Executive Summary

The potential for two Pennsylvanias is a distinct possibility—one Pennsylvania that reflects the creation of new wealth from a vibrant, competitive, emergent economy and another Pennsylvania that is increasingly isolated and vulnerable. The Commonwealth’s and its individual citizens’ well-being will not be bright if the two Pennsylvanias become a reality. The demographic and economic forecasts foretell a future of an aging population laboring in a restructured economy based on services. Many of these occupations are devoted to supporting the health care and social service needs of that aging population. The service sector jobs, while critically important to the well-being of citizens of the Commonwealth, are undervalued in terms of compensation and will be challenged to provide a living wage or a decent standard of living for families. Their sustaining communities will struggle to survive.

As Pennsylvania’s land-grant university, Penn State has a responsibility to actively participate in the economic and social development of the Commonwealth. To be so engaged is a commitment of the University and an expectation of our sponsoring society. The Commonwealth has rightly defined economic and workforce development as critical to the future well-being of Pennsylvania and its standing in the nation. The success of our efforts as a University to assist the Commonwealth in the seemingly overwhelming challenge of creating a new economy, one based on agribusiness, advanced manufacturing and materials, biotechnology, information technology, and environmental technology, is perhaps Penn State’s most powerful opportunity for full engagement with the Commonwealth. Penn State has the resources and superbly qualified faculty and staff on our campuses and in centers and offices statewide to make a difference in the Commonwealth’s most pressing economic issue. President Graham Spanier’s recent reorganization to strengthen Outreach and Cooperative Extension created the largest integrated outreach organization in higher education in the country. Its strong connection to Technology Transfer, coupled with the new partnerships with the campus colleges, further positions Penn State at this time to be a powerful unified resource for the Commonwealth and its citizens.
This report represents the Coordinating Council for Outreach and Cooperative Extension’s responsibility to inform the University community about the critical nature of the Commonwealth’s human resource investment challenge, to review current Penn State economic and workforce development efforts, and to identify those opportunities where Penn State could do more to enhance its leadership role.
Recommendations

Penn State Strategic Initiatives

1. Workforce and economic development needs to be identified as a University-wide, interdisciplinary strategic initiative.

2. Penn State should establish a University standing committee to facilitate the University’s economic and workforce development needs analysis efforts and better coordinate our efforts as a University for greater synergy and impact. This body would serve as a champion, advocate, and clearinghouse for workforce development. Penn State should also consider identifying an office to support this committee and serve as an organizational focal point to support faculty interested in engaging in this work and implementing the many other recommendations noted in this report.

3. Penn State should develop a University-wide workforce preparation marketing strategy that clearly and simply articulates Penn State’s leadership role in the education of Pennsylvania’s workforce and development of the Commonwealth’s economy.

4. Penn State should respond with workforce educational and training programs in biotechnology, environmental technology, information technology, advanced materials production and advanced manufacturing, and agribusiness and the top industry growth areas including health services, business services, social services, and educational services.

5. Penn State should develop more associate degrees and certificate programs, including post-baccalaureate certificates that provide the technical and management skills needed to address the Commonwealth’s growing industrial workforce and economic development needs. When appropriate, these associate degrees and certificate programs should be aligned with more advanced degrees.
6. Penn State should enhance internships, practicums, and service learning that provide practical opportunities for students in the workplace in concert with their academic preparation.

7. Penn State should make information available to undergraduate students to make them aware of workforce education-related certificate programs as an additional option they might pursue to enhance their competitiveness in the job market when they graduate.

8. Penn State should continue to ensure that faculty are recognized and rewarded for their workforce and economic development outreach activities.

9. Penn State should consider establishing a special incentive fund for faculty for new workforce development initiatives to encourage and facilitate their entry into this outreach arena.

10. Penn State should actively develop partnering opportunities—especially with other higher education institutions—to expand opportunities to serve regional and local needs.

**Penn State Organizational Strategies**

11. Penn State should develop strong linkages with Team Pennsylvania (Team PA) and the Human Resource Investment Council’s (HRIC) standing committees—notably the Incumbent Worker, Information Technology, Workforce Education, Employment Statistics/Communication, and Rapid Response Committees—encourage Penn State faculty and staff involvement on the local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) statewide where possible, and establish a local presence for Penn State within each Team PA CareerLink Center.

12. Penn State should strengthen its connections between economic development and workforce development programs and services in Technology Transfer, Cooperative Extension, Continuing Education, and specialized institutes. These units play key roles
in the Commonwealth’s economic development model and are interrelated.

13. Faculty expertise in economic and workforce development should be aggregated University-wide from various campuses and departments and a forum created to facilitate and support their exchange of ideas.

14. Given the new HRIC initiatives and components of the new workforce development system, such as Individual Learning Accounts and contracts for educational services, Penn State should: (1) review its processes to ensure that its workforce-related education and training programs can become and remain certified and (2) review the policies for the WIBs vouchers to ensure that students can use them for Penn State programs so the University can remain a competitive provider.

**Penn State as a Leader in Economic and Workforce Development**

15. Communication links should be established across the University and with the Commonwealth to keep abreast of current workforce development system initiatives and priorities. Existing Penn State-generated employment/labor force/demographic research reports should be linked to the Pennsylvania Workforce Development Information System to enhance understanding of trends, and this information should be shared systematically within the University.

16. To inform the public and industry of its workforce development efforts, a listing of Penn State’s offerings University-wide should be accessible across the Commonwealth on the CareerLink electronic network, because this is the one-stop shop for employers and employees to access education and training needed to acquire necessary knowledge and skills for the workplace.

17. A plan to enhance the current systems of referral among Penn State units to maximize Penn State’s program development and
delivery opportunities in the *CareerLink* system should be developed.

18. A variety of external advisory boards exist for colleges, campuses, and program areas. The University standing committee should assess best practices in using external advisory boards to gain input on local needs.

**Penn State’s Opportunity to Strengthen its Assessments of the Commonwealth’s Needs**

19. Penn State should collaborate with Team PA to further identify and monitor Pennsylvania’s critical job growth categories and potential and continue to develop appropriate programmatic responses where appropriate.

20. Penn State should continue to enhance its ability to understand the economic and workforce development needs of the Commonwealth and develop educational programs that address marketplace changes and student interests, enhancing fit between programs and needs both University-wide and regionally.

21. A critical element of the needs assessment process is listening to stakeholders and partners, employees, and employers. Penn State should enhance collaboration in the needs assessment processes.

**Penn State’s Support in Development of Performance Measures**

22. Penn State should develop common outcome assessments and methods for systematically capturing information related to assessments of quality and impact of workforce-related programs and services for reporting purposes within the University and to external stakeholders. Penn State could assist the Commonwealth in developing performance measures as well
since this is a requirement that will be addressed in the new workforce development system.

**Other Observations**

23. Penn State should enhance awareness of the benefits to faculty of participating in workforce development efforts: e.g., consulting, industry-sponsored research, placement of graduates, student internship and cooperative learning experiences, and research opportunities.

24. Penn State should work with the emerging county-based Education Councils to ensure that they are aware of Penn State programs and services.