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High-Priority Occupations (HPOs): An Introductory Lesson

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What is an HPO?

High-Priority Occupations (HPOs) are job categories that:

- are in demand by employers
- have higher skill needs
- provide family sustaining wages

(Occupations that offer advancement opportunities or have visible “career ladders” will be considered as well)

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What is the Purpose of Defining HPOs?

- In the past there were many programs in place to distribute training money.
- They were all handled differently and competed with each other for money.
- This led to training dollars being under-utilized or unused as some programs ran out of money while others had surpluses.
- Through HPOs, training dollars can be best used to sustain and grow Pennsylvania's economy.

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What is a Self–Sustaining Wage?

For 2012 HPO List: $31,008 in PA

(200 percent of the poverty level for one adult and one child in 2011)

Most areas used the statewide level. Four WIAs were lower due to cost-of-living:

- Luzerne-Schuylkill: $30,678
- North Central: $28,585
- Northern Tier: $29,377
- Southern Alleghenies: $28,721

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Identifying HPOs

Occupations are classified as HPOs through an analysis of the (PA) Targeted Industry Clusters.

Step One: Identify occupations that are important to the success of industries within the clusters.

Step Two: Occupational statistics are reviewed and filters are applied to hone the list.

Step Three: Lastly, input from industry experts and regional leader is incorporated

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Examples of Filters

Importance to cluster – Does the occupation account for a significant portion of the cluster? Is the occupation highly concentrated, or dominant, in the cluster?

Occupational Employment & Change – Is there, or will there be, a lot of opportunity within the career? Will these opportunities be best in the cluster or in other industries?

Wages & Change – What does the occupation pay in the cluster compared to all industries? Are the wages increasing or declining?

Unemployment in Occupation – How many people in this field are currently unemployed? Is there already an over-supply of trained workers?

Training Completers – How many people completed training related to this occupation? How does that compare with the number of jobs that are available?

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Regional HPO Lists

The PA list is used as the basis to populate all WIA lists. This is why some occupations on the regional lists may look like they shouldn't be there. Occupations that met the filters at the state level may have a limited presence in individual regions within the state.

Additional occupations must meet local criteria or the Workforce Investment Board (WIB) can petition to have it added.

WIBs can petition for themselves or on behalf of local educational institutions.

Successfully petitioned occupations are valid for three years.

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WIB Petition Process

Designed to capture nuances of regional and local labor markets.

Petitions must come from WIB and be submitted within 30 days of the initial list release date.

Appeal and emergency petition processes exist.

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Who is Impacted by the List?

- Workforce Investment Act (WIA) trainings & other federally-funded training programs
- Community Colleges
- Career and Technical Education

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CIP-SOC Connection

Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) Codes are used by educational training providers to define and classify their curriculum.

Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) Codes are used to group occupations and determine employment projections and wages.

A national crosswalk exists to relate the skills learned through a program (CIP) to the jobs that require them (SOC).

PA has developed a dynamic version of the CIP-SOC crosswalk which incorporates programs specific to Pennsylvania as well as programs impacting emerging occupations and technology.