

# Workforce Solutions Middle Rio Grande Board Plan Program Years 2021-2024

## Introduction

Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) §108, each Local Workforce Development Board (Board) is required to develop and submit to the state a comprehensive four year plan (Local Plan) that identifies and describes policies and procedures as well as local activities that are in line with the State Plan. This Local Plan must be developed openly and be available to the public for comment for 30 days, particularly to members of the business and educational communities as well as various other labor organizations. Along with submission of the Local Plan to the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), the Board must submit all public comments of disagreement with the plan to TWC.

At the end of the first two-year period, the appropriate chief elected officials (CEOs) and the Board will review the local plan, and prepare and submit modifications to reflect changes in the labor market and economic conditions, factors affecting the implementation of the plan, changes in financing, changes to the structure of the Board, and/or the need to revise strategies to meet local performance goals.

### Part 1: Board Vision and Strategies

The strategic elements of the Local Workforce Development Board Planning Guidelines (Guidelines) are as follows:

#### A. Vision and Goals

(WIOA §108(b)(1)(E); 20 CFR §679.560(a)(5))

Boards must include a description of the Board's strategic vision to support regional economic growth and economic self-sufficiency. The description must include:

- goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce, including early education services, and services for youth and individuals with barriers to employment; and
- goals relating to the performance accountability measures based on performance indicators described in WIOA §116(b)(2)(A).

#### Vision

The vision which the Workforce Solutions Middle Rio Grande Board (Board) will pursue in its endeavors is of a region in which all residents have the greatest possible opportunity for full and effective economic participation, private enterprise has the maximum opportunity to grow and develop in an orderly manner, and public services are organized and delivered in the most efficient and cost effective manner possible; a region in which all people have the greatest possible opportunity for economic advancement, businesses have the broadest possible

opportunity to grow and develop, and government has the highest possible capacity to provide quality public service without constituting a burden on either the people or the economy

The Board has determined that the best way to serve job seekers is to provide employer-driven workforce development services. These services focus on employers' need for a knowledgeable, skillful workforce to help business become productive and competitive both locally and in the global market. Job seekers benefit from this perspective as more employment opportunities become available to job seekers through business success and growth resulting in increased employer participation in the workforce system and increase employment opportunities for job seekers. The One Stop Services contractor will be charged with assisting the Board in its implementation of an employer driven One Stop Services.

### **Board Goals**

Goal One: Develop a local employment and training system where employers and job seekers choose the workforce center system as the first choice in meeting their employment needs.

Objectives:

1. To develop a fully functioning one stop career center system that streamlines employment related services and provides services to all job seekers and employers in a hassle free, user friendly environment driven by customer need.
2. Increase the availability of services in the region.
3. Enhance the quality of services in the region.

Goal Two: The workforce of the Middle Rio Grande Workforce Development Area will possess the necessary skills and education to meet present and future needs of employers.

Objectives:

1. To develop and maintain an employment and training system that produces qualified applicants with the necessary skills to fill existing and future jobs.
2. To improve relations with the employer community and better understand their needs.
3. To enhance the workforce development area's employment opportunities.
4. To help improve the quality and quantity of training opportunities for residents
5. To enforce accountability for placement among education and training providers for the customers they serve.
6. To listen to workforce investment system partners to learn the workforce needs of the community and address these needs through improvements in workforce center service delivery

Goal Three: The Board will develop a collaborative partnership between education, business, economic development and the community in general to address the skill requirements of the current and emerging workforce.

Objectives:

1. Ensure that all students are provided with opportunities to develop high levels of academic and technical competence.

2. Provide opportunities for all students to gain practical work and learning experience outside of the classroom.
3. Assist eligible youth to make informed career choices by offering a broad variety of career exploration opportunities involving business, industry, parents, teachers, counselors, administrators and community organizations.
4. Create a core service mix that is sequential, comprehensive, and includes strong work ethics, workplace foundation skills, and value-added occupational skills training.
5. Establish a workforce development structure that assures the integration of economic development and workforce development.
6. Attract broader community and economic development resources to improve economic opportunities in the region.

Goal Four: Ensure the success of workforce development programs through accountability, evaluation, and a rigorous continuous improvement.

Objectives:

1. All workforce development performance criteria will be exceeded by WFMRG contractors.
2. Establish and maintain a data analysis and reporting capability to keep the Board apprised of the program successes and areas in need of improvement.
3. Create and access staff development opportunities

## **B. Board Strategies**

(WIOA §108(b)(1)(F); 20 CFR §679.560(a)(6))

Boards must include a description of the Board's strategy to work with the entities carrying out the core programs and with the required partners to align resources available to the local workforce development area (workforce area) to achieve the vision and goals.

The mission of Workforce Solutions Middle Rio Grande (the Board) is to assure the creation of a systematic, integrated system within the Middle Rio Grande Workforce Development Area through which its residents have access to quality employment and employment related education and training services, and its employers, public and private, can find skilled and productive workers, access services to upgrade the skills, productivity and competitiveness of incumbent workers, and assistance in creating new and expanded employment opportunities. The Board current Contractor Middle Rio Grande Development Council (WFSMRG) has been providing workforce development and child care management services for over 50 years. With the tenured relationship that the Board has with WFSMRG, we are able, as a team, work to support the mission, vision and the Board's goals and work to continuously improve the performance of the One Stop Center system and also the quality of our customer service.

### **C. High-Performing Board**

(WIOA §108(b)(18); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(17))

Boards must include a description of the actions the Board will take toward becoming or remaining a high-performing Board, consistent with the factors developed by the Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC).

The Board achieved all performance measures in FY2019 and is on track to perform in a similar manner for FY2020. Board members are encouraged to become more involved in the workforce center system activities, to meet with partner agencies to discuss workforce development needs in the region, to hear customer success stories and become inspired by the accomplishments by former participants. Board members are also encouraged to take part in any training that may come available for Board members to enhance their knowledge about workforce development and the needs of the region. Board and contractor staff are encouraged to attend training in their field of expertise as well as to become "cross-trained" in other functions with the system so as to enhance staff capabilities through the system.

The Board is under new, experienced leadership that will be working with not only Board staff but with WFSMRG on a new innovative plan to boost performance measures. The Board will also be utilizing the partner agencies and local agencies to develop new strategies to include and overcome the challenges that COVID-19 has created. Board staff, Board members and Contractor staff are also being encouraged and provided training that will be to enhance their knowledge of the Workforce programs and the One Stop services, management, monthly financial and program analyses will provide data to adjust and enhance objectives under a continuous improvement model.

### **Part 2: Economic and Workforce Analysis**

#### **A. Regional Economic and Employment Needs Analysis**

(WIOA §108(b)(1)(A); 20 CFR §679.560(a)(1))

Boards must include a regional analysis of the following:

- The economic conditions, including existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors, in-demand occupations, and target occupations
- The employment needs of employers in existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors, in-demand occupations, and target occupations

#### **B. Knowledge and Skills Analysis**

(WIOA §108(b)(1)(B); 20 CFR §679.560(a)(2))

Boards must include an analysis of the knowledge and skills needed to meet the employment needs of the employers in the region, including employment needs for in-demand industry sectors, in-demand occupations, and target occupations.

The in-demand industry sectors are presented in the table below (Source: Chmura Economics & Analytics 2020). As you can see from this report the location quotients (LQs) indicate sectors in which a region has high concentrations of employment compared to the national average. Something to note is that with an LQ of 10.76, mining, quarrying and oil and gas extraction employment is more than 10 times greater than the national average. Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, public administration and educational services make up other large LQs.

**Table 3.3.1: Industry Snapshot, Middle Rio Grande, Four Quarters Ending 2020Q1**

NAICS	Industry	Employment	Avg Ann Wages	LQ
62	Health Care and Social Assistance	11,868	\$32,484	1.19
44	Retail Trade	8,517	\$25,712	1.20
61	Educational Services	7,976	\$35,425	1.41
92	Public Administration	6,582	\$69,032	2.02
72	Accommodation and Food Services	6,165	\$17,563	0.99
21	Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	3,194	\$103,158	10.76
23	Construction	3,424	\$36,011	0.86
31	Manufacturing	3,375	\$37,233	0.59
56	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	3,471	\$33,748	0.79
48	Transportation and Warehousing	3,114	\$51,729	0.98
11	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	2,807	\$27,513	3.09
81	Other Services (except Public Administration)	2,048	\$21,394	0.66
52	Finance and Insurance	1,389	\$44,493	0.51
42	Wholesale Trade	1,279	\$51,326	0.49
71	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	1,124	\$27,275	0.81
54	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	1,124	\$51,652	0.24
53	Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	824	\$43,612	0.68
51	Information	451	\$48,233	0.33
22	Utilities	401	\$71,139	1.13
55	Management of Companies and Enterprises	116	\$60,407	0.11
99	Unclassified	21	\$24,935	0.38
	<b>Total - All Industries</b>	<b>69,271</b>	<b>\$40,243</b>	<b>1.00</b>

Source: Chmura Economics & Analytics 2020

The industry mix has been changed considerably with the most notable change in the oil and gas extraction field.

**Table 3.3.2: Changes in Industry Mix 2010-2020**

Industry	2010Q4		2020Q1		Change 2010-2020	
	Employment	% of Total	Employment	% of Total	Employment	Avg Ann % Change
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	3,004	5.0%	2,807	4.1%	-197	-0.7%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	1,099	1.8%	3,194	4.6%	2,095	12.6%
Utilities	339	0.6%	401	0.6%	62	1.9%
Construction	3,475	5.8%	3,424	4.9%	-50	-0.2%
Manufacturing	3,404	5.7%	3,375	4.9%	-29	-0.1%
Wholesale Trade	1,174	2.0%	1,279	1.8%	104	1.0%
Retail Trade	6,960	11.6%	8,517	12.3%	1,557	2.3%
Transportation and Warehousing	2,998	5.0%	3,114	4.5%	116	0.4%
Information	510	0.9%	451	0.7%	-59	-1.4%
Finance and Insurance	1,320	2.2%	1,389	2.0%	70	0.6%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	588	1.0%	824	1.2%	236	3.8%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	833	1.4%	1,124	1.6%	291	3.4%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	80	0.1%	116	0.2%	36	4.2%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	2,028	3.4%	3,471	5.0%	1,443	6.2%
Educational Services	7,977	13.3%	7,976	11.5%	-1	0.0%
Health Care and Social Assistance	10,631	17.7%	11,868	17.1%	1,237	1.2%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	1,168	1.9%	1,124	1.6%	-45	-0.4%
Accommodation and Food Services	4,191	7.0%	6,165	8.9%	1,973	4.4%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	1,747	2.9%	2,048	3.0%	301	1.8%
Public Administration	6,400	10.7%	6,582	9.5%	182	0.3%

Source: JobsEQ® by Chmura

The Board's in demand occupations lists (below) presents those occupations that WIOA funds may be employed to purchase training for eligible participants. As such these occupations represent the selected occupations the Board considers to be most in demand as well as meeting the criteria for targeted training (e.g. \$12 hour wage and less than two years of training). Some occupations with wages below \$12 may be considered to increase the opportunities for entry level positions. The target occupations are presented in detail with additional data on the chart below:

**IN DEMAND OCCUPATIONS FOR MIDDLE RIO GRANDE**

Middle Rio Grande	15-1122	Information Security Analysts
Middle Rio Grande	15-1151	Computer User Support Specialists
Middle Rio Grande	29-1141	Registered Nurses
Middle Rio Grande	29-2034	Radiologic Technologists and Technicians
Middle Rio Grande	29-2041	Emergency Medical Technicians & Paramedics
Middle Rio Grande	29-2052	Pharmacy Technicians
Middle Rio Grande	29-2061	Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses
Middle Rio Grande	31-9091	Dental Assistants
Middle Rio Grande	31-9092	Medical Assistants
Middle Rio Grande	31-9097	Phlebotomists
Middle Rio Grande	33-2011	Firefighters
Middle Rio Grande	33-3012	Correctional Officers & Jailers
Middle Rio Grande	33-3021	Detectives and Criminal Investigators
Middle Rio Grande	33-3051	Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers
Middle Rio Grande	43-3031	Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks
Middle Rio Grande	43-6013	Medical Secretaries
Middle Rio Grande	47-2073	Operating Engineers and Other Construction Equipment Operators
Middle Rio Grande	47-2111	Electricians
Middle Rio Grande	49-3011	Aircraft Mechanics and Service Technicians
Middle Rio Grande	49-3023	Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics
Middle Rio Grande	49-3031	Bus & Truck Mechanics & Diesel Engine Specialists
Middle Rio Grande	49-9021	Heating, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers
Middle Rio Grande	49-9051	Electrical Power-Line Installers and Repairers
Middle Rio Grande	49-9071	Maintenance & Repair Workers, General
Middle Rio Grande	51-4121	Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers
Middle Rio Grande	53-3032	Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers

**Target Occupations for Middle Rio Grande WDA 2017 - 2019**

Occupation	Annual Openings	Entry Hourly Wage
49-3011 Aircraft Mechanics/Service Techs	2	\$20.18
49-3023 Auto Service Techs/Mechanics	3	\$9.36
49-9071 Maintenance Repairs and Workers	11	\$9.24
43-3031 Bookkeeping/ Accounting/ Auditing	3	\$10.51
49-3031 Bus/Truck Mechanic/Diesel Specialist	2	\$12.12
33-3012 Correctional Officers/Jailers	1	\$13.37
15-1151 Computer User Support Specialist	2	\$12.38
33-3021 Detectives/Criminal Investigators	2	\$32.06
29-2041 Emergency Medical	12	\$11.61
49-9051 Electrical Power Line Installer/Repairer	5	\$20.98
47-2111 Electricians	2	\$11.74
33-2011 Fire Fighters	3	\$17.31
29 2061 Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurses	6	\$21.68
29-2034 Radiologic Technologist	1	\$18.00
43-6013 Medial Secretaries	9	\$9.71
47-2073 Operating Engineer/Construction Equipment	3	\$11.35
33-3051 Police/Sheriff's Patrol Officers	6	\$15.64
29-1141 Registered Nurses	15	\$22.20
31-9097 Phlebotomists	2	\$11.45
49-9021 Heating, Air Conditioning & Refrigeration Mechanics/Installers	4	\$12.37
53-3032 Truck Drivers, Heavy/Tractor-Trailer	18	\$13.08
51-4121 Welders/Cutters/Solderers/Brazers	2	\$13.51
31-3092 Medical Assistants	6	\$11.45
15-1122 Information Security Analyst	45	\$30.44
<b>No data for MRG - San Antonio data used</b>		

The 2016-2026 occupational projections released by TWC and on which the above Target Occupations chart is based, uses a different statistical model than previous TWC projections. Therefore, the data is not "cross compatible" between previous year's projection sets. Though annual openings may seem low in some occupations, the number of individuals transferring into the occupation and the replacement openings which are not considered in the "growth" projections can represent significant annual openings. Some occupations have entry level wages less than \$12 per hour but represent career ladder opportunities and/or have significant wages for experienced workers.

Below you will see the chart with the occupation groups in the region that shows the average wages per workers.

**Table 3.4.1: Middle Rio Grande Region Occupation Mix 2020Q1**

Occupation Title	Employment	Avg Ann Wages <sup>1</sup>	LQ	Avg Ann % Chg In Empl (5 Years)	Unempl Rate	Annual Demand <sup>2</sup>	Forecast Ann Growth
Office and Administrative Support	7,459	\$31,800	0.85	0.1%	4.4%	821	-0.4%
Sales and Related	6,731	\$31,800	1.00	1.7%	6.6%	953	-0.3%
Food Preparation and Serving Related	5,603	\$21,300	0.94	1.9%	8.2%	1,048	0.8%
Educational Instruction and Library	5,455	\$51,000	1.40	1.1%	4.5%	475	0.0%
Transportation and Material Moving	5,431	\$35,500	0.95	1.2%	6.4%	689	0.2%
Management	4,896	\$79,700	1.10	1.1%	1.9%	454	0.4%
Healthcare Support	4,457	\$21,600	1.47	3.2%	5.7%	804	3.0%
Construction and Extraction	4,223	\$39,800	1.32	-2.4%	6.5%	582	1.3%
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	4,193	\$72,400	1.07	0.8%	2.4%	327	1.5%
Production	3,084	\$31,200	0.76	-2.0%	5.3%	313	-1.0%
Protective Service	2,710	\$51,600	1.81	1.8%	2.9%	248	0.1%
Business and Financial Operations	2,682	\$61,000	0.71	1.8%	3.5%	265	0.3%
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	2,622	\$37,700	0.99	0.4%	3.4%	266	0.3%
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	2,579	\$24,800	1.09	3.1%	6.7%	352	0.4%
Personal Care and Service	1,692	\$26,400	0.86	2.1%	6.0%	268	0.4%
Community and Social Service	1,174	\$49,900	1.00	3.3%	2.8%	146	1.2%
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	942	\$24,300	2.16	-2.3%	13.0%	152	0.0%
Computer and Mathematical	841	\$70,100	0.41	2.6%	3.4%	66	0.3%
Architecture and Engineering	778	\$80,100	0.66	0.5%	3.1%	64	0.4%
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	644	\$50,300	0.51	1.1%	4.9%	71	0.0%
Life, Physical, and Social Science	599	\$65,900	1.01	1.6%	3.1%	59	0.5%
Legal	474	\$74,000	0.82	0.9%	2.0%	32	0.3%
<b>Total - All Occupations</b>	<b>69,271</b>	<b>\$42,100</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>5.2%</b>	<b>8,453</b>	<b>0.5%</b>

Source: Chmura Economics & Analytics 2020

MRGDC has a long history of identifying, understanding, and tracking the growth and decline of industries and occupations in the Middle Rio Grande area. For example, we developed customized employment and training solutions in response to the ups and downs of the oil and gas industry, and helped connect Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita evacuees to employment opportunities in the area. Currently, we are modifying our services to meet the new realities of the COVID-19 pandemic. We prepare substantive labor market information reports that are based on employer- and/or industry-specific needs, including occupational staffing or hiring patterns, working conditions, wage rates, local employment history and trends, and pool of qualified workers. We use the following methodologies for our labor market analyses:

- Tools to gather and analyze supplemental data:
  - Texas Labor Market Information
  - WIT o Workforce Reports
  - SitesOnTexas
- Longstanding relationships with local and regional economic development entities that play a significant role in assisting our staff in identifying the industry trends in our region, including:
  - SBDCs
  - SBA Regional Office, San Antonio
  - Local chambers of commerce
  - Economic development foundations and corporations

- Municipal economic development coordinators
- Bank and financial institutions
- Chmura, our contracted consulting organization, to develop customized, actionable intelligence about activities and issues that affect the Middle Rio Grande economy.

### C. Labor Force Analysis and Trends

(WIOA §108(b)(1)(C); 20 CFR §679.560(a)(3))

Boards must include an analysis of the regional workforce, including current labor force employment and unemployment data, information on labor market trends, and educational and skill levels of the workforce, including individuals with barriers to employment.

Key target populations for workforce development services remain those most in need of assistance: veterans, foster youth, at risk youth, offenders, those in poverty, dislocated workers, individuals with disabilities, and individuals lacking basic skills or work maturity skills.

The Middle Rio Grande workforce development area had a population of 172,941 in the 2020 U.S. Census. The table below presents the breakdown by race/ethnicity and sex. The region is predominantly Hispanic [note: Hispanic is an ethnicity. The Hispanic count includes white, black and other.]

Summary<sup>1</sup>

	Percent			Value		
	WFS Middle Rio Region	USA	Texas	WFS Middle Rio Region	USA	Texas
<b>Demographics</b>						
Population (ACS)	—	—	—	172,941	324,697,795	28,260,856
Male	50.5%	49.2%	49.7%	87,419	159,886,919	14,034,009
Female	49.5%	50.8%	50.3%	85,522	164,810,876	14,226,847
Median Age <sup>2</sup>	—	—	—	32.7	38.1	34.6
Under 18 Years	28.5%	22.6%	26.0%	49,321	73,429,392	7,338,445
18 to 24 Years	11.0%	9.4%	9.9%	19,065	30,646,327	2,790,857
25 to 34 Years	13.6%	13.9%	14.7%	23,470	45,030,415	4,154,182
35 to 44 Years	11.7%	12.6%	13.5%	20,257	40,978,831	3,823,085
45 to 54 Years	11.0%	13.0%	12.5%	18,961	42,072,620	3,526,243
55 to 64 Years	9.6%	12.9%	11.2%	16,585	41,756,414	3,165,517
65 to 74 Years	8.2%	9.1%	7.4%	14,193	29,542,266	2,081,849
75 Years, and Over	6.4%	6.5%	4.9%	11,089	21,241,530	1,380,678
Race: White	92.9%	72.5%	74.0%	160,603	235,377,662	20,903,375
Race: Black or African American	0.8%	12.7%	12.1%	1,332	41,234,642	3,428,211
Race: American Indian and Alaska Native	0.6%	0.8%	0.5%	1,087	2,750,143	141,425
Race: Asian	0.7%	5.5%	4.8%	1,125	17,924,209	1,357,273
Race: Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.2%	0.1%	53	599,868	25,292
Race: Some Other Race	4.2%	4.9%	5.8%	7,239	16,047,369	1,643,869
Race: Two or More Races	0.9%	3.3%	2.7%	1,502	10,763,902	761,411
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	84.2%	18.0%	39.3%	145,567	58,479,370	11,116,881

<b>Population Growth</b>						
Population (Pop Estimates) <sup>4</sup>	—	—	—	173,023	328,239,523	28,995,881
Population Annual Average Growth <sup>4</sup>	0.5%	0.7%	1.6%	789	2,146,799	419,412
People per Square Mile	—	—	—	12.1	92.9	111.0
<b>Economic</b>						
Labor Force Participation Rate and Size (civilian population 16 years and over)	55.1%	63.2%	64.5%	70,599	163,555,585	13,962,458
Prime-Age Labor Force Participation Rate and Size (civilian population 25-54)	72.9%	82.1%	80.6%	44,996	104,634,905	9,228,757
Armed Forces Labor Force	1.3%	0.4%	0.4%	1,729	1,073,907	93,394
Veterans, Age 18-64	4.3%	4.6%	4.9%	4,165	9,143,042	846,005
Veterans Labor Force Participation Rate and Size, Age 18-64	78.7%	76.6%	78.1%	3,277	7,003,778	660,595
Median Household Income <sup>2</sup>	—	—	—	\$40,880	\$62,843	\$61,874
Per Capita Income	—	—	—	\$18,889	\$34,103	\$31,277
Mean Commute Time (minutes)	—	—	—	19.9	26.9	26.6
Commute via Public Transportation	0.3%	5.0%	1.4%	187	7,641,160	181,273
<b>Educational Attainment, Age 25-64</b>						
No High School Diploma	27.4%	10.9%	15.3%	21,730	18,550,150	2,239,400
High School Graduate	29.1%	25.7%	24.7%	23,055	43,627,868	3,621,456
Some College, No Degree	20.3%	20.7%	21.8%	16,062	35,174,790	3,190,676
Associate's Degree	6.8%	9.1%	7.6%	5,388	15,526,064	1,120,514
Bachelor's Degree	12.7%	21.2%	20.4%	10,046	35,997,848	2,987,310
Postgraduate Degree	3.8%	12.3%	10.3%	2,992	20,961,560	1,509,671
<b>Housing</b>						
Total Housing Units	—	—	—	66,880	137,428,986	10,937,026
Median House Value (of owner-occupied units) <sup>2</sup>	—	—	—	\$91,276	\$217,500	\$172,500
Homeowner Vacancy	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%	576	1,257,737	95,519
Rental Vacancy	9.6%	6.0%	7.8%	1,846	2,793,023	318,899
Renter-Occupied Housing Units (% of Occupied Units)	32.3%	36.0%	38.0%	17,167	43,481,667	3,686,845
Occupied Housing Units with No Vehicle Available (% of Occupied Units)	6.7%	8.6%	5.3%	3,570	10,395,713	512,411
<b>Social</b>						
Poverty Level (of all people)	23.8%	13.4%	14.7%	40,087	42,510,843	4,072,194
Households Receiving Food Stamps/SNAP	24.4%	11.7%	11.8%	12,994	14,171,567	1,140,905
Enrolled in Grade 12 (% of total population)	1.8%	1.4%	1.5%	3,153	4,422,344	411,701
Disconnected Youth <sup>3</sup>	5.5%	2.5%	2.8%	634	423,273	45,519
Children in Single Parent Families (% of all children)	45.9%	34.1%	34.4%	20,802	23,790,005	2,405,770
Uninsured	22.5%	8.8%	17.2%	37,778	28,248,613	4,791,164
With a Disability, Age 18-64	14.4%	10.3%	9.5%	13,493	20,187,604	1,627,151
With a Disability, Age 18-64, Labor Force Participation Rate and Size	43.0%	42.2%	44.8%	5,797	8,509,463	729,715
Foreign Born	20.4%	13.6%	17.0%	35,245	44,011,870	4,814,638
Speak English Less Than Very Well (population 5 yrs and over)	22.9%	8.4%	13.7%	36,341	25,615,365	3,607,255

Source: Chmura Economics & Analytics 2020

The 2020 Census data on disability status indicated 3.1 percent or 922 persons had a disability that limited their basic physical activities to include hindering their ability to work. The statewide percent is 5.3. Educational attainment for the Middle Rio Grande region is presented in

the table above, from the 2008-2012 American Community Survey, Bureau of the Census. Educational attainment in the region continues to lag behind statewide averages with persons age 25 and older with less than a 9th grade education at well over double the rate statewide, 24.3 percent in the Middle Rio Grande Region vs. 9.7 percent statewide. A quarter of the population 25 and over has less than a 9<sup>th</sup> grade education. The number of individuals age 25 and over with a college degree whether Associate, Bachelor's Degree, or Graduate Degree is nearly half the statewide rate: 32.6 percent statewide compared to 19.8 percent in the region.

The challenge for the Board is to provide workforce development services to a population less educated than the state average, younger than the state average, experiencing more poverty than the state average, and predominately Hispanic. Basic skills remediation needs to be a prominent program activity to address skills deficiencies and give customers the opportunity to access occupational skills training. Coupled with the population characteristics, the lack of high skill high paying occupations in the region hinders the opportunity for individuals to "move up" to a better standard of living. With the bulk of job openings centered in the service sector, wages are low.

<b>WDA Labor Force Statistics</b>				
	<b>Feb-21</b>	<b>Jan-21</b>	<b>Feb-20</b>	<b>Yearly Change</b>
<b>Civilian Labor Force</b>	76,769	76,651	76,957	-188
<b>Employed</b>	68,326	68,384	72,553	-4,227
<b>Unemployed</b>	8,443	8,267	4,404	4,039
<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	11.0%	10.8%	5.7%	5.3%
<b>Texas Labor Force Statistics</b>				
	<b>Feb-21</b>	<b>Jan-21</b>	<b>Feb-20</b>	<b>Yearly Change</b>
<b>Civilian Labor Force</b>	14,049,170	14,026,650	14,262,779	-213,609
<b>Employed</b>	12,989,548	13,000,673	13,761,203	-771,655
<b>Unemployed</b>	1,059,622	1,025,977	501,576	558,046
<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	7.5%	7.3%	3.5%	4.0%
<b>US Labor Force Statistics</b>				
	<b>Feb-21</b>	<b>Jan-21</b>	<b>Feb-20</b>	<b>Yearly Change</b>
<b>Civilian Labor Force</b>	160,008,000	159,234,000	164,235,000	-4,227,000
<b>Employed</b>	149,522,000	148,383,000	158,017,000	-8,495,000
<b>Unemployed</b>	10,486,000	10,851,000	6,218,000	4,268,000
<b>Unemployment Rate</b>	6.6%	6.8%	3.8%	2.8%
<b>Continued Claims for the Week of the 12th</b>				
	<b>Feb-21</b>	<b>Jan-21</b>	<b>Feb-20</b>	<b>Yearly Change</b>
<b>WDA</b>	2,095	2,348	1,500	595
<b>Texas</b>	213,437	232,165	107,395	106,042

Source: Chmura Economics & Analytics 2020

The region's civilian labor force for February 2021 (76,769) has stayed the same since February 2020, (76,957) with only a slight decrease. Employment has decreased from 72,553 February 2020 to 68,326 in February 2021, mainly due to Covid 19.

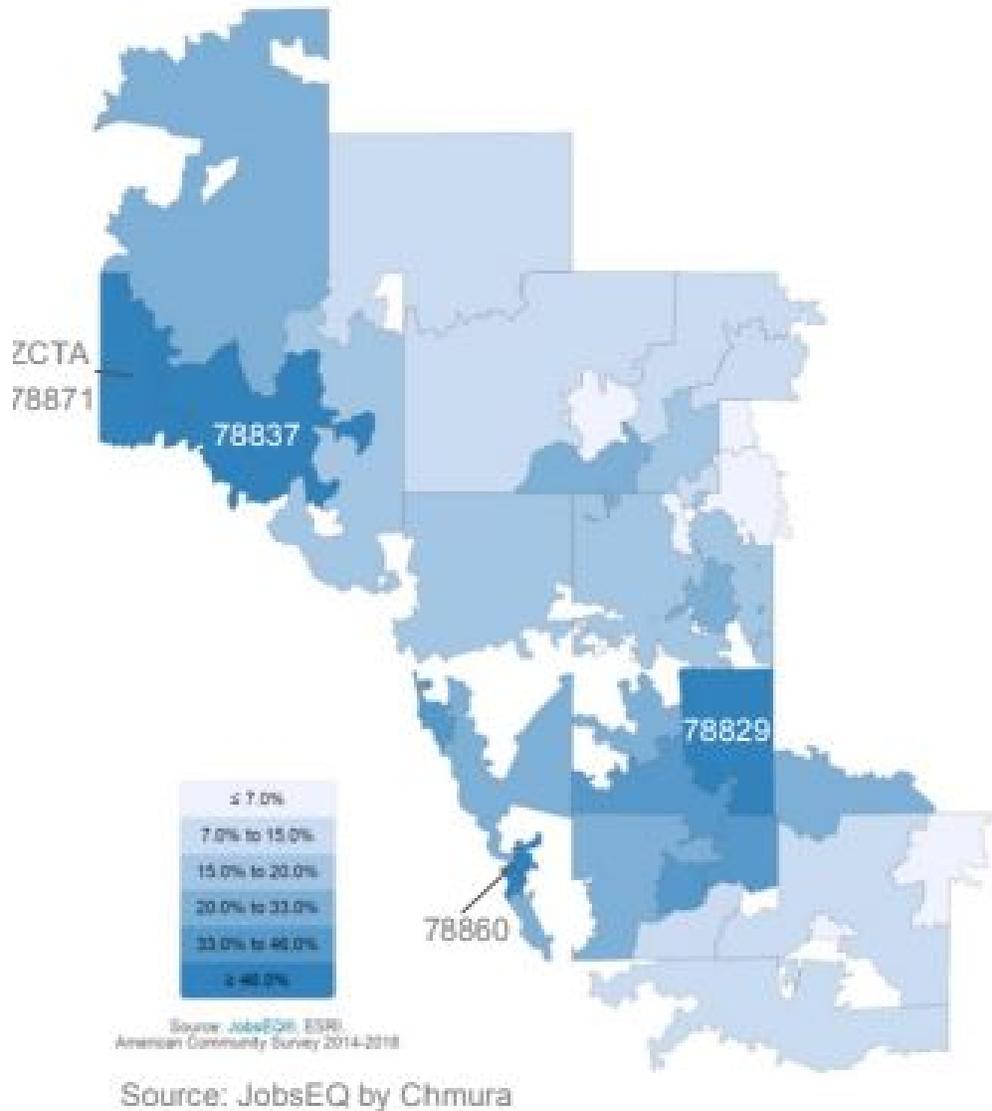
The decline of the oil industry in our region has made the workforce development more difficult. The ripple effect has reduced employment in Manufacturing and Construction, taking away more jobs with good wages. The Board's charge is to find ways to support expanding occupations in the Education and Health Services industry. Also, with the challenges that COVID-19 has

presented, the training system has been somewhat of a challenge with on line and virtual classroom instruction.

Poverty can be driven by many events or factors, including one-time events such as loss of job or a health issue or limited access to education or disposable income. Related to community development goals, a higher poverty rate implies more community resources may be committed to social assistance programs. As shown in darker blue in Figure 3.5.5 areas with the highest percentage of the population living in poverty are found along the Mexican border in Maverick and Val Verde counties, as well as Zavala.

### **Middle Rio Grande WDA Poverty Status**

**Figure 3.5.5: Poverty Level (of all people) by ZCTA**



Source: 2010 • 2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates

Some of the counties in the Middle Rio Grande region are among those with the highest poverty rates in the state. Two counties, Maverick and Zavala Counties are among the 18 counties statewide with a poverty rate above the 25% designation for a High Poverty Area. The overall total for the region indicates that the region continues to suffer from poverty to a greater degree than the state as a whole.

The fluctuations in the oil and gas economy due to price volatility make planning for workforce development more difficult. The Board's training system has a lag in getting fresh training graduates out to good paying jobs before those jobs disappear due to falling prices for fossil

fuels. Gearing up for the Eagle Ford Shale boom has left a surplus of individuals in what were targeted occupations, before the decline due to oil price reductions. The ripple effect has reduced employment in Manufacturing and Construction, taking away more jobs with good wages. The Board's charge is to find ways to support expanding companies in the Education and Health Services industry, and to a lesser extent the leisure and Hospitality industry supporting the region's growing tourism economy.

#### **D. Workforce Development Analysis**

(WIOA §108(b)(1)(D); 20 CFR §679.560(a)(4))

Boards must include an analysis of workforce development activities in the region, including education and training.

Workforce Solutions Middle Rio Grande Board (the Board) strives to empower youth and job seeking customers to make good career choices, assist them with training to achieve their career goals, and to secure employment in a job that matches their skills. Investing in the future also means developing relationships with employers/economic development groups to identify the skills and training needed to grow business/industry, creating/brokering partnerships with employers, and developing linkages between employers and our training institutions to develop training programs required/needed by employers.

The Board invested in the following activities this past Board contract year to fulfill attain objectives:

- Served 7160 job seekers in our Workforce Solution Offices.
- Provided workforce assistance to 1106 employers.
- Provide Weekly Job Club sessions to all job seekers.
- Financial literacy
- Provided training to the dislocated workers population by utilizing WIOA Dislocated Worker grant funds and WIOA Additional Assistance funds for dislocated workers from the oil/gas industry.
- Aid in customer self-service and staff guided job search through our resource rooms and the various career and training programs (WIOA, Choices, SNAP).
- Provided employers and training institutions with labor market information to identity wage comparisons, training needs, commuting patterns, and future projections/trends in various industries to help plan and support their current and future workforce.
- Developed our targeted occupation list for job seekers, students, community colleges, training institutions, and ISDs. The targeted occupation list is used by the community colleges to identify those training programs leading to high growth wages for their graduates. WIOA customers and our other service customers used the list to guide their decisions on job training and future employment. Each of these decisions leads to a skilled workforce to meet employer needs/demands for their future growth.
- Hosted the annual Red, White & You hiring event for veterans, their spouses, and other job seekers.
- The Board collaborates with our local college (Southwest Texas Junior College) in hosting College and Career Day for the school districts in our surrounding areas. The

main objective is to educate students about post-secondary opportunities to include both vocational and career pathways. Students are able to explore a range of career paths, network with prospective employers, and practice essential professional skills. The events feature keynote speakers, informative breakout sessions on college admission/testing/financial aid, student success center/PTK (Honor society, Phi Theta Kappa) /college social media, and a presenter from TWC's Labor Market and Career Information department were scheduled for all to participate. Due to the huge success in this event (last year our attendance was over 1200 students) and Input from the local school districts, we are working on expanding the event to include Junior's for future College and Career days.

- The Board also has a close collaboration with Southwest Texas Junior College GED/AEL program. When clients are identified with this barrier, referrals are made immediately to the GED/AEL program. Customers were assisted with GED/AEL programming last year.
- The Board meets with educational advisory committees and employers to evaluate the effectiveness of our training programs and services. The workforce center system contractor staff meets with employer representation and college personnel to learn about skills needs and help the college adapt coursework to meet employer needs. An example is the lineman training course at SWTJC; staff met with different electric cooperatives to understand their skills need and meet with the instructor to ensure skills needs were addressed in the training.

Major strengths of the workforce development system are the long partnership with Southwest Texas Junior College, the rapport established between employers and the workforce development system, the accessibility of services in the region through the workforce centers, and partnership and commitment of the Board and Chief Elected Officials to sustain and improve workforce development in a region with shifting economic challenges.

Deficiencies to be addressed include enhancing youth program services through WIOA's youth program elements, the on-going challenge to hire and retain qualified professionals for positions within the workforce center system, adapting to dwindling funding streams across programs.

The Board and its Contractor for workforce center system services and child care management services continue to meet or exceed Texas Workforce Commission-contracted performance measures. Performance for each of the measures is presented below.

Meeting performance means that the performance was within the confidence range of the predicted value. The data in the chart below is for Contract Year 2020, End of Year data.

Measure	Status	End of Year Target	End of Year Performance
Claimant Reemployment with 10 weeks	Not meeting	58.78%	55.82%

# Employers Receiving Assistance	N/A	N/A	1,536
Choices Full Work Rate -All Family Total	meeting	48.64%	47.62%
Average # Children Served per day	meeting	1632	1645
Employed/Enrolled Q2 post exit - C&T participants	meeting	69%	71.71%
Employed/Enrolled Q2-Q4 post exit - C&T participants	meeting	84%	81.68%
Median Earnings Q2 Post Exit - C&T participants	meeting	\$4,770.00	\$4,848.00
Credential Rate - C&T participants	meeting	60%	82.95%
Employed Q2 Post Exit -Adult	meeting	90%	85.90%
Employed Q4 Post Exit- Adult	meeting	87.80%	82.54%
Median Earnings Q2 Post Exit - Adult	N/A	N/A	\$9,226.48
Credential Rate • Adult	meeting	89.40%	82.76%
Employed Q2 Post Exit - DW	meeting	84.70%	100%
Employed Q4 Post Exit – DW	meeting	90%	94.74%
Median Earnings Q2 Post Exit - DW	meeting	N/A	\$8,657.85
Credential Rate – DW	Not meeting	90%	66.67%
Employed/Enrolled 02 Post Exit - Youth	meeting	78.30%	77.01%
Employed/Enrolled Q4 Post Exit - Youth	meeting	81.6%	74.71%
Credential Rate - Youth	meeting	69.7%	86.36%

Source: Performance Analysis and Reporting MPR 4.0 TWC

### **Part 3: Core Programs**

#### **A. Workforce Development System**

(WIOA §108(b)(2); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(1))

Boards must include a description of the workforce development system in the workforce area that identifies:

- the programs that are included in the system; and
- how the Board will work with the entities that facilitate core programs and other workforce development programs to support alignment to provide services, including programs of study authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006, that support the strategy identified in the State Plan under WIOA §102(b)(1)(E).

The workforce development system in the Middle Rio Grande region consists of the key partnerships of publicly funded workforce centers, employers, and the education community, Southwest Texas Junior College and Sul Ross State University Rio Grande College.

The publicly funded workforce center system consists of four full-service centers in Dimmit, Maverick, Uvalde, and Val Verde and five non full-service centers in Zavala, LaSalle, Edwards, Kinney and Real Counties. Programs that may be accessed at each of these locations are:

- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), providing citizens with access to job search assistance, occupational skills training, assessment and testing, case management, support services to encourage participations, placement services and follow up to ensure continued success in the placement. Employers may place job orders through Work in Texas or by contacting the individual centers. Included in WIOA are youth programs that assist at-risk in-school and out of school youth with programs to encourage them to stay in school, return to school, and acquire work maturity skills to enhance their ability to become employed through work internships or work experience within the public and private sectors.
- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) provides financial help for children and their parents or relatives who are living with them. Monthly cash payments help pay for food, clothing, housing, utilities, furniture, transportation, telephone, laundry, household equipment, medical supplies not paid for by Medicaid and other basic needs. The amount of the TANF payment depends on family size and income. Choices provides TANF recipients with access to job search assistance, basic skills remediation, occupational skills training, work experience, support services and job placement.
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides food assistance to eligible participants who are seeking work, or are working, and meet Income requirements. The SNAP employment program assists SNAP recipients of job search, job seeking skills, referral to services to address barriers to employment and job placement.
- Child Care Services provide support services for workforce employment, job training and other services. Child Care Services also provide support for contracted providers.

The Board supports the strategy for incorporating state agency plans to direct a coordinated approach to workforce development. The Board’s goals align with the TWC goals and objectives identified in the combined state plan. Those goals can be summarized as:

State Goal	The Boards Goal/Objective
1. Give employers and individuals ready	Develop a local employment and training

access to a network of high-quality information and services.	system where employers and job seekers choose the workforce center system as the first choice in meeting the employment needs.
2. Provide Texans access to literacy, education, vocational rehabilitation, and in-demand workplace skills necessary for self-sufficient employment and advancement.	Goal Two: The Board possess the necessary skills and education to meet present and future needs of employers.
3. Empower the current and future Texas workforce with the career information, knowledge, and skills necessary for employment and career advancement in high-skilled, high-wage careers.	Goal Three: The Board will develop a collaborative partnership between education, business, economic development and the community in general to address the skill requirements of the current and emerging workforce.
4. Safeguard and maintain public trust in the Texas workforce system through sound fiscal stewardship, strong performance and accountability measures, and achievement of system-wide performance outcomes.	Goal Four: Ensure the success of workforce development programs through accountability, evaluation, and a rigorous continuous improvement.

**B. Core Programs—Expand Access, Facilitate Development, and Improve Access**

(WIOA §108(b)(3); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(2))

Boards must include a description of how the Board will work with entities carrying out core programs to:

- expand access to employment, training, education, and support services for eligible individuals, particularly eligible individuals with barriers to employment;
- facilitate the development of career pathways and co-enrollment, as appropriate, in core programs, including specific career pathways occupations that the Board currently includes on its Target Occupations List, and career pathways occupations that the Board is planning to develop; and
- improve access to activities leading to a recognized postsecondary credential (including a credential that is an industry-recognized certificate or certification, portable, and stackable).

Boards must include a description of the Board’s plan for working with at least one of the Governor’s industry clusters.

WFSMRG, the contractor for the Board carries out the core programs. This Council of Governments has been the workforce center system operator since the Board was founded in 1996. The WFSMRG has had a fluctuating level of staff since its adoption of the responsibilities for workforce development programs. Cuts in funding have reduced key staff to a bare minimum.

Program funding for workforce development services include the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act, providing services for Adults, Youth, and Dislocated Workers, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) also called Choices, providing employment and workforce participation opportunities to customers receiving assistance from this program, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, providing workforce development activities for recipients of SNAP (also known as "food stamps") benefits, and Child Care Management Services, providing subsidized child care to program participants and eligible working families. Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) and special programs.... The workforce center system is the access point for individuals seeking a job, enhancing their job seeking skills, obtaining information on the labor market, seeking occupational skills training or help with placement after completing training. The system works with Choices customers to help them find and keep employment and meet their program participation requirements. Center staff work with dislocated workers to assist them in finding another job after being laid off due to economic circumstances or a business closing. Some job seeker needs and how they are addressed are presented in the table below:

<b>Job Seeker Needs</b>	<b>How The Board addresses need</b>
Access to job listing	WorkInTexas job listings referrals to job openings
Job Search Assistance	Job Search Assistance Job Search Workshops Resume preparation Copiers and fax machines Resource Room with internet access Counseling/motivation assistance for ensure required activity to receive TANF or SNAP benefits
Assessment and Testing	TABE testing Comprehensive skills and barriers assessment Access to personality/aptitude testing Referral to other partners for advance/specialty assessment
Occupational Skills	Classroom training in targeted occupations Assistance accessing financial aid and tuition assistance Target Occupation List of jobs in demand Labor Market Information Coordination with area colleges to provide training that meets employer needs
Support While in Training	Transportation assistance Child Care services Referral to medical assistance Counseling and tutorial services
Job Placement after Training	Job development in key target industries Industry specific job fairs Employer recruitment assistance Assistance with licensing/testing fees
Job Retention	Follow up services to ensure job retention

The Board's career pathway approach connects progressive levels of education, training, credentials, and support services for specific occupations in a way that optimizes the progress and success of individuals with varying levels of abilities and needs. This approach helps individuals with different levels of skills and experiences earn marketable credentials, engage in further education and employment, and achieve economic success.

WFSMRG defines career pathways broadly to include the organization of rigorous and high-quality education, training, and other services (such as counseling) to align with regional needs and help individuals with different needs accelerate their educational and career advancement. The career pathway approach is important for underprepared students, because it incorporates and integrates best-practice service models, such as: participant-focused education and training; consistent and non-duplicative assessments of participants' education, skills, and assets/needs; support services and career underprepared youth and adults obtain postsecondary credentials and good jobs. The career pathway approach also incorporates strategy principles by deeply engaging employers to increase the relevancy and labor market value of participants' skills and credentials, which in turn improves participants' employment prospects.

The career pathway approach provides a framework for unified planning that orients or reorients existing education and workforce services to one system focused on individuals' postsecondary and economic success. WFSMRG cohesively combine public-private partnerships, resources and funding, policies, data, and shared performance measures to successfully develop and scale quality, sustainable pathways. WFSMRG will use youth funds to conduct an objective assessment "for the purpose of identifying appropriate services and career pathways for participants." Individualized employment plans will be developed for youth, adults, and dislocated workers to identify "career pathways to attain career objectives."

WFSMRG will also use funds for the alignment of Adult Education and Literacy activities with other core programs, including the development of career pathways which is often the first step on a comprehensive career pathway, navigation assistance; and employment services and work experiences that have been shown to help. WFSMRG will plan at local level and improve at accountability across the core programs to increase access to employment, education, training, and support services for individuals, particularly those with barriers to employment. This will be imperative because it can align policies and funding streams to support comprehensive and integrated services that help low-skilled and low-income people-including disconnected youth, welfare recipients, formerly incarcerated individuals, and others with unique barriers to employment-get the education, training, employment services, and support services they need to enter and advance in the workforce. Coordination will be essential to providing such services concurrently and over time as people's needs and situations change. Unified planning between ISDs, Adult Education and literacy and community colleges will support career pathway and strategies.

Industry certifications validate job seekers' skills and knowledge and allow employers to hire a workforce that will meet their needs. A skills certification recognized by an industry ensures the alignment between a job seekers' skills and an employer's needs, thus streamlining the hiring and

orientation phase for new employment. The skills credentials provide portability, not only to employers but also geographically for our region. WFSMRG is well positioned to identify the types of certifications necessary for high demand jobs in our area and ensures training and skills assessments at our workforce solutions centers meet the demand for identified certifications.

WFSMRG will ensure to educate a skilled workforce for regional employers. Industries such as healthcare, information technology and transportation have successfully been developed and implemented. These industry-recognized credentials have connected individuals to the skills they need to enter into and advance in jobs.

To better understand this landscape and develop initiatives to address the skills gap, WFSMRG will utilize the Business Services Unit at our workforce centers to visit employers to gather information from industry associated about both the current and potential use of portable, standard-based industry-recognized skills credentials. The outcome will be essential as it will build strong partnerships with local businesses and business associations to identify areas of need and to assist in the development of relevant training and coordination with public agencies, including education, economic development and human services to ensure the effective targeting of public resources aimed at increasing the skills of our workforce.

Inherent in these skills credentials is the identification of the knowledge, skills and abilities required in jobs within specific sectors and industries. This approach sets the stage to better align education and training to career success, as well as to create educational pathways from high school to community colleges and/or four-year career-focused majors in universities, which are directly connected to employment.

## **Part 4: One-Stop Service Delivery**

### **A. One-Stop Service Delivery System**

(WIOA §108(b)(6); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(5))

Boards must include a description of the one-stop delivery system in the workforce area, including explanations of the following:

- How the Board will ensure the continuous improvement of eligible providers and how providers will meet the employment needs of local employers, workers, and job seekers
- How the Board will facilitate access to services provided through the one-stop delivery system, including to remote areas, through the use of technology and other means
- How entities within the one-stop delivery system, including the one-stop operators and the one-stop partners, will comply with WIOA §188 (related to Non-Discrimination), if applicable, and with applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 regarding the physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs and services, technology, and materials for individuals with disabilities, including providing staff training and support for addressing the needs of individuals who have disabilities
- The roles and resource contributions of the one-stop partners

Some program activities are common for all job seeking customers, outreach and recruitment, intake, eligibility determination, assessment, employment plan development, enrollment in program activities, case management and follow up after placement in employment. Outreach and recruitment are conducted in various ways to include advertising, flyers, PSAs, and working through schools and partner agencies to reach Individuals in need of workforce services. Intake and eligibility involve an initial assessment of the individual's skills, needs, and barriers to employment. Personal Information concerning age, education, income, work history, special needs, and documentation supporting these characteristics is collected and reviewed to determine whether the individual is eligible for program services. All job seekers may use the Resource Room where computers, copiers, fax and telephones are available to assist with job search and on-line training in job search techniques, labor market information and job openings identified through WorkInTexas.com. Once eligibility is determined the customer undergoes an assessment of their skills, knowledge, abilities, basic skill levels, interests etc. WFSMRG uses the following assessment Instruments:

- TABE forms 9 & 10 A pre-test called the Locator determines which the TABE level the individual should take. The TABE levels are E (easy), M (medium), D (difficult), or A (advanced).
- SUPERA Customers that are limited English Proficient (LEP) are provided the Spanish version of this basic education test. There are multiple difficulty levels for this assessment instrument.
- 

For non-normed assessments such as the SAGE, staff may read the questions and allow paper and pencil administration instead of computer administration. Depending on the degree of accommodation needed, the customer may be referred to the Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) for applicable accommodations.

Once an assessment has been completed, the customer visits with a case manager to develop an employment plan outlining the steps to be taken by the customer and the case manager to assist the customer to be job ready. The employment plan is updated as the customer completes each assigned activity or as new assignments are added to the plan. The case manager coordinates the activities with the customer and helps ameliorate any barriers to the customer completing the employment plan. Upon successful completion of activities, the customer is then assisted with finding a job through WIT or assisted job search. Once the customer is placed in employment the case manager checks with him/her periodically to ensure that the placement is satisfactory to the customer and the employer.

**Adults and Dislocated Workers:** The Board provides funds through individual training accounts for training in targeted occupations. Individuals interested in training and eligible for WIOA are encouraged to review the target occupations list and the training available from Southwest Texas Junior College and the Sul Ross State University Rio Grande College. Both training institutions have a strong working relationship with the Board and with area employers. Both institutions focus on the current and future skills needs of employers. Training may extend for up to two years with a financial cap of no more than \$4,000 for standard training cost and \$8,000 for a highly technical training for the two-year period.

The Board staff and contractor staff consult with community colleges to ensure there are training courses for the selected targeted occupations and community colleges consult with the Board when considering new training courses. Both Board and Contractor staff serve on community colleges' advisory committees and regional community college representatives serve as Board members or attend monthly Board meetings as visitors

Additional training opportunities for adults and dislocated workers include adult basic education and GED programs, literacy programs and English language training for those who have low levels of English fluency. The Southwest Texas Junior College's Adult Basic Education Department and their staff are active partners with the workforce development system. Cross-system referrals are made by each center to either provide remedial or GED educational services to adults who need such services for training or employment. In addition, the Board and the Contractor WFSMRG provide space and facilities for special projects such as the Retail Clerk classes designed to combine work-based and basic skills instruction in partnership with employers. Other areas are being explored to identify foundation skills needed as a pre-requisite to meet employer's skills needs through occupational or on the job training. Class attendance and supportive services are tracked by both systems for co-case managed customers. Coordination of assessment results minimizes the re-testing of customers.

**Youth:** The first four objectives in the Board's Goal Three summarizes the strategies for serving youth:

Goal Three: The Middle Rio Grande Workforce programs will develop a collaborative partnership between education, business, economic development and the community in general to address the skill requirements of the current and emerging workforce.

Objectives:

1. Ensure that all students are provided with opportunities to develop high levels of academic and technical competence.
2. Provide opportunities for all students to gain practical work and learning experience
3. outside of the classroom.
4. Assist eligible youth to make informed career choices by offering a broad variety of career exploration opportunities involving business, Industry, parents, teachers, counselors, administrators and community organizations.
5. Create a core service mix that is sequential, comprehensive, and includes strong work ethics, workplace foundation skills, and value-added occupational skills training.

Through the services available in the workforce center system and through the efforts of its partner agencies youth are provided with the opportunity to access remediation of basic skills, develop work maturity skills, access occupational skills training, have a chance to gain work experience after school or in the summer months, school dropout prevention and recovery activities, and support services for individuals in need of child care services or transportation services.

The Board and its workforce center system operator, WFSMRG, work with the area Independent

school districts to advise youth customers of the services available through the workforce center system and through the schools where available to help youth develop a bridge from school to work/careers. ISDs working with the Board Include:

Carrizo Springs Consolidated	Sabinal ISD	Rocksprings ISD
Nueces Canyon Consolidated	Knippa ISD	Brackettville ISD
San Felipe Del Rio Consolidated	Utopia ISD	Cotulla ISD
Uvalde Consolidated	Eagle Pass ISD	Leakey ISD
Comstock ISD	Crystal City ISD	La Pryor ISD

Since It began operating the workforce system in the Middle Rio Grande region, the Board and its Contractor WFSMRG has learned the following: 1) Workforce development is a continuum and must be viewed as a long term, managed process with consistent focus. The foundation of workforce development must be laid in early childhood education, proceed through formal K-16 education, and continue with lifelong learning; and 2) Economic and workforce development strategies must be integrated and mutually reinforced. Economic development regions, whether local or multi-community, must plan for future business and skill needs. Workforce development must be geared to meet the employment needs of both today's and tomorrow's employers, for current and future jobs. WFSMRG is working with employers (e.g., electrical wires companies, the Eagle Ford Shale Consortium, Sierra Industries, American Natural Gas Alliance (ANGA), etc.), and Southwest Texas Junior College (SWTJC) to establish multiple career pipelines both within industries and within occupations to connect students, as early as junior high school, to industries that might employ them upon graduation. This process will allow more people to begin slow and gradually build their skills for success, which could enhance the opportunities for those in poverty to get a job, get a better Job, and then get a career. A key strategy is to focus on core competencies that are consistent across several industry clusters; graduates will have a broader knowledge base that will make them eligible for openings in multiple industries while simultaneously improving literacy, soft skills, and occupational skills.

Because partnerships and collaboration among the public, private and nonprofit sectors are essential to successfully establish, build and sustain workforce and economic development systems, WFSMRG continues an effort with local nonprofits to work holistically with families to provide parenting classes, tutoring in the home, and life skills training with outreach through the One-Stop centers. At the same time, the WFSMRG is working through the WFSMRG Education Committee in collaboration with independent school districts, SWTJC, and Sul Ross State & Rio Grande College (SRSRGC) to continue the development of vertical teams within the overall educational system, thereby removing the gaps between secondary school and the Junior College, and between the Junior College and SRSRGC. This has promise for lowering the dropout rate in all educational systems.

Finally, WFSMRG's Education Committee is working to expand both two-year degree and certificate offerings of Career and Technology education at SWTJC or other training institutions in anticipation that this will provide practical education for students wishing to stay in the region and train for jobs here, as well as give employers a more customized educational process so that employees can be brought along as they acquire both skills and experience on the job.

**Veterans:** WFSMRG has built a one-of-a kind regional network committee, comprised of all county Veteran Service Officers, a workforce center staff person dedicated to Veteran's services. Meeting on a quarterly basis, the committee develops strategies related to training and employment, transportation, health, and other Veteran's needs.

WFSMRG has designated and trained staff at each center to deliver first-day and specialized services equivalent to those provided to the general population. Despite limited funding available to the one-stop system; the centers have expanded and improved the menu of services to special population groups by forming new collaborative relationships with the nine county Veterans Services Officers and other Veterans organizations. Now that the Texas Veterans Commission has taken over direct supervision of the Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER) located at the workforce center in Del Rio, WFSMRG has maintained its previously trained staff to assure a liaison and co-case management role for effective and efficient first day service access for all veterans in the region. Each center has a designated staff person responsible for coordinating specialized services to veterans in coordination with the LVER.

Veterans are specifically recruited and outreached for workforce development services. Veterans are asked to identify themselves as such are designated as a priority for services at the centers. Veterans are outreached through Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion Posts, and other partners serving Veterans.

Veterans with specific barriers to employment such as poor job skills, post-traumatic stress disorder, financial problems, drug or alcohol abuse issues, homelessness, psychological counseling are referred to the appropriate partner agency to address these issues and are given priority for services whenever possible.

The Board has taken on the following strategies for services to Veterans:

Strategy No.1:

Establish a working partnership between the Veterans Network, the Workforce Solutions System, nine (9) county veterans service officers, Veterans organizations at the federal, state, and regional level who will meet quarterly for the purpose of creating a service network for all veterans in the region.

Strategy No. 2:

Develop the capacity of the network to coordinate health, transportation, veterans' benefits, and job placement services to all new and existing veterans in the region.

Strategy No. 3:

Establish an annual health and job fair that brings all veterans to a facility at least once a year and work with Texas Leadership and the Texas Workforce Commission to outreach to all veterans throughout the year.

By establishing priority of service at each of the workforce centers and working with each center to provide basic services for veterans in their home community, the Workforce Solutions System has increased the services to veterans working with the Texas Veterans Commission to assure

intensive and specialized services can be provided that are accessible in their community of residence. This is accomplished by bringing all employment counselors, veterans' organizations and county service officers together every quarter to share information that can provide better access and services through the network of partners.

Mini job fairs are held at the various centers specifically outreaching to veterans who are recently returning to their communities. The network is working on an Intelligent transcript that can identify the transferable skills learned in the military in order to more effectively place them in jobs and identify the training needs for the gap needed or in demand by the new employers.

**Persons with a Disability:** All workforce centers are fully accessible to disabled and physically challenged customers. Arrangements have been made with partner agencies for the provision of additional assistance for disabled customers as needed. This assistance may include job coaching, interpreters, sign language assistance, transportation, distance learning opportunities, adaptive equipment, and counseling.

The Board and the Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) have developed a memorandum of understanding. The VRS agrees to Provide Commission services to jointly eligible clients to the extent allowed by Commission staffing patterns and budgets. These services Include, but are not limited to:

- Diagnostic and related services Guidance and counseling
- Physical or mental restoration services
- Personal and vocational adjustments Training
- Interpreters
- Services in support of training (i.e., books, tools, uniforms, equipment, etc.)
- Job development
- Job placement
- Follow-up

Station a VRS counselor at the Board office as Commission staffing patterns permit. Refer Commission clients to the Board per established the Board referral procedures.

The Board agrees to provide WIOA services with the Dimmit, LaSalle, Zavala, Uvalde, Maverick, Val Verde, Kinney, Real and Edwards counties, Service Delivery Area, to jointly eligible clients to the extent allowed by Board and contractor staffing patterns and budgets.

These services include, but are not limited to:

- Assessment and counseling
- Vocational training
- On-the-Job training
- Work experience
- Job search training
- Supportive services
- Job development
- Job placement
- Follow-up

- Refer clients to the Commission per established Commission referral procedures.

The VRS and the Board agree to the following general provisions:

Funding of a mutual client's program of services will be shared by both parties to the maximum extent possible.

Both parties will coordinate their service delivery efforts to the maximum extent possible. These coordinated efforts may include, but are not limited to:

- Shared monitoring of client progress (referring agency has primary responsibility) interagency referral
- Monthly case progress reporting (or more frequently if necessary) Acknowledge each other's referral and complete required paperwork within 5 working days of occurrence
- Participate in an interagency work group Joint staff training
- Sharing of all appropriate Information regarding mutual clients
- Joint development of training or employment services plans

Each agency will designate a liaison representative whose functions will include:

- Serving as a resource to their respective agency's staff for information related to this agreement
- Providing guidance for the implementation of services under this agreement Coordinating communication and meetings between the agencies to review relevant policy, procedures or other information
- Coordinating interagency training programs
- Recommending changes in this relationship to improve the coordinated delivery of services

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselors co-located at the three larger center work extensively with the Student HireAbility Navigator (SHN), independent school districts, Education Service Center-15, Education Service Center-20 and Vocational Rehabilitation Region 6 and Southwest Texas Junior College Disability Support Services to schedule activities at the schools developing careers pathways in conjunction with the school counselors. promote awareness and availability of pre-employment transition services and Workforce Solutions resources to schools, parents, and students. Pre-Employment Transition Services in form of Charting the course were conducted to transitioning students and parents to promote awareness and availability of services and resources available in the workforce system area. A great working relationship has been developed by VR, SHN and Workforce Solutions South Texas and VR Region 6 staff to work collaboratively in providing most needed services to WFS system youth and community resource fairs.

- Since the COVID-19 pandemic these curriculums had to be redeveloped in order to be conducted virtually. Workforce Solutions Middle Grand Board purchased Premier Virtual platform in order to conduct virtual job fairs, transition fairs, in conjunction with VR Region 6 Easy Virtual platform to workforce solutions system youth in all independent school districts. The platforms contain chat rooms to allow students and parents to communicate with WFS staff during these events. WFS has been able to conduct various activities in form of youth career summits, youth career drive thru fairs /

events to allow students to explore career exploration opportunities of in demand careers in the area.

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- The Summer Earn and Learn program (SEAL) has been successful in the past three years in providing excellent worked based learning opportunities for section 504, special education students and those with learning disabilities. Extensive work and collaborative efforts by SHN, VR, and WFS staff have been essential in developing business worksites and preparing students to be job ready by all Workforce Solutions System partners.

## **B. Cooperative Agreements**

(WIOA §108(b)(14); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(13))

Boards must provide copies of executed cooperative agreements that explain how all local service providers, including additional providers, will carry out the requirements for integration of and access to the entire set of services available in the local one-stop delivery system. This includes cooperative agreements (as defined in WIOA §107(d)(11)) between the Board or other local entities described in §101(a)(11)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 USC 721(a)(11)(B)) and the local office of a designated state agency or designated state unit that administers programs that are carried out under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act (29 USC 720 et seq.) (other than §112 or part C of that title (29 USC 732, 741) and are subject to §121(f) in accordance with §101(a)(11) of the Rehabilitation Act (29 USC 721(a)(11)) with respect to efforts that will enhance the provision of services to individuals who have disabilities and to other individuals, such as cross training of staff, technical assistance, use and sharing of information, cooperative efforts with employers, and other efforts.

## **C. Employer Engagement, Economic Development, and Unemployment Insurance Program Coordination**

(WIOA §108(b)(4); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(3))

Boards must include a description of the strategies and services that will be used in the workforce area to do the following:

- Facilitate engagement of employers in the workforce development programs, including small employers and employers in in-demand industry sectors, in-demand occupations, and target occupations
- Support a local workforce development system that meets the needs of businesses in the workforce area
- Better coordinate workforce development programs and economic development
- Strengthen links between the one-stop delivery system and unemployment insurance programs

Note: This may include the implementation of initiatives such as incumbent worker training programs, on-the-job training programs, customized training programs, industry and sector

strategies, career pathways initiatives, use of effective business intermediaries, and other business services and strategies designed to meet the needs of regional employers. These initiatives must support the strategy described above.

Unemployment insurance benefits are accessed through the Texas Workforce Commission web page. The Board web page has a direct link for clients to have easy access. Requirements for receipt of benefits include searching for work. THE BOARD and WFSMRG provide UI recipients with assistance in meeting the work search requirement through the Resource Rooms at each workforce center and providing assistance with customers using WorkInTexas.com. UI customers may also be enrolled in short term training to improve their employability or occupational skills training if they need a different skill set for a new occupation.

#### **D. Coordination of Wagner-Peyser Services**

(WIOA §108(b)(12); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(11))

A description of plans, assurances, and strategies for maximizing coordination, improving service delivery, and avoiding duplication of Wagner-Peyser Act services and other services provided through the one-stop delivery system.

E. Integrated, Technology-Enabled Intake and Case Management

(WIOA §108(b)(21); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(20))

Boards must include a description of how one-stop centers are implementing and transitioning to an integrated, technology-enabled intake and case management information system for programs carried out under WIOA and by one-stop partners.

The state Strategic Plan for Workforce development, Advancing Texas 2010-2015 provides a concise synopsis of the role of partners in the workforce development system:

"The strategic intent of the Texas workforce system is to create a world-class workforce. The workforce investment system provides employers, customers and future workers of Texas convenient and ready access to relevant and comprehensive workforce services. Workforce services encompass education and training services as well as support programs. These services are delivered through an integrated and cohesive partner network of state agencies, educational institutions, local workforce boards, and community-based organizations that are accountable to the customers they serve. These partners will achieve the system mission by:

Providing programs and services which are relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of the ultimate customers of the system: employers, current and future workers.

Meeting system level and agency level performance objectives through coordinated planning and the execution of initiatives that produce accountable results.

Deploying integrated programs and services that allow all Texans to participate through a coordinated and efficient statewide system.

Collaborating to achieve seamless pathways and career options for Texas' future workforce. Communicating education, training and career opportunities to build value, awareness and participation in system programs and services.

Finding opportunities to leverage and align resources to optimize system effectiveness and efficiency

## **Part 5: Workforce Investment Activities**

### **A. Economic Development and Entrepreneurial/Microenterprise Activities**

(WIOA §108(b)(5); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(4))

Boards must include an explanation of how the Board will coordinate local workforce investment activities with regional economic development activities that are carried out in the workforce area and how the Board will promote entrepreneurial-skills training and microenterprise services.

The Board promotes regional planning as a way to promote collaboration, leverage resources, build capacity and ensure that services are delivered in the most efficient way possible.

The Board is a part of the Border Workforce Alliance, comprising five local workforce boards covering the Texas/Mexico Border: Cameron County, Lower Rio Grande Valley, South Texas, Middle Rio Grande, and Borderplex (Upper Rio Grande). These Boards have partnered on two US DOL grants within the last few years (STEM, \$2,000,000, and Project GROW, \$5,999,998). The grants received focused on skills training for target occupations in specific careers to support local industry. The Alliance stands ready to continue its coordination should additional grants be obtained.

The Board will explore the potential for providing entrepreneurial skills to eligible individuals that possess the ability to develop and grow small businesses. Microenterprise services will be considered as a program possibility with the release of policy guidance from TWC regarding the allowability of costs associated with providing grants to individuals.

The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) approved a series of innovative one-time and pilot programs funded through a generous donation of \$4.9 million from IKEA. Workforce Solutions Middle Rio Grande Board applied for a \$75,000.00 grant which will be used for programs that will equip and enable individuals with information and tools to advance in their career through educational resources and programs including apprenticeship, online learning platforms, grants and real-time labor market and job information. Texas businesses will also be supported through industry data analytics, online training videos, and tools to help adapt jobs to remote and contactless operations.

On February 26, 2021 the WFSMRG Board submitted an application for \$75,000.00. On March 23, 2021 TWC sent an approval letter to the board:

1. Website development costs and contactless payment technology such as

2. QR (Quick Response) codes and Point of Sale (POS);
3. Developing online webinars/videos to facilitate customer self-service;
4. Technology supported communication channels for providing remote consultations and initial quotes or analysis of need (such as for plumbing, electrical, remodeling services, internet service providers, etc.); and
5. Digital marketing, sales, business signage or any other tools to assist businesses with marketing and advertising.

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## **B. Rapid Response Activity Coordination**

(WIOA §108(b)(8); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(7))

Boards must include a description of how the Board will coordinate workforce investment activities carried out in the workforce area with statewide rapid response activities described in WIOA §134(a)(2)(A).

The local Rapid Response Team consists of the Workforce Solutions Program Administrator with the Center Manager who document the loss of jobs from one to greater than fifty employees subject to the WARN notice. The Team visits the worksite to identify the number of employees that are affected and to immediately assess their needs by providing an on-site employee orientation on the various services for re-employment, re-training, psychological services to assist in coping with job loss, mass unemployment claims filing, and other services such as job search preparation and developing a re-employment plan. This information is attained by surveying each individual employee to establish their educational level, experience, and self-reported needs. Data entry of this information is entered into TWIST so that when intensive services are needed, the employee can be quickly assisted from the menu of re-employment services at each workforce center. Brochures and labor market information are shared at the first orientation session and if the affected employees are still working, the Rapid Response Team will stagger the orientations in coordination with the work schedule through the human resource staff. Since the Rapid Response contractor is also the workforce center system operator, WFSMRG, activities for dislocated workers are coordinated with all available services accessible through the workforce center system. The Team also coordinates with the statewide rapid response system as they arise.

## **C. Youth Activities and Services**

(WIOA §108(b)(9); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(8))

Boards must include a description and assessment of the type and availability of workforce investment activities for youth in the workforce area, including activities for youth with

disabilities. This description must include an identification of successful models of such activities.

WFSMRG has broad experience serving disadvantaged and disengaged youth. We understand how to incorporate the required program elements specified in WIOA so that our programs are both innovative and compliant. Typically, our out-of-school services include activities such as GED preparation, work readiness, life skills, work experience, skills training, job placement, job retention, and career advancement while our in-school programs focus on drop-out prevention, academic enrichment, work-based learning, career exploration, job shadowing, internships, and work experience. We are particularly proud of our past youth program that developed Pre-Advanced Placement and Advanced Placement curriculum at the junior high school and high school levels. The resulting articulation agreements continue to help students transition more easily into college.

#### **D. Coordination with Secondary and Postsecondary Education Programs**

(WIOA §108(b)(10); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(9))

Boards must include a description of how the Board will coordinate its workforce investment activities with relevant secondary and postsecondary education programs and activities to coordinate strategies, enhance services, and avoid duplication of services.

The Board and its Contractor is working with employers (e.g., electrical wires companies, the Eagle Ford Shale Consortium, Sierra Industries, Laughlin Airforce Base, American Natural Gas Alliance (ANGA), etc.), and Southwest Texas Junior College (SWTJC) to establish multiple career pipelines both within industries and within occupations to connect students, as early as junior high school, to industries that might employ them upon graduation. This process will allow more people to begin to slowly and gradually build their skills for success, which could enhance the opportunities for those in poverty to get a job, get a better job, and then get a career. A key strategy is to focus on core competencies that are consistent across several industry clusters; graduates will have a broader knowledge base that will make them eligible for openings in multiple industries while simultaneously improving literacy, soft skills, and occupational skills.

Because partnerships and collaboration among the public, private and nonprofit sectors are essential to successfully establish, build and sustain workforce and economic development systems, MRGDC continues an effort with local non-profits to work holistically with families to provide parenting classes, tutoring in the home, and life skills training with outreach through the One-Stop centers. At the same time, the MRGDC is working through the MRGDC Education Committee in collaboration with independent school districts, SWTJC, and Sul Ross State University Rio Grande College (SRSRGC) to continue the development of vertical teams within the overall educational system, thereby removing the gaps between secondary school and the Junior College, and between the Junior College and SRSRGC. This has promise for lowering the drop out rate in all educational systems.

The WFSMRGB is also working to expand both two-year degree and certificate offerings of Career and Technology education at SWTJC or other training institutions in anticipation that this will provide practical education for students wishing to stay in the region and train for jobs here, as well as give employers a more customized educational process so that employees can be brought along as they acquire both skills and experience on the job.

The Board has developed grant applications for High Demand Job training such as Aviation Maintenance in partnership with economic development corporations in the region. School districts will be able to train youth for jobs earning up to \$20 an hour using leveraged funds to grow the jobs in high skill career pathways for youth.

## **E. Child Care and Early Learning**

(40 TAC §809.12 Board Plan for Child Care Services)

Each Board must include a description of how the Board is strategically managing child care and early learning within its workforce system to enhance school readiness and strengthen and support the child care industry.

Note: This may include efforts to:

- Coordinate with employers, economic development, and other industry leaders to increase the awareness and importance of early learning as a workforce and economic development tool
- Support improved school readiness through higher-quality child care, including Texas Rising Star, and through partnership opportunities such as prekindergarten partnerships
- Support the needs of the child care industry, which could include assistance with business development or shared services, as well as opportunities to support professional growth and career pathways for early education

The Board's child care program and its Child Care Committee members set goals every year. The goals include strategies for outreach, recruitment and development of quality child care at the prekindergarten and child care provider levels. The Board collaborates with Business Services Unit (BSU) who work closely with the business community in order to bring awareness of the child care program to their employees and/or customers. WFSMRGB also coordinates with WIOA, Choices, and other workforce programs to strengthen the services provided to customers. The Board will:

- Increase the of Texas Rising Star (TRS) providers in our region and to increase the number of children served at a TRS center.
- TRS mentors will provide training to child care provider staff to help them prepare for TRS assessment.

- Scholarships will be offered to TRS providers or potential TRS provider child care staff enabling them to receive a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential.
- Develop a partnership with Head Start and ISD's to better serve the prekindergarten children integrating workforce services for parents who are in school or work.
- To support more home-based child care providers either by paying for professional development, materials, or helping improve the quality of care provided to children in the home-based centers.
- To support the business needs of child care providers to include business mentoring in partnership with the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and peer-to-peer association of child care providers.

## **F. Transportation and Other Support Services**

(WIOA §108(b)(11); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(10))

Boards must include a description of how the Board will provide transportation, including public transportation, and other appropriate support services in the workforce area in coordination with WIOA Title I workforce investment activities.

The Southwest Area Regional Transit District (SWART) is the provider of transportation services in the southwest Texas region. In conjunction with Del Rio Transit (serving the County of Val Verde and City of Del Rio), SWART serves the nine county Middle Rio Grande Valley area. SWART operates a demand response service within eight of the nine counties. It also provides intercity services within its entire nine - county district and in some cities outside the district including San Antonio and Laredo. SWART accepts requests for demand-response service as few as one business day prior to the desired trip date, or up to 60 days in advance. Fares vary by pick up location, drop off location, and time of day.

THE BOARD and WFSMRG have had limited coordination with SWART but intend to enhance coordination where it may benefit our joint client population.

For the most part transportation assistance to customers is in the form of gas cards to customer in need of transportation for program participation and occasionally assist with vehicle repairs.

## **G. Coordination of Adult Education and Literacy**

(AEL) (WIOA §108(b)(13); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(12))

Boards must include a description of how the Board will coordinate WIOA Title I workforce investment activities with AEL activities under WIOA Title II. This description must include

how the Board will carry out the review of local applications submitted under Title II consistent with WIOA §§107(d)(11)(A) and (B)(i) and WIOA §232.

Young people in our region are living in high-poverty communities having less access to work, as well as fewer opportunities to gain early work experience and develop the skills needed to advance in school and the workplace. Post-secondary schools are under-resourced and where high school graduation rates are far below the national average.

The Board and its workforce center system contractor WFSMRG will integrate and collaborate with Title II -Adult Education by:

- Broadening the focus of adult education, literacy, and English language barrier to provide referral services to include transition to postsecondary education and employment.
- The referral system has become a vital benefit in our partnership arrangements. People tend to trust businesses they already know. This means that with a partner's recommendation and referral, their clients automatically invest trust in your organization and by creating an exclusive network between partner organizations and/or Institutions these valuable recommendation and referral practically double the client base for each side. Joint promotions and advertising reflect solid relationships and partnerships.
- Referrals potentially leading to adult education activities that "help eligible individuals transition to postsecondary education and WIOA education and training or employment, or for concurrent enrollment activities," so long eligibility and requirements are met.
- Encourage the use of Integrated education and training and workforce preparation activities.
- Engage in innovative adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career information. This will help adult learners obtain college credits and achieve basic skill gains.

WFSMRG continues to foster new affiliations to support the growth, promote jobs and economic development to the region. These partnerships augment workforce development resources to promote the coordination of services in our communities. To leverage resources and services for the residents of the region, WFSMRG has developed alliances with training entities that have available training resources and partnerships with community-based organizations that have support services or case management such as MET, CSA, Family Endeavors etc. WIOA supports enhanced, innovative employment and training opportunities. Middle Rio Grande will engage to assist and serve the hardest to serve and border residents who often lack basic education attainment and English proficiency.

WFSMRG has integrated its services with SWTJC -AEL by inviting and conducting GED classes at our four larger workforce centers. Class consist of workforce staff providing a morning filled with information and presentations to GED students to include but not limited to building soft skills, critical thinking, digital literacy and self-soft management skills. Hands on activities consist of using the Texas Works for researching occupations of their interest and focusing on demand industries and occupations with data and wage information in our region. Employers have engaged and participated in providing information to the students in regards to their aspect of the type of individual they are looking for, interview questions and positive responses and

overall hiring processing. These events have been a huge success. The Board will identify a review team and implement the review of proposals for the local adult education competition based on Agency guidance.

MRGDC has strong relationships with both TWC Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) and Adult Education and Literacy (AEL). Although AEL is currently co-located at 2 of the Workforce Centers, we work closely with them to assist individuals with remedial education, high school equivalency diplomas, and English language skills. We have an established process to refer clients that need AEL services to move on to higher education, receive training, or obtain full-time employment. We have established a co-case management system to assure each referral meets their educational objectives and allows to continue to a career pathway with workforce training or skills development as needed. AEL is also helping provide computer literacy for those who need it while completing basic skills or GED goals.

## **Part 6: Adult, Dislocated Workers, and Youth Services**

### **A. Adult and Dislocated Worker Employment and Training**

(WIOA §108(b)(7); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(6))

Boards must include a description and assessment of the type and availability of adult and dislocated worker employment and training activities in the workforce area. Boards must include a description and assessment of the type and availability of adult, dislocated worker and youth employment and training activities in the workforce area. Boards must also include the list of assessment instruments (tools) used for adult, dislocated worker, and youth.

Program activities are common for all job seeking customers, outreach and recruitment, intake, eligibility determination, assessment, employment plan development, enrollment in program activities, case management and follow up after placement in employment. Outreach and recruitment are conducted in various ways to include advertising, flyers, PSAs, and working through schools and partner agencies to reach Individuals in need of workforce services. Intake and eligibility involve an initial assessment of the individual's skills, needs, and barriers to employment. Personal Information concerning age, education, income, work history, special needs, and documentation supporting these characteristics is collected and reviewed to determine whether the individual is eligible for program services. All job seekers may use the Resource Room where computers, copiers, fax and telephones are available to assist with job search and on-line training in job search techniques, labor market information and job openings identified through WorkInTexas.com. Once eligibility is determined the customer undergoes an assessment of their skills, knowledge, abilities, basic skill levels, interests etc. For non-normed assessments such as the SAGE, staff may read the questions and allow paper and pencil administration instead of computer administration. Depending on the degree of accommodation needed, the customer may be referred to the Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) for applicable accommodations. Once an assessment has been completed, the customer visits with a case manager to develop an employment plan outlining the steps to be taken by the customer and the case manager to assist the customer to be job ready. The employment plan is updated as the customer completes each assigned activity or as new assignments are added to the plan. The case

manager coordinates the activities with the customer and helps ameliorate any barriers to the customer completing the employment plan. Upon successful completion of activities, the customer is then assisted with finding a job through WIT or assisted job search. Once the customer is placed in employment the case manager checks with him/her periodically to ensure that the placement is satisfactory to the customer and the employer.

For Adult and Dislocated Workers, WFSMRG provides funds through individual training accounts for training in target occupations. Individuals interested in training and eligible for WIOA are encouraged to review the target occupations list. The Board staff and contractor staff consult with community colleges to ensure there are training courses for the selected targeted occupations and community colleges consult with the Board when considering new training courses. Additional training opportunities for adults and dislocated workers include adult basic education and GED programs, literacy programs and English language training for those who have low levels of English fluency. The Southwest Texas Junior College's Adult Basic Education Department and their staff are active partners with the workforce development system. Cross-system referrals are made by each center to either provide remedial or GED educational services to adults who need such services for training or employment.

The Board and WFSMRG will focus on serving those populations of youth who are most in need of employment and training programs, including displaced, homeless, and foster youth. The youth are referred to WIOA Youth Specialist/Case Manager to begin the integrated eligibility process so that their eligibility can be determined for possible enrollment in WIOA. The WFSMRG is committed to delivering a program which is developmentally age appropriate, communicates high expectations, provides opportunities for leadership, encourages a sense of personal identity, and encourages community commitment and participation.

This youth development approach focuses on: long-term intensive services; places greater emphasis on out-of-school youth; has an increased focus on education; engages in the twelve months of follow-up services; emphasizes different outcomes for different ages; and emphasizes work-based learning which include adult mentoring. To achieve the aforementioned, all 14 WIOA youth program elements will be made available and incorporated into the program by continuing and improving on the following:

- Tutoring, study skills training, instruction and dropout prevention: WFSMRG staff engage youth to stay in school by assisting them in arranging tutoring and study skills training. This activity is provided by area schools for in-school youth as a part of their concerted drop out prevention efforts. Case managers will track this activity to ensure that youth are progressing in their study skills and achieving academic success.
- Alternative Secondary School services will be acquired for all those out-of-school youth needing to enhance their educational achievement so that they will be able to meet employer demands in high-demand occupations. WFSMRG staff refer customers to high school diploma equivalency classes.
- Paid/unpaid work experiences that have academic and occupational education as a component of their experience: WFSMRG provides limited internship and OJT opportunities to youth. Components of each of these activities tie back to the youth's

academic coursework facilitated by the case manager to ensure that the youth is progressing at both the worksite and in school.

- Occupational skills training is available to older youth who have completed school or who have dropped out but have the basic skill levels necessary to complete training, usually an 8<sup>th</sup> grade level of reading and math. Youth who are in-school and who are following a Career Pathway will be assisted in enhancing their learning through internships, work experience, job-shadowing and vocational training after they graduate from high school. Out of school youth who are unemployed or under-employed will be brought in to start working on development of an employment plan and educational plan that will result in the selection of a career in a high demand occupation. Occupations are listed in the target occupation list in Part A of this plan.
- Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as a workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster is provided through Summer Employment Opportunities that are directly linked to academic and occupational Learning. In addition to learning occupational skills youth are provided with work experience that builds work maturity skills, enhancing their ability and confidence in finding employment after graduation. This program option is targeted to those populations that are in greatest need, i.e. Out-of-school youth, youth leaving the foster system, youth leaving the judicial system and the homeless. Summer employment opportunities will still be available for in-school youth with barriers to success.

Leadership Development activities may include community service and peer-centered activities which encourage responsibility and other positive social behaviors during non-school hours. Activities focus on how to get acquainted with new people, organizing ideas, learning leadership qualities, public speaking, creating confidence, listening skills, building trust, vision and planning skills, team projects, and personality types. These activities will be initiated in coordination with school districts and Southwest Texas Junior College. Case managers will track the progress made in these activities as part of the youth's employment plan development.

Support services: Transportation assistance and child care assistance are available to youth and customers on an as needed basis. Case managers will decide the need and make the appropriate referral for services. Support services are tracked as a part of overall case management.

Adult mentoring: WFSMRG will recruit adult mentors for Individual youth who may benefit from a youth/mentor relationship. Mentors volunteers will be trained in appropriate mentoring techniques and will be subject a background check. Adult mentoring activities will be tracked as part of the youth's case management.

Follow-up services: WFSMRG staff follow up on youth placed in employment at least monthly. Follow up notes will be included in the youth's case management file. Any problems or issues will be noted in the case notes and addressed to the extent possible.

Comprehensive guidance and counseling are provided to customer initially during the initial assessment and then on an as needed basis to address any problems or barriers the customer may

have during their participation. Guidance and counseling efforts will be tracked in the customer's case notes.

Financial literacy education: MRGDC will be seeking a means to provide financial literacy education either through coordination with school districts or through a procured independent contractor. Lessons will include such topics as money and goals, protecting your identity, saving, credit, staying out of debt, understanding pay, etc. Entrepreneurial skills training: This activity will be provided as an addition to financial literacy training. Topics will include social and cultural aspects, concepts of business and economics, types of businesses, skills and abilities required for entrepreneurship.

Labor market and employment information about in demand industry sectors in workforce area: WFSMRG host job fairs and labor market information is available at the fairs as well as on the Board web page. Understanding labor market information will also be a part of the entrepreneurial skills training program activity

Transition to post-secondary education and training: As a part of the school's at-risk youth efforts, youth are encouraged to develop a career interest and stay in school as a means to achieving their interest. The job fairs noted above also include information about making the transition to post-secondary training or education.

Successful models of activities:

For the past two years, WFSMRG has supported enhancing existing youth fairs by integrating with Southwest Texas Junior College and hosting a College & career Day inviting area High School seniors and juniors to the college campus for a day of information, activities and fun. The theme for the event was "Developing Futures Together" in recognition of the longstanding collaborative work and partnership between the college and workforce solutions. Keynote motivational speakers and breakout sessions consist of college admission, testing, financial aid, and student success center/college social media and including Texas Workforce Commission for labor market and career information for all to participate. Area employers are invited to participate in this grand event to provide information on occupations and their hiring processes. Representation of 30 academic and technical departments participate, sharing information about the various educational options available at Southwest Texas Junior College.

## **B. Priority to Recipients of Public Assistance and Low-Income Individuals**

(20 CFR §679.560(b)(21))

Boards must include the Board policy to ensure that priority for adult individualized career services and training services will be given to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient, consistent with WIOA §134(c)(3)(E) and §680.600 of the Final Regulations, as well as veterans and foster youth, according to the priority order outlined in the WIOA Guidelines for Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth. Boards must also include a list of any Board-established priority groups, if any.

The Board and the workforce center system operator WFSMRG assure that priority for services will be given to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals and individuals who are basic skills deficient.

The Board's current policy on priority groups for service, policy #MRGWB-ALL-O4, which is for all programs states: "Targeting Services: The Board has targeted recipients of public assistance and other low-income persons as the top priorities for receiving services."

The Board will modify this policy to add "individuals who are basic skills deficient" to the priority for services policy to ensure that priority for adult individualized career services and training services will be given to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient, consistent with WIOA §134(c)(3)(E) and §680.600 of the Final Regulations.

Priority of service is assessed at the customer's point of entry, where the individual is queried as to the service or need. The questions asked allow staff to update customer information in TWIST and to identify meeting the Priority of Services classification as it pertains to Veterans, Foster Youth and MSFW. The Veterans Questionnaire Triage tool is used as a part of a process to determine priority of services. Registrar's identify all priority of services customers at entry point. If, during participation, the Employment Specialist/Case Manager learns of changes in an individual's status that allows a higher priority of service, the person will be given increased priority. Veterans and eligible spouses receive priority of service in all WIOA Title I programs (WIOA, TANF/Choices, SNAP, etc.). For the WIOA Adult Program priority for individualized career and training services will be given to participants who, are designated: • low-income, and/or • basic skills deficient for the Adult Program • Individuals who are English Language Learners meet the criteria for "basic skills deficient." For the purposes of implementing priority of service, broad definition of the term "veteran" is used. Under this definition, "veteran" means a person who served at least one day in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable. Priority of service order: 1. Veterans and eligible spouses who are low-income or basic skills deficient. 2. Individuals who are MSFW or Foster Youth who are low-income or basic skills deficient. 3. Veterans and eligible spouses who are not low-income or basic skills deficient. 4. Anyone who does not belong to one of the groups above. We follow these steps to determine if a participant in the WIOA Adult Program must receive priority of service: • Determine whether the individual seeking to enroll is a veteran or eligible spouse. • Determine whether the individual is low-income. • If the individual is not low-income, the person must complete a basic screening tool to identify any basic skills deficiencies. • Assign an order of priority (first, second, third, etc.), assess needs and continue to provide services as needed.

MRGDC relies on the expertise of the Texas Veterans Commission to ensure our Workforce Centers and Virtual Centers provide exceptional customer service and results for Veterans. At all times, we ensure that veterans are provided with priority of service. Additionally, the MRGDC and its Veterans partners have established a Veteran's Quarterly Committee comprised of each county's Veterans Service Officer (VSO) to develop and access multiple resources for employment and training of veterans.

## **Part 7: Fiscal Agent, Grants, and Contracts A. Fiscal Agent**

(WIOA §108(b)(15); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(14))

Boards must include identification of the entity responsible for the disbursement of grant funds described in WIOA §107(d)(12)(B)(i)(III), as determined by the CEOs or the governor under WIOA §107(d)(12)(B)(i). B. Sub-Grants and Contracts (WIOA §108(b)(16); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(15)) Boards must include a description of the competitive process that will be used to award the sub-grants and contracts for WIOA Title I activities.

The fiscal agent for the Middle Rio Grande WDA is the Middle Rio Grande Development Council. The organization is a Council of Governments, a voluntary association of, by and for local governments, and is established to assist local governments in planning for common needs, cooperating for mutual benefit, and coordinating for sound regional development. The COG's purpose is to strengthen both the individual and collective power of local governments and to help them recognize regional opportunities, eliminate unnecessary duplication, and make joint decisions. COGs are established under Local Government Code Title 12, Planning and Development Subtitle C. Planning and Development Provisions Applying to More Than One Type of Local Government, Chapter 391. Regional Planning Commission. This designation is made by a Memorandum of Understanding designating MRGDC as its Fiscal Entity.

It is the policy of WFSMRG to conduct procurement in a manner that provides for full and open competition. Prior to awarding a contract, WFSMRG will conduct a pre-award review to evaluate the proposer's financial management system and make an assessment of the proposer's level of risk of noncompliance or nonperformance under the contract. An award will be made only to an organization possessing the qualifications and demonstrated ability to perform successfully under the terms and conditions of a contract and a positive pre-award review. The services solicited under this RFP are procured under the Competitive Proposal Method outlined in the TWC Financial Manual for Grants and Contracts (FMGC).

## **Part 8: Performance**

### **A. Board Performance Targets**

(WIOA §108(b)(17); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(16))

Boards must include a description of the local levels of performance negotiated with TWC and the CEOs consistent with WIOA §116(c), to be used to measure the performance of the area and to be used by the Board for measuring the performance of the local fiscal agent (where appropriate), eligible providers under WIOA Title I subtitle B, and the one-stop delivery system in the area.

Performance benchmarks and measures are proscribed by the Texas Workforce Commission and become part of each Board's contract for funding. These performance benchmarks are passed on to the contractors and are incorporated into their contract statement of work.

The following performance measures were set in accordance with WIOA § 116(c):

Adult Employed Q2 Post Exit

Adult Median Earnings Q2 Post Exit  
Adult Employed Q4 Post Exit  
Adult Credential Rate  
Dislocated Worker Employed Q2 Post Exit  
Dislocated Worker Median Earnings Q2 Post Exit  
Dislocated Worker Employed Q4 Post Exit  
Dislocated Worker Credential Rate  
Youth Employed/Enrolled Q2 Post Exit  
Youth Employed/Enrolled Q4  
Youth Credential Rate

Each year or as appropriated the negotiates any deviation from the performance target based on data unique to the region.

## **Part 9: Training and Services**

### **A. Individual Training Accounts (ITAs)**

(WIOA §108(b)(19); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(18))

Boards must include a description of how training services outlined in WIOA §134 will be provided through the use of ITAs, including, if contracts for training services will be used, how the use of such contracts will be coordinated with the use of ITAs under that chapter, and how the Board will ensure informed customer choice in the selection of training programs, regardless of how the training services are to be provided.

Individual Training Accounts are provided to customers to pay for occupational skills training in targeted occupations. Training is usually provided by Southwest Texas Junior College. ITAs have a life of up to two years from issue and a ceiling of no more than \$4,000 for standard training cost and \$8,000 for highly technical training for the two-year period. Customers have the choice of occupational study based on the target occupation list and availability of the training in the region.

### **B. ITA Limitations**

(20 CFR §663.420) Boards may impose limits on the duration and amount of ITAs. If the state or Board chooses to do so, the limitations must be described in the Board Plan, but must not be implemented in a manner that undermines WIOA's requirement that training services are to be provided in a manner that maximizes customer choice in the selection of an Eligible Training

Provider. Exceptions to ITA limitations may be provided for individual cases and must be described in Board policies.

There is no exception.

## **Part 10: Apprenticeship**

### **A. Registered Apprenticeship Programs**

Boards must include a description of how the Board will encourage Registered Apprenticeship programs in its workforce area to register with the Eligible Training Provider System in order to receive WIOA funding.

## **Part 10: Apprenticeship**

### **A. Registered Apprenticeship Programs**

A Power Point Slide presentation will be prepared with a step by step process taking the developing apprenticeship programs in the Middle Rio Grande workforce area to register with the Eligible Training Provider System (E.T.P.L.) in order to receive WIOA funding. The Labor Market Information Specialist will reach out to the developing correlated programs to assure that the appropriate trade training can be registered and training funded under the approved ITA levels.

For example, the Rio Grande Co-Op has apprenticeship programs where they are hiring the SWTJC Lineman trained under sponsored ITA's funded under WIOA.

### **B. Apprenticeship Texas**

While in the past there have been few opportunities to develop apprenticeship opportunities for job seekers and the employers who will now hire them as apprentices, the Board has now established proactive strategies which will identify apprenticeships available in the region such as Diesel Mechanic Apprentice – Truck Care at the Love Truck Stop in Encinal, Texas. By using the U.S Department of Labor's Apprenticeship Job Finder link we can now have job seekers find the local apprenticeship opportunities that can be linked with the Texas E.T.P.L. system to get available Deisel Mechanic trade skills enabling Love Truck Stops to hire local job seekers as Diesel Mechanic Apprentice. The Board will ask Love to commit to registering their apprenticeship program in the ETPL system as there already is a Diesel Mechanic Program that can be enhanced with the apprenticeship component, thus providing portability of the job seeker to any employer in Texas.

Other opportunities found in nearby San Antonio, Laredo, and within 150 miles of the Middle Rio Grande area that are in demand may include:

Pharmacy Technician/Pharmacy Technician Apprentice – Walgreens, Boerne, Texas (Three Walgreen Pharmacy(s) in MRG)

HVAC Apprenticeship Technician, Lennox with an HVAC Trade School

Apprentice Electrician, People Ready, San Antonio, Texas

Construction Union Apprenticeship, San Antonio

Automotive Body Technician Apprentice, Honda, San Antonio

Installation Technician Apprentice, Learning Alliance Corp., Laredo

This list will be expanded based on the search for apprenticeship opportunities by the Apprenticeship Job Finder and the identification of apprenticeship readiness training programs (ARPs) throughout the Texas and the United States which affiliate with the nationally recognized Multi-Craft Cor Curriculum (MC3) through the North America's Building Trades Unions (NABTU) sponsoring comprehensive Texas E.T.P.L. training.

The Board supports the establishment of apprenticeships as they are available in the region.

### **B. Apprenticeship Texas**

Boards must include a description of the Board's strategy and commitment to support Apprenticeship Texas efforts across the state, as applicable.

There are currently a few apprenticeship programs in the electric coops. The Board has received presentations and is in the process of identifying areas of apprenticeships that can be developed with our masters in the various trades in our region.

### **Part 11: Public Comment**

Boards must include a description of the process used by the Board, consistent with WIOA §108(d), 20 CFR §679.550(b) and §679.560(b) and (e), to:

- make copies of the proposed local plan available to the public through electronic and other means, such as public hearings and local news media;
- include an opportunity for comment by members of the public, including representatives of business, labor organizations, and education;
- provide at least a 15-day, but no more than a 30-day period for comment on the plan before its submission to TWC, beginning on the date that the proposed plan is made available, before its submission to TWC; and
- submit any comments that express disagreement with the plan to TWC along with the plan.

A public notice was posted on the Board web page announcing the availability of the plan at the Board office and on the Board's web page. The plan was made available for comment for 15 days.