

# DRIVING WORKFORCE GROWTH IN NORTHERN KENTUCKY

## WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

Northern Kentucky's economy continues to grow, but workforce shortages and skills gaps threaten to slow that momentum. Employers across Boone, Campbell, and Kenton counties say they have the jobs but struggle to find enough qualified workers—an issue that affects every sector of our economy.

Labor projections from the NKU Center for Economic Analysis and Development show minimal growth through 2050, not enough to meet future needs. The reasons are clear: flat population growth, limited domestic migration, rapid retirements among older workers, and a high labor participation rate (~67%) that leaves few untapped candidates. While international immigration has increased since 2020, many potential workers still face barriers such as limited transportation, language challenges, childcare costs, recovery needs, and a lack of job-aligned skills. The NKADD region also has about 5,600 “opportunity youth” (ages 16-24) who are neither working nor in school.

If Northern Kentucky is to maintain its leadership in job creation and investment, we must keep more students, attract new talent, and help adults overcome barriers to work.

## REGIONAL WORKFORCE PRIORITIES

Workforce and economic development partners, including the NKY Chamber and NKY Works, are focused on five key strategies:

1. Retain more of the 160,000+ college students within 50 miles of NKY each year.
2. Engage high school students with local, high-demand career paths.
3. Attract graduates and professionals from outside the region.
4. Integrate legal immigrants already living here into our workforce.
5. Remove barriers and close skills gaps so more adults can find and keep quality jobs.

These efforts are working—but lasting success depends on partnership with our elected officials.

## POLICY PRIORITIES FOR ELECTED LEADERS

To strengthen Kentucky's workforce and ensure continued growth, we encourage policymakers to:

- Increase funding for Kentucky Adult Education, especially ESL and Integrated Education & Training programs, to help legal immigrants join and stay in the workforce.
- Fund a state and regional talent attraction campaign promoting Kentucky's in-demand careers.
- Support work-based learning by removing insurance barriers that limit hiring students under 18.
- Raise income eligibility for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) to reflect rising costs.
- Act on 2022 Benefit Cliff Task Force recommendations: establish a Basic Health Plan, phase down SNAP benefits gradually, and tie housing assistance to income.
- Streamline credential transferability for workers from other states and countries.
- Expand support for job seekers in recovery or with justice involvement, and for 'opportunity youth.'
- Sustain the Work Ready KY Dual Credit Scholarships and codify all-day kindergarten to strengthen the talent pipeline.