizations serving on your county committee or team. If an organization has agreed to participate but hasn't named a representative, simply use TBD for the name. You may list more than one organization for each stakeholder category, but must have at least one entity listed for each category. Attach additional pages as necessary)

Economic Development

Name (Print)	Organization	Title

Name (Print)	Organization	Title

Name (Print)	Organization	Title

Elected Officials

Name (Print)	Organization	Title

Name (Print)	Organization	Title

Name (Print)	Organization	Title

Education

Name (Print)	Organization	Title

Name (Print)	Organization	Title

Name (Print)	Organization	Title

Business & Industry

Name (Print)	Organization	Title

Name (Print)   Organization   Title

Name (Print)   Organization   Title

Kentucky Work Ready Communities

Workforce Development

Name (Print)	Organization	Title
Name (Print)	Organization	Title
Name (Print)	Organization	Title

Underserved Populations (Disabilities, Ex-offenders/Re-entry, Foster Youth, Youth and Young Adults, Recovery, Homeless, Unemployed, Underemployed, Foreign-born/Immigrants, and Veterans).

Name (Print)	Organization	Title
Name (Print)	Organization	Title
Name (Print)	Organization	Title

ESTIMATED SUBMISSION DATE
(Please indicate the projected date your application will be submitted for review.)

Month _____ Year _____

SIGNATURE
(Your signature below indicates your county team's commitment to working through the process to become a Certified Work Ready Community or Work Ready Community In Progress and authorizes the state to add your county's name to the list of others working toward this achievement.)

_____

County Team Leader

_____ County

WORK READY COMMUNITIES APPLICATION

NAME OF COUNTY:	

Working Age (18-64) Population w/o HS diploma or HSE (%):		High School Graduation Rate (%)	
Population with some college (%):		Population with an Associate's Degree or Higher (%):	

	Number (#) Enrolled (Planned or Current)	Number (#) Awarded (Anticipated or Actual)
High School Work Ethic Seal		
Career Readiness Certificates (NCRC, KCRC, KY Essential Skills Certificate, etc.)		
Work Based Learning Opportunities		

	Rural (<50K) or Urban (>50K)? (Circle One)	Population (%) with availability to 25 Mbps
Internet Availability & Speed	**RURAL / URBAN**	

	Current Labor Force Participation Rate (%)	Goal over 3 years (%). (Write N/A for WRiP.)
Labor Force Participation Rate		

Please also complete the attached narratives and include documentation of community commitment.

NARRATIVES/PLANS

For each section, please provide a 2-3 paragraph explanation of your county's plan to achieve the related piece of Work Ready criteria.

1. All applicants must complete Narrative 1.

> **Narrative 1: Graduation Rate**: Please explain your county's plan of action to achieve or maintain a 90% high school graduation rate. What challenges, if any, do you expect and how can you overcome those challenges?

2. All applicants must complete Narrative 2.

> **Narrative 2: Working Age Population without High School Diploma or Equivalent (HSE):** Please explain your county's plan of action to decrease the percentage of working age individuals in your county to or below 15%. What challenges, if any, do you expect and how can you overcome those challenges?

3. All applicants must complete Narrative 3.

> **Narrative 3: College Credit or Higher:** To be certified Work Ready, 43% of the population should have some college or a higher degree. Please explain your county's plan of action to achieve or increase this level of attainment. What challenges, if any, do you expect and how can you overcome those challenges?

4. All applicants must complete Narrative 4.

> **Narrative 4: Associates Degree or Higher:** To be certified Work Ready, 25% of the population should have some college or a higher degree. (If you qualify for the exception outlined in the criteria, please explain so here). Please explain your county's plan of action to achieve or increase this level of attainment. What challenges, if any, do you expect and how can you overcome those challenges?

5. Discuss your Soft Skills Programs relative to High School Work Ethic Seal, Kentucky Essential Skills Certificate, and any supplemental programs for Career Readiness Certificates.

Narrative 5: Soft Skills Programs: Discuss your programs that address work ethic/soft skills development and credentialing for both the secondary school and postsecondary adult populations   This includes the High School Work Ethic Seal, Kentucky Essential Skills Certificate, and any other supplemental programs for Career Readiness Certificates.

The programs must meet the following minimum standards:
- provide evidence of employer engagement in the program development process, including representation of the county's most prolific businesses and industries,
- provide evidence that employers recognize achievement of work ethic or soft skills credential in their hiring/advancement processes,
- programs must include measurable goals for annual improvement in the raw number and percentage of workforce credentialed,
- plans must include a strategy to assure employers of the sustainability of the programs, and
- programs must address, at a minimum, the following topical areas: attendance/punctuality, communication, teamwork, leadership, and critical thinking.

6. All applicants must complete Narrative 6.

Narrative 7: Work Based Learning Opportunities: Explain what Work Based Learning Opportunities (apprenticeships, internships, co-ops, etc.) are available in your county. How are these opportunities promoted? What plans do you have to increase these opportunities? What challenges, if any, do you expect and how can you overcome these challenges?

7. All applicants must complete Narrative 7.

Narrative 7: Broadband Availability:
Please explain your county's plan of action to get internet availability to the necessary percentage of the population (60% for rural counties, 90% for urban counties). What challenges, if any, do you expect and how can you overcome those challenges?

8. All applicants must complete Narrative 8.

Narrative 8: Engagement of Underserved Populations: Please discuss how your community has executed your plan to provide employment & engagement opportunities to individuals in the underserved categories (Disabilities, veterans, ex-offenders, foster youth, youth and young adults, recovery, homeless, unemployed, underemployed, and foreign-born). Plan should address potential barriers such as childcare, health, housing, and transportation that may exist.

9. All applicants must complete Narrative 9.

> **Narrative 9: Workforce Supply vs. Demand:** Please identify the top five occupational needs for each KWIB sector that are required currently and over the next five years. Discuss how your community works with your local workforce board to review and subsequently analyze occupational demand (by industry sector) in order to develop a system that supplies industry with the talent pipeline needed for a thriving business environment. You should also explain how your community is working with educational partners to fill those needs.

Submittal Format

All applications must be submitted in PDF format and submitted by email, with receipt verification, or a flash drive via verifiable delivery. It is the responsibility of the applicant to verify delivery/receipt of the application.

Email: workready@ky.gov

Mailing Address:
300 Mero Road - 4th Floor
Frankfort, KY 40601

Contact Information

For more information or clarification, please contact either:

Jacob McAndrews, Work Ready Communities Coordinator
Green River, Kentuckiana Works, Lincoln Trail, South Central, and Western Kentucky
Phone Number: 270-599-3617
Email: Jacob.McAndrews@ky.gov

Sara Jaggers, Work Ready Communities Coordinator
Bluegrass, Cumberlands, EKCEP, Northern Kentucky and TENCO
Phone Number: 502-234-8466
Email: sara.jaggers@ky.gov