



# *Berks Workforce 2030*



## ***Recommendations***

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# Executive Summary

This supplemental report distills the full Berks Workforce 2030 findings into a focused action plan. It is designed for quick reference by partners who want to move directly from evidence to implementation. Rather than retelling the data story, this version highlights only the strategies and recommendations that will shape Berks County's workforce through 2035. Across all sections, the message is consistent: population growth will not solve the workforce challenge—participation, preparation, and retention will.

Three priorities guide every recommendation: expanding participation by removing barriers to work, building employer-led pipelines that prepare workers for high-demand jobs, and retaining local talent by improving job quality and community attachment.

Immediate opportunities for the next year include launching barrier-removal pilots such as childcare and transportation models, building an employer support hub that simplifies access to training funds and credentials, scaling career-connected learning and internship-to-hire pathways, formalizing advancement ladders for mid-career workers, and expanding flexibility through hybrid work and digital skills training.

These actions, taken together, provide a practical roadmap for strengthening the regional workforce and positioning Berks as a place where employers, educators, and residents can grow together..

# Population and Workforce Trends

Berks County's workforce growth will remain nearly flat through 2035, meaning future competitiveness depends less on new population inflows and more on retaining, preparing, and engaging current residents.

Berks County's working-age population (ages 25–64) will remain essentially flat through 2035, with minimal growth of up to 4% under optimistic projections. The population will skew older as mid-career workers (40–49) increase and older cohorts (55–64) retire. With limited inflow of younger adults, new workforce supply will depend on higher participation and retention rather than population growth. This creates an urgent need to strengthen pipelines for younger workers, support transitions for mid-career employees, and capture the expertise of older workers before retirement.

With only modest growth projected in Berks County's working-age population, the WDB's role is to help employers maximize participation, retention, and readiness. In this environment, every worker counts—and the Board can be a catalyst for unlocking untapped potential across the community. The following tactics outline how the Board can support employer strategies while drawing on proven models and best practices.

## **1. Help Employers Expand Participation through an Underutilized Talent Pool.**

Flat population growth means participation must rise, and new workforce expansion will need to come from groups not fully engaged in the economy today. The WDB can help employers design return-to-work programs for parents, veterans, and immigrant professionals, and provide technical assistance for small and mid-sized employers that lack HR capacity to onboard and retain workers who face barriers. A strong example is Northampton Community College's Career Pathways in Manufacturing, an MTTC-funded eight-week, 160-hour course that provides NIMS-recognized machining and CNC training to veterans, low-income residents, and those with limited tech access. Engaging and expanding the talent pools gives: employers access to overlooked workers, diversify their talent base, and fill vacancies more effectively. This approach diversifies hiring, builds inclusion, and helps employers fill persistent vacancies while expanding local opportunity.

## **2. Strengthen Early Career Pipelines in Partnership with Employers.**

Minimal growth in the 18–34 population means younger groups will not provide enough "natural replacement" for retiring workers. The WDB can help employers build stronger school-to-work transitions by scaling internships, apprenticeships, and contextualized literacy and math

programs that directly prepare students for high-demand jobs. One example is the Pennsylvania College of Technology Advanced Manufacturing Pre-Apprenticeship (AMP), which engages high school juniors and seniors in a four-month program covering CNC, robotics, and lean manufacturing while awarding stackable credentials. Enrollment has doubled, showing clear demand, and the anticipated result is that employers strengthen recruitment pipelines, reduce succession risks, and benefit from a flow of better-prepared entry-level talent. Employer participation in these early-career experiences not only builds a pipeline but also anchors young residents in the community.

### **3. Support Employers in Developing Advancement and Succession**

**Pathways.** Berks' workforce is heavily mid-career, offering stability now but exposing risks as older, highly skilled workers retire. The WDB can provide resources and convening support for employers to build advancement tracks, leadership training, and knowledge-transfer systems. This includes capturing the expertise of retiring staff through mentorship and job-shadowing, while preparing mid-career employees for supervisory and technical leadership roles. The anticipated result is that employers reduce disruption from retirements, protect institutional knowledge, and build loyalty by offering clear upward mobility. Capturing institutional knowledge through mentorship and cross-training will preserve skills and build loyalty among rising employees.

### **4. Emphasize Retention and Advancement of the Existing Workforce.**

With overall workforce growth expected to remain flat, the WDB can help employers keep workers engaged through investments in retention strategies, skill development, and career ladders. Supporting employers in accessing funding, coordinating training partnerships, and offering technical assistance ensures that employees can advance within Berks rather than leaving the region. The anticipated result is that employers will reduce turnover costs, stabilize their operations, and remain competitive despite limited growth in the prime-age population

With limited population growth ahead, labor force participation will determine Berks County's economic trajectory. The next section focuses on how to raise and sustain participation through targeted supports and barrier removal.

# Labor Force Participation

Participation rates are projected to hold between 78% and 83% over the next decade. To grow the workforce, Berks must focus on removing barriers, investing in skill-building, and improving job quality. Retention will be just as critical as recruitment.

Participation will hold between 78% and 83% through the next decade, with only modest potential for growth even under strong economic conditions. Employers report continued hiring difficulty, especially in healthcare, trades, and entry-level service roles. Barriers such as childcare, transportation, and housing constrain participation, while shifting worker expectations emphasize flexibility, culture, and advancement. The following actions target where partners can make measurable impact.

## **1. Invest in Current Workers through “Grow Your Own” Pipelines.**

Retaining talent is often more cost-effective than recruiting new staff, but employers need support to make that investment pay off. These efforts build internal pipelines and strengthen long-term retention.

- Spotlight and recognize employers who successfully invest in incumbent worker training, giving peers models they can adapt.
- Partner with community colleges to expand credit for prior learning, helping workers move more quickly through degree or credential pathways.
- Support the development of apprenticeship programs that blend classroom instruction with on-the-job experience, including assistance with program design and funding.

## **2. Engage Youth Earlier.** Keeping young people in Berks starts with showing them that meaningful opportunities exist locally. The WDB brings employers, schools, and students together through internships, mentorships, and advisory opportunities that build awareness and career readiness.

- Offer short-term, project-based internships that let students experience workplace expectations without requiring full-time commitments.
- Invite high school students to sit on advisory boards, ensuring their perspectives shape career programming while giving them an early connection to local employers.
- Add leadership and career readiness activities in schools, building communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skill.

**3. Expand Credentialing Pathways.** Reliable credential-based programs are proven to create reliable pipelines into critical industries like healthcare, manufacturing, and IT. The WDB convenes employers and educators to ensure credentials reflect actual workforce demand and give workers clear steps for advancement.

- Partner with employers to expand use of clinical rotations, internships, and hands-on training models as direct pipelines into jobs.
- Convene industry groups to design stackable credentials and apprenticeships that reflect real advancement opportunities in healthcare, manufacturing, and IT.
- Standardize credential frameworks across industries so employers can trust worker readiness and employees see clear and consistent routes to advancement.

**4. Anchor Workforce Strategy Around Job Quality.** With overall labor force participation capped, the competitiveness of Berks will depend on whether jobs are attractive enough to keep people engaged. The WDB helps employers measure job quality, share practices that make workplaces more appealing, and celebrate those leading the way.

- Develop a Job Quality Scorecard to benchmark wages, benefits, and career advancement opportunities, making it easier for employers to identify gaps and improvements.
- Provide technical assistance for employers to build transparent career ladders and promotion pathways that motivate workers to stay and grow.
- Highlight workplaces that offer flexible scheduling, positive culture, or other employee supports, raising the visibility of employers who set the standard for job quality.

**5. Expand Affordable Childcare Access through a Tri-Share Model.**

Childcare is one of the most consistent barriers preventing Berks residents from entering and staying in the workforce. Employers, educators, and service providers emphasized that parents frequently decline jobs, turn down shifts, or leave the labor force entirely because they cannot find affordable and reliable care. This issue cuts across industries, affecting entry-level and skilled positions alike, and has only intensified as more households face financial strain. A tri-share childcare model offers a promising solution. First piloted in states like Michigan and North Carolina, tri-share splits the cost of childcare evenly among three parties:

the employer, the employee, and the state (or an intermediary partner such as a foundation). This model ensures that workers pay only a third of the market cost, while employers gain more reliable staff and the public sector reduces the economic losses tied to low labor force participation.

The Berks County WDB is well-positioned to coordinate a local pilot by:

- Bring together employers in sectors hardest hit by childcare issues (healthcare, manufacturing, human services) to pool demand.
- Secure state and philanthropic funding so small and mid-sized employers can participate.
- Work with local childcare providers to expand hours that fit shift work.
- Embed childcare navigation into workforce programs so parents starting new jobs or apprenticeships get immediate support.

## **6. Improve Workforce Access through Employer-Supported Shuttles and**

**Guaranteed Ride Home Programs.** Reliable transportation is one of the largest barriers keeping Berks residents, especially hourly and middle-skill workers, out of the labor force. Employers, training providers, and human service leaders consistently report that workers decline job offers or leave their positions because they cannot secure dependable transportation across multiple shifts. In a county where many positions require evening, overnight, or weekend coverage, public transit often cannot meet demand. Without intervention, this barrier sidelines willing workers and constrains employer growth. A practical solution is to coordinate an employer-supported shuttle and vanpool system, paired with a Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) safety net. This combined approach ensures daily access to work while giving employees peace of mind that emergencies will not cost them their jobs.

- Convene anchor employers to co-fund shuttle routes that serve industrial corridors and training hubs.
- Partner with BARTA and workforce training providers to align shuttle schedules and routes with 2nd and 3rd shift work.
- Pursue public-private cost sharing, drawing on a mix of:
  - Employer contributions, offset by reduced turnover costs.
  - Employee participation fees, set at an affordable flat weekly rate.
  - Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds to cover pilot program costs for jobseekers.
  - Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) or other federal transportation grants that specifically target low-income workers.

- o State programs such as PennDOT's Multimodal Transportation Fund or DCED workforce development grants.
- o Philanthropic partners (e.g., Berks County Community Foundation) to underwrite initial operating costs or subsidize rides for small employers.
- Establish a Guaranteed Ride Home program through partnerships with Uber, Lyft, taxis, or local service providers, offering up to 4–6 free emergency rides per year for participating workers.

With core barriers like childcare and transportation addressed, the next challenge is to strengthen the skills that enable upward mobility. The following section focuses on literacy, numeracy, and contextual learning strategies that connect education to employment.

# Education, Literacy, and Numeracy

Employers are clear: foundational skills like literacy, numeracy, and communication, shape job readiness as much as technical credentials. Addressing these gaps through contextualized and employer-driven models will strengthen both worker advancement and business performance.

Employers across sectors report growing concerns about literacy, numeracy, and communication skills, especially in frontline and technical roles. English proficiency challenges are most acute in manufacturing and healthcare, while math readiness lags workforce demand. Targeted, job-connected learning models are the most effective way to close these gaps.

Strengthening contextualized literacy, numeracy, and digital skills through industry-led training and employer-education partnerships is essential to sustaining middle-skill employment and upward mobility.

Gaps in literacy and numeracy are not collapsing Berks County's workforce, but the pressure points are clear and concentrated in industries too important to ignore. Employers in manufacturing, healthcare, and transportation report declines in English proficiency and applied math, particularly in frontline roles where documentation, measurement, and communication are essential. Without targeted interventions, these gaps will limit advancement for workers, raise costs for businesses, and weaken regional competitiveness. The following recommendations highlight where employers, educators, and the Workforce Development Board can act together.

**1. Build and Brand an Employer Support Hub.** Many employers, especially small and mid-sized firms, struggle to find the right entry point into workforce resources. The Workforce Development Board already has strong programs, but they can be hard to navigate. A centralized hub would make it easier for employers to access training funds, short-term credentials, and technical assistance. It could also provide toolkits for onboarding and workplace training and serve as the place where industry groups guide curriculum and credential design. By creating a clear "front door," Berks can reduce duplication, expand participation, and make it easier for employers to invest in their workers. This front door simplifies navigation, reduces duplication, and expands participation in training programs.

- Provide access to training funds such as WedNet, tuition reimbursement, and state or federal incentives

- Offer clear pathways into short-term, stackable credentials (e.g., CNA and LPN in healthcare, mechatronics and CNC certifications at RACC, CDL for logistics)
- Deliver technical assistance to smaller firms, including help applying for grants, setting up tuition supports, or designing training pipelines
- Create employer toolkits for onboarding, screening, and embedding English and math readiness in workplace training
- Formalize industry groups in manufacturing, healthcare, and logistics as advisory councils to guide curricula, credentials, and dual enrollment pathways
- This approach ensures employers can quickly find and use available resources, increasing participation in workforce programs and building stronger pipelines of skilled workers.

## **2. Facilitate a Career Connected Learning Model with Levels of Engagement.**

**Engagement.** While many employers want to support the talent pipeline, they are often unsure of how to get involved or lack the capacity to sustain high-intensity partnerships. A tiered engagement model gives employers a roadmap of options, from simple career awareness activities to deep pipeline-building partnerships. This structured approach allows every employer to contribute at an achievable level while scaling collective impact.

- Career Exploration (low commitment): Career talks, industry days, job site tours, and student-led projects such as “What’s So Cool About Manufacturing”.
- Career Engagement (moderate commitment): Mock interviews, workplace challenges, project-based learning, and mentorship (e.g., PSU Berks senior design projects).
- Career Experience (high commitment): Internships, apprenticeships, co-ops, and credential-aligned projects that directly address literacy, numeracy, and technical skill gaps.

## **3. Leverage Industry-Led Curriculum Models.**

The Schmidt Training and Technology Center at RACC demonstrates how employer-driven design leads to training programs that directly meet workforce needs. Employers co-develop curricula, integrate applied math and communication skills, and provide guaranteed job pathways for graduates. This model shows how flexible scheduling, competency-based progression, and industry-grade labs can close foundational skill gaps while preparing workers for technical roles. Expanding this approach ensures training aligns with

employer expectations and provides smaller companies with access to high-quality programs they could not deliver on their own.

- Employer-driven design: East Penn and other firms co-create training, set benchmarks, and align credentials with hiring needs.
- Flexible scheduling: Competency-based, open-entry courses allow shift workers to complete training in 6–12 weeks.
- Applied learning: Labs and simulators emphasize hands-on performance, with 75% of grading based on practice rather than tests.
- Foundational integration: Applied math, blueprint reading, and communication are built into every program.
- Regional access: Smaller employers without in-house training capacity benefit from shared services.

#### **4. Expand Contextualized Literacy and Numeracy Training.**

General remediation often fails to engage adults or connect to real workplace demands. Contextualized training addresses this gap by tying instruction directly to job tasks—turning math and literacy from abstract concepts into tools for safety, productivity, and advancement. Local employers have already piloted this model, embedding ESL and applied math into daily work. Scaling these efforts countywide would give workers the skills they need to succeed while giving employers confidence in training outcomes.

- Siemens' Mechatronic Systems Certification Program offers applied STEM curriculum aligned with global standards.
- East Penn Manufacturing offers math, blueprint reading, and ESL training during and after shifts with the Literacy Council.
- Training includes both English language learners and English-speaking workers who want to expand skills.
- Programs have documented success: six East Penn employees recently graduated from Level 1 ESL after 10 weeks of on-site instruction, improving communication and career readiness.

#### **5. Engage Diverse Stakeholders Across the Pipeline.**

Workforce solutions are most effective when those navigating the system—students, adult learners, and English language learners—have a seat at the table. Too often, workforce strategies are designed without the perspective of those directly impacted by barriers such as scheduling, transportation, or language. By intentionally including learners in planning, the WDB ensures solutions are grounded in lived experiences, making programs more accessible, equitable, and effective.

- High school students: Establish advisory panels to share insights on readiness and career activities.

- Postsecondary learners: Host forums to discuss the value of internships, apprenticeships, and applied learning.
- Adult learners: Gather input from those pursuing GEDs, short-term credentials, or career transitions on barriers like childcare and work schedules.
- English language learners: Partner with Literacy Council and Tec Centro to represent ELL voices and ensure programs address technical vocabulary and workplace literacy needs.

**6. Measure and Track Skills with Standardized Tools.** Right now, most data on literacy and numeracy in Berks County comes from employer anecdotes or student test scores. These measures are fragmented and do not provide a consistent picture of workforce readiness. Standardized assessments give schools, training providers, and employers a shared framework for evaluating progress and accountability. By adopting portable credentials and participating in data-sharing agreements, Berks can move from isolated snapshots to long-term tracking that informs hiring, funding, and policy.

- Adopt evidence-based assessments such as ACT WorkKeys to measure applied math, workplace documents, and graphic literacy.
- Provide portable credentials for workers, recognized across industries.
- Establish cross-sector data-sharing agreements with K-12 districts, higher education, and adult education providers.
- Encourage statewide opt-in to the Postsecondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO) program, which links graduate outcomes to wages and industries across state lines.

With stronger foundational skills and employer-driven training models, Berks can better retain students and workers who might otherwise leave. The next section focuses on mobility, commuting, and retention strategies to keep talent anchored locally.

# Mobility, Commuting, and Talent Retention

Berks County's long-term competitiveness depends not just on preparing talent but keeping it. Outmigration of college graduates and daily outbound commuting weaken the regional labor pool. The goal is to convert education and internship experiences into local employment, strengthen professional networks, and promote Berks as a connected place for young professionals.

Outmigration of educated young adults remains a core challenge. Roughly 40% of residents commute outside the county for work, and inflows from nearby counties do not fully replace the skill loss. Without improved retention of college graduates and emerging professionals, Berks risks losing more talent. Intentional retention programs can reverse this trend by aligning employers, colleges, and community partners around shared goals.

**1. Expand Internship to Hire Pathways across the County.** A countywide internship to hire model turns student interest into local employment by pairing real experience with community connection. Building on the momentum of the Internship Summit and campus led events, a clear pipeline gives educated young adults reasons to launch careers in Berks rather than leaving for larger metro areas. Healthcare employers who host interns report that clinical placements create stronger pipelines. By allowing students to learn the employer's culture and role expectations firsthand, internships build familiarity and trust. Employers note that when those students later seek full time employment, they demonstrate greater buy in and long term commitment.

- Embed mentorship and community building in every internship, including civic and cultural touchpoints such as college night style events that showcase neighborhoods and amenities.
- Connect employer-led internships and early career roles to a retention campaign so students see a path to full-time work in Berks County.
- Track conversion to full time roles and one year retention to focus resources where the pipeline works best.

**2. Launch a Countywide Talent Fellowship for Recent Graduates and Young Professionals.** A visible, branded fellowship signals that Berks invests in emerging talent and offers structured pathways into high demand roles in information technology, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing. By combining paid placements, mentorship, leadership development, and

community engagement, the fellowship addresses brain drain and reduces outbound commuting.

- Partner with Greater Reading Young Professionals to add civic projects, cultural events, and peer networking to the fellowship experience.
- Design a residency-style model that pairs fellows with local employers and includes community-based projects to deepen place attachment.
- Coordinate a marketing campaign that highlights affordability, amenities, outdoor recreation, and employer strength to attract and retain higher skill talent.
- Align placements with employers in Berks and neighboring counties to capture returning commuters and build cross county pipelines.
- Focus on outcomes such as local placement, one year retention, and reduced outbound commuting among participants.

### **3. Market Relocation Incentives to Attract Higher Skill Residents.**

A targeted relocation campaign meets mobile talent where they are and elevates Berks as a compelling choice for people seeking both career growth and community. Using established platforms and employer backed perks increases reach and makes incentives tangible. In Pennsylvania, Mercer County has already used the MakeMyMove platform to attract new residents with tailored incentive packages. Hermitage offers a \$5,000 cash incentive plus perks valued at \$7,400, while Greenville and Sharon provide smaller relocation bundles, showing how even modest packages can influence decisions. Featuring Berks on the same platform would expand visibility and create competitive positioning in the regional market.

- Feature Berks on platforms that showcase financial incentives, signing bonuses, cultural perks, and networking opportunities aimed at recent graduates, remote workers, and young professionals.
- Encourage employer backed relocation perks such as signing bonuses, housing stipends, or tuition repayment linked to target roles.
- Pair incentives with messaging about quality of life, including outdoor recreation, arts, and family friendly neighborhoods.
- Target outreach to high demand fields aligned to local needs in information technology, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing.
- Monitor engagement and relocations tied to the campaign to refine offers and ensure impact.

As Berks builds its retention ecosystem, flexible work will become a critical tool for attracting and keeping professionals. The next section explores how hybrid and remote models can expand participation without sacrificing productivity.

# Remote Work and Flexibility

Flexibility is now a baseline expectation for many workers. While not every industry can offer full remote options, hybrid scheduling and digital upskilling can expand access and retention across the county.

Remote work participation in Berks County (8.9%) trails the national average (15.2%), limiting flexibility benefits that could draw more residents into the workforce. While manufacturing and healthcare limit full remote options, hybrid scheduling, digital training, and coworking hubs can expand inclusion. Branding Berks as a “flexible work” county and supporting digital literacy would help attract and retain younger professionals and caregivers seeking balance.

The goal is to identify where flexibility is possible and prepare workers to succeed in those roles.

## **1. Expand Remote-Eligible Roles through Occupation-Based Audits.**

Remote work in Berks County lags the national average, with only 8.9% of residents working remotely compared to 15.2% nationwide. This gap signals missed opportunities to boost participation among parents, caregivers, and professionals seeking flexibility. Employers often assume that most roles in manufacturing, healthcare, or education cannot be adapted, but analyzing job functions at the occupational code level reveals opportunities that may otherwise be overlooked. Many positions include components such as scheduling, documentation, analysis, or customer support that can be performed off-site even if the core role requires in-person work. The Workforce Development Board can support this process by helping employers review standard occupational classifications (SOC codes) and typical responsibilities within their industry to determine which elements could shift to hybrid or remote formats.

- Provide free or low-cost job analysis services for employers, especially small and mid-sized firms that lack internal HR capacity.
- Develop templates and case studies that show how specific occupation codes in manufacturing, healthcare, and education include tasks that can be separated into remote or hybrid functions.
- Offer consulting and/or technical support to companies that want to pilot flexible arrangements based on occupational task analysis, ensuring productivity is maintained while opening opportunities for a wider pool of workers.

**2. Strengthen Digital Skills and Remote Work Readiness.** One reason remote work opportunities are uneven is that not all workers possess the digital literacy required for success in online environments. This is especially relevant for Hispanic/Latino workers in Berks, who currently report the lowest remote participation rates at just 5.1 %. Targeted training in remote collaboration tools and cybersecurity not only makes workers more competitive for flexible jobs but also ensures employers have staff who can operate securely in distributed environments.

- Partner with RACC, the Literacy Council, and local libraries to deliver short courses in tools like Teams, Zoom, project management software, and digital security.
- Market these programs directly to underrepresented groups to close racial and ethnic gaps in remote participation.
- Subsidize training through employer vouchers to encourage businesses to hire program graduates into remote-eligible roles.

**3. Leverage Coworking Spaces as Remote Work Connectors.** Remote workers tied to employers outside the county represent both a challenge and an opportunity. Without intentional local connections, these individuals may eventually relocate closer to their employers. By partnering with and expanding the reach of existing coworking spaces, Berks can anchor talent locally, create a professional base for remote workers, and keep external wages flowing into the county economy. These spaces can serve not only as physical work environments but also as connectors to networks, training, and community engagement.

- Partner with existing coworking providers to market their services directly to remote professionals living in Berks County..
- Use coworking spaces as venues for networking, professional development, and remote-worker affinity groups, creating social ties that encourage long-term residence.
- Promote coworking as part of Berks County's workforce brand, highlighting flexibility, high-speed connectivity, and professional amenities that allow residents to "live local, work anywhere."

Even the best job or flexible schedule cannot offset the strain of unaffordable housing. The final section links housing attainability directly to workforce stability and retention.

# Housing and Workforce Stability

Housing affordability is now one of the strongest predictors of workforce retention. Employers across healthcare, manufacturing, and human services report that unstable or unaffordable housing directly affects recruitment, attendance, and turnover. The following actions position housing as part of the workforce solution.

Berks County's housing attainability crisis is not just a real estate issue—it is a workforce issue. Employers across healthcare, manufacturing, and human services report that unstable or unaffordable housing directly affects recruitment, retention, and performance. Rising home prices, limited rental options, and an aging housing stock put particular strain on essential workers and younger professionals. Addressing these challenges will require collaboration not only from the Workforce Development Board and employers but also from local governments, housing authorities, developers, and community partners. Coordinated engagement across these sectors can ensure that housing solutions are designed to strengthen both the labor force and long-term community stability. The following recommendations present a cross-sector framework for action.

## **1. Strengthen Employer-Assisted and Workforce-Linked Housing.**

Employers have a critical role to play in stabilizing housing for their workforce. Models already exist in Pennsylvania that can be expanded locally. Embedding housing into the workforce toolkit, helps employers reduce turnover, ensuring that staff can live near their work

- Activate the PHFA Employer Assisted Housing Program and encourage major Berks employers to co-sponsor down-payment and closing costs.
- Partner with the Housing Authority to pilot vouchers for residents enrolled in workforce training or employed in high-need industries such as healthcare and logistics.
- Position housing assistance as a core retention strategy alongside tuition reimbursement and upskilling opportunities.

## **2. Expand and Diversify Affordable Housing Supply.** The county's housing stock remains heavily single-family, while today's largest household category is singles living alone. Expanding the mix of housing types will make Berks more affordable and attractive for both essential workers and mobile young professionals. To meet changing needs, Berks must expand multifamily and alternative housing models.

- Update zoning in municipalities in and around job centers to allow for higher density zoning (and excluding single family density zoning) and removing barriers (codes, parking, etc).
- Encourage development of accessory dwelling units to provide flexible, affordable options for younger workers, single earners, and older adults.
- Streamline approvals for workforce-oriented projects and incentivize employer or nonprofit co-investment.

**3. Rehabilitate and Preserve Aging Housing Stock.** More than half of Berks County's homes were built before 1970, limiting quality and attainability. Preserving these units is crucial to maintain housing attainability.

- Direct PHARE funds and USDA Housing Preservation Grants toward repairs and modernization of workforce households' homes.
- Launch a Workforce Rehab Initiative that prioritizes essential workers referred by employers for stabilization support.

**4. Leverage Federal, State, and Rural Housing Resources.** Rural areas of the county face unique challenges and qualify for federal housing tools.

- Expand use of USDA Section 502 Direct Loans (zero-down, income-based homeownership) and Section 515 Multifamily Loans (developer financing for affordable rentals).
- Host an annual “USDA Housing Access Workshop” to connect nonprofits, townships, and developers to these resources.
- Integrate rural housing expansion with workforce strategies, particularly in healthcare and manufacturing hubs outside Reading.

The Berks Workforce 2030 Recommendations Report translates the county's full workforce study into a concise action plan for employers, educators, and community partners. It highlights practical steps to expand workforce participation, strengthen skill pipelines, and retain local talent. Core priorities include reducing barriers like childcare and transportation, scaling employer-led training, and linking housing, flexibility, and job quality to retention. Together, these strategies position Berks County to engage every willing worker and build a resilient, future-ready economy.