

# Workforce Solutions Middle Rio Grande Local Plan Program Years 2017–2020

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## **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 A: Strategic Elements**

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

### *Boards' Vision*

- 1. A description of the Board's strategic vision to support regional economic growth and economic self-sufficiency. The description must include:**
  - a. goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce, including youth and individuals with barriers to employment; and**
  - b. goals relating to the performance accountability measures based on performance indicators described in WIOA §116(b)(2)(A).**

### **Board Response:**

#### Mission and Vision

The mission of Workforce Solutions Middle Rio Grande (WSMRG) 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 vision which the WSMRG 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 WSMRG Board's Goals and Objectives

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.

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 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 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 for both Board and Contractor staff to ensure effective performance of their duties.
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2. **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 area to achieve the vision and goals.**

**Board Response:**

Workforce Solutions Middle Rio Grande conducts a competitive procurement process to select a contractor for workforce center system operation and for child care management services. The current contractor is Middle Rio Grande Development Council (MRGDC). MRGDC has been providing workforce development and child care management services in the Middle Rio Grande region for over 25 years. Contractor staff have demonstrated the knowledge, skills and abilities to staff workforce center system operation and child care management system functions in a professional manner, attaining numerous performance awards for the Board. MRGDC and the Board work closely to plan and implement workforce development solutions for our customers: job seekers and employers. The partnership has long provided the region with quality workforce development services.

*Economic and Workforce Analysis*

3. **A regional analysis of the following:**
  - a. **The economic conditions, including existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations, as well as targeted occupations**

**b. The employment needs of employers in existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations**

**As appropriate, a local workforce development area (workforce area) may use an existing analysis, provided that it is recent and provides a current and accurate description of the regional economy.**

**Board Response:**

The Middle Rio Grande Workforce Development Area consists of nine counties: Dimmit, Edwards, Kinney, La Salle, Maverick, Real, Uvalde, Val Verde and Zavala. The Middle Rio Grande Region of Texas is a 14,404 square mile area located in Southwest Texas, on the Texas - Mexico border. The region is highly rural with a population density of 11.59 residents per square mile compared to a statewide density of 95.92 per square mile. The region is characterized by vast, underdeveloped rangeland. The favorable climate enables year-round crop production, although irrigation use will be curtailed in future years because of water issues. The innate natural beauty of the area allows landowners to capitalize on recreation, hunting and tourism, which is becoming a large economic development industry in itself for the region.

The region has several major transportation arteries, including Interstate Highway 35, US Highway 90, US Highway 83, a network of state highways and the Southern Pacific Railroad. The economy is based predominately on agriculture, oil and gas production, government, services, tourism, and trade with Mexico. The Mexican trade is primarily local retail trade found along the immediate border and shipping of goods across the region to the US interior. The region has been able to capitalize on federal and state grant resources. Government employment now accounts for a significant portion of the region's employment. By the second quarter of 2016 Federal employment amounted to 70% of employment by ownership. State government was 1 per cent. Local government employment was 23%, mostly in education and health services. Private employment was 6% of employment by ownership.

The Middle Rio Grande Workforce Development Area comprises approximately the western third of the Eagle Ford Shale region. The recent implementation of new petroleum gas recovery technologies has led to an economic boom for Uvalde, La Salle, Dimmit, Maverick and Zavala Counties. The uptick in activity fueled an influx of outside workers which increased demand for housing and services. Hotels and restaurants were built to meet this demand. The housing shortage became acute with RV trailers and "mancamps" established to meet the need for accommodation of incoming workers. Employment in the service producing industries increased with the demand. Most of the high paying jobs were taken by out-of-towners moving into the region. Local hires were mostly clerical, truck driving in the Oil and Gas sector and Support Activities for Mining, and in Leisure and Hospitality occupations and retail trade. The increase in production of fossil fuels led to an "oil glut" and prices dropped, imperiling the industry and leading to layoffs and idling of rigs and support units. Layoffs hit the Support Activities for Mining hard as well as the Oil and Gas

Sector. Support and ancillary industries in manufacturing and construction have also been affected by the down turn, with wages and job openings in decline.

The Texas Workforce Commission reported employment by industry for the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter 2016 for the Middle Rio Grande Region. The table below presents the employment by industry for the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2016 for the Middle Rio Grande Region. The largest sector in terms of employment is the Education and Health Services industry with 18,711 employees representing a slight increase over the same period in 2015. Trade, Transportation and Utilities comprise the next largest industry in terms of employment with 11,310 employees, representing a decline from the previous year. Other industries experiencing decline over the previous year also include Natural Resources and Mining, down 8.7%, Construction down 27.3%. The downturn in construction is related to the downturn in the Eagle Ford Shale Play due to the collapse of oil and gas prices worldwide. Recent reports indicate that production is beginning to ramp back up with announcements that OPEC will cut oil production in the coming months.

Employment by Industry (2nd Quarter 2016, Percent Change)				
Industry	Employment	% of total	% Change	
			Quarter	Year
Natural resources and mining	4,286	7.3%	8.2%	-8.7%
Construction	1,774	3.0%	-7.7%	-27.3%
Manufacturing	3,452	5.9%	-2.2%	-2.1%
Trade, transportation and utilities	11,310	19.3%	1.3%	-3.8%
Information	396	0.7%	2.1%	5.3%
Financial activities	1,881	3.2%	-1.3%	-2.6%
Professional and business services	2,884	4.9%	1.5%	10.1%
Education and health services	18,711	32.0%	-0.5%	2.1%
Leisure and hospitality	6,596	11.3%	4.7%	0.3%
Other services	990	1.7%	1.3%	-0.4%
Public administration	6,270	10.7%	0.1%	0.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>58,550</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>-1.6%</b>

The TWC’s projections for industry growth from 2014 to 2015 are presented in the table below. Overall employment is expected to grow by 13.9%, with Elementary and Secondary Schools having the largest share of employment with 8,200 employees. Add in Local Government, Home Health Care Services and Restaurant and Other Eating Places these four industries account for thirty percent of the expected employment in 2016.

<b>Middle Rio Grande Valley WDA Industries Adding the Most Jobs</b>				
Industry Title	Annual Average Employment 2014	Annual Average Employment t 2024	Number Change 2014-2024	Percent Growth 2014-2024
<b>Total All Industries</b>	<b>67,940</b>	<b>77,380</b>	<b>9,440</b>	<b>13.9%</b>
Elementary & Secondary Schools, Public & Private	6,820	8,200	1,380	20.2%
Local Government, Excl. Education & Hospitals	4,020	5,220	1,200	29.9%
Home Health Care Services	4,170	5,340	1,170	28.1%
Restaurants & Other Eating Places	4,040	4,840	800	19.8%
General Medical & Surgical Hospitals, Public & Private	1,580	1,900	320	20.3%
Department Stores	990	1,250	260	26.3%
Other General Merchandise Stores	1,190	1,410	220	18.5%
Gasoline Stations	940	1,130	190	20.2%
Grocery Stores	1,360	1,530	170	12.5%
Traveler Accommodations	820	990	170	20.7%
Outpatient Care Centers	550	710	160	29.1%
Other Ambulatory Health Care Services	400	560	160	40.0%
Facilities Support Services	740	890	150	20.3%
Child Day Care Services	640	780	140	21.9%
Building Material & Supplies Dealers	550	670	120	21.8%
Nursing Care Facilities, Skilled Nursing	630	750	120	19.0%
General Freight Trucking	620	730	110	17.7%
Specialized Freight Trucking	470	570	100	21.3%
Services to Buildings & Dwellings	270	370	100	37.0%
Sports, Hobby, & Musical Instrument Stores	230	320	90	39.1%
Junior Colleges, Public & Private	620	710	90	14.5%
Automotive Repair & Maintenance	300	390	90	30.0%
State Government, Excl. Education & Hospitals	700	790	90	12.9%
Automobile Dealers	410	490	80	19.5%
Individual & Family Services	250	320	70	28.0%

Middle Rio Grande WDA Civilian Labor Force October 2016				
Date	October 2016	September 2016	October 2015	Year Change
CLF	72,241	73,139	72,555	-314
Employed	66,984	67,497	67,203	-219
Unemployed	5,257	5,952	5,352	-95
Rate	7.3%	8.1%	7.4%	-.01%

The region's civilian labor force for October 2016 has declined since 2012, from 75,488 as of October 2012, to 72,241 four years later, a loss of 3,247. Employment has dropped from 69,366 to 66,984. There are also fewer unemployed compared to 2012 with 5,257 unemployed, a rate of 7.3% compared to 2012 which had 8.1% rate down from 10.8% in January 2012.

The table above presents the labor force statistics for October 2016 for the Middle Rio Grande WDA. Since October 2015 the labor force has declined by 314 persons. Employment has also declined by 219 people. The unemployment rate declined slightly

from 7.4% to 7.3%. Compared to the Texas average (4.4%)and national average (4.7%)the unemployment is much higher in the Middle Rio Grande region.

The table below presents the fastest growing industries, based on TWC projection. Based on percent change from 2014 to 2024 Other Ambulatory Health Care Services, Services to Buildings and Dwellings Auto Repair and Maintenance all have growth rates of 30% or greater. The industry adding the most jobs Elementary and Secondary Schools has a projected growth rate of 20.2 percent.

<b>Middle Rio Grande Valley WDA Fastest Growing Industries</b>				
Industry Title	Annual Average Employment	Annual Average Employment	Number Change 2014-2024	Percent Growth 2014-2024
	2014	t 2024		
<b>Total All Industries</b>	<b>67,940</b>	<b>77,380</b>	<b>9,440</b>	<b>13.9%</b>
Other Ambulatory Health Care Services	400	560	160	40.0%
Services to Buildings & Dwellings	270	370	100	37.0%
Automotive Repair & Maintenance	300	390	90	30.0%
Local Government, Excl. Education & Hospitals	4,020	5,220	1,200	29.9%
Outpatient Care Centers	550	710	160	29.1%
Home Health Care Services	4,170	5,340	1,170	28.1%
Individual & Family Services	250	320	70	28.0%
Department Stores	990	1,250	260	26.3%
Clothing Stores	250	310	60	24.0%
Child Day Care Services	640	780	140	21.9%
Building Material & Supplies Dealers	550	670	120	21.8%
Specialized Freight Trucking	470	570	100	21.3%
Traveler Accommodations	820	990	170	20.7%
Facilities Support Services	740	890	150	20.3%
General Medical & Surgical Hospitals, Public & Private	1,580	1,900	320	20.3%
Elementary & Secondary Schools, Public & Private	6,820	8,200	1,380	20.2%
Gasoline Stations	940	1,130	190	20.2%
Health & Personal Care Stores	250	300	50	20.0%
Restaurants & Other Eating Places	4,040	4,840	800	19.8%
Automobile Dealers	410	490	80	19.5%
Nursing Care Facilities, Skilled Nursing	630	750	120	19.0%
Other General Merchandise Stores	1,190	1,410	220	18.5%
General Freight Trucking	620	730	110	17.7%
Junior Colleges, Public & Private	620	710	90	14.5%
Rail Transportation	280	320	40	14.3%

The Mining Industry does not show up on the growth charts because those sectors are expected to have a continued decline of 15% from 2014 to 2024, losing 490 jobs overall with most of the loss (430 jobs) in Support Activities for Mining. The forecast for employment in the Mining sector is subject to both economic and political events and decisions both in the U.S and overseas (OPEC) that affect the price of oil and gas. The Industry will continue to be a significant sector in the region as long as the demand for fossil fuels continues.

Another industry experiencing decline is Construction with a 7.3% decline in employment by 2024. Specialty Trade Contractors, usually a growth sector within the Construction industry is expected to lose 280 jobs, or 18% of the total employment in the sector by 2024. Evidence suggests that this decline is tied to the overall decline in Oil and Gas production.

Another sector in decline due to oil and gas instability is Machinery Equipment Rental and Leasing with a 55% decline in employment projected over the next eight years.

Projections of changes in individual occupations within industries indicates that the bulk of jobs continue to be in health care, retail trade, agriculture and food preparation (fast food). Other than health care, the remainder are low paying occupations paying insufficient wages and require no formal education credential. Nearly 35% of the total annual projected job openings over the next eight years are occupations that require no formal credential, not even a high school diploma.

**Occupations Adding the Most Jobs Middle Rio Grande WDA**

Occupational Title	Annual Average Employment	Annual Average Employment	Number Change	Percent Growth
	2014	2024	2014-2024	2014-2024
Personal Care Aides	3,370	4,290	920	27.3%
Retail Salespersons	1,990	2,500	510	25.6%
Cashiers	2,080	2,400	320	15.4%
Farmworkers & Laborers; Crop, Nursery, & Greenhouse	1,730	1,890	160	9.2%
Office Clerks, General	1,630	1,830	200	12.3%
Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	1,690	1,820	130	7.7%
Farmworkers; Farm, Ranch, & Aquacultural Animals	1,600	1,720	120	7.5%
Combined Food Preparation & Serving Workers, Incl. Fast Food	1,170	1,490	320	27.4%
Elementary School Teachers, Ex. Special Education	1,160	1,420	260	22.4%
Maintenance & Repair Workers, General	970	1,180	210	21.6%
Secretaries & Admin Assistants, Ex. Legal/Medical/Executive	1,040	1,170	130	12.5%
Janitors & Cleaners, Ex. Maids & Housekeeping Cleaners	950	1,140	190	20.0%
Secondary School Teachers, Ex Special/Career/Technical Ed	840	1,020	180	21.4%
Stock Clerks & Order Fillers	870	1,000	130	14.9%
Substitute Teachers	780	940	160	20.5%
Teacher Assistants	740	900	160	21.6%
Waiters & Waitresses	750	890	140	18.7%
First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	770	890	120	15.6%
Registered Nurses	680	860	180	26.5%
Correctional Officers & Jailers	610	740	130	21.3%
Maids & Housekeeping Cleaners	600	720	120	20.0%
Customer Service Representatives	590	710	120	20.3%
Food Preparation Workers	510	620	110	21.6%
Counter Attendants; Cafeteria/Food Concession/Coffee Shop	500	610	110	22.0%
Emergency Medical Technicians & Paramedics	380	510	130	34.2%

**Occupations with the Most Annual Job Openings Middle Rio Grande WDA 2014 -2024**

Occ Code	Occupational Title	Total Annual Average Openings
41-2011	Cashiers	125
41-2031	Retail Salespersons	120
39-9021	Personal Care Aides	115
35-3021	Combined Food Preparation & Serving Workers, Incl. Fast Food	70
45-2092	Farmworkers & Laborers; Crop, Nursery, & Greenhouse	60

Occ Code	Occupational Title	Total Annual Average Openings
43-9061	Office Clerks, General	55
25-2021	Elementary School Teachers, Ex. Special Education	50
35-3031	Waiters & Waitresses	50
45-2093	Farmworkers; Farm, Ranch, & Aquacultural Animals	50
43-5081	Stock Clerks & Order Fillers	45
49-9071	Maintenance & Repair Workers, General	45
53-3032	Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	45
25-2031	Secondary School Teachers, Ex Special/Career/Technical Ed	40
33-3021	Detectives & Criminal Investigators	40
35-3022	Counter Attendants; Cafeteria/Food Concession/Coffee Shop	40
37-2011	Janitors & Cleaners, Ex. Maids & Housekeeping Cleaners	40
25-9041	Teacher Assistants	35
29-1141	Registered Nurses	35
53-7062	Laborers & Freight, Stock, & Material Movers, Hand	35
25-3098	Substitute Teachers	30
33-3012	Correctional Officers & Jailers	30
29-2061	Licensed Practical & Licensed Vocational Nurses	25
35-2021	Food Preparation Workers	25
37-2012	Maids & Housekeeping Cleaners	25
39-9011	Childcare Workers	25

Source: TWC LMI

In general employers need qualified applicants for their job openings. Qualifications include both the requirements stipulated on the job posting as well as work maturity skills, the ability to work together with others, to follow directions, to be punctual, to take direction and initiative, and to be drug free. Many employers have expressed their frustration with individuals referred by workforce center systems, referrals who do not meet the minimum requirements or who have drug convictions on their record. The Board and its contract MRGDC endeavor to only refer qualified applicants both in terms of so-called soft skills and the minimum prerequisites for the position.

**4. A list of the in-demand industry sectors and occupations.**

**Board Response:**

The in-demand industry sectors are presented in the table on page seven. The in-demand occupations are presented in the table on page eight.

**5. A list of the target industry sectors and occupations.**

**Board Response:**

The Board’s target occupation list 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 per hour wage and less than two years of training). The target occupations are presented in detail with data on the plan attachment. The target occupations are:

<b>Target Occupations for Middle Rio Grande WDA 2017 - 2019</b>		
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Annual openings</b>	<b>wage</b>
49-3011 Aircraft Mechanics/Service Techs	10	24.66
49-3023 Auto Service Techs/Mechanics	10	16.47
49-9071 Maintenance Repairers and Workers	45	12.53
43-3031 Bookkeeping/Accounting/Auditing	5	14.25
49-3031 Bus/Truck Mechanic/Diesel Specialist	5	16.08
33-3012 Correctional Officers/Jailers	15	16.12
31-9091 Dental Assistants [40% growth to 2024]	0	12.86
29-2021 Dental Hygienists [50% growth to 2024]	0	38.75
33-3021 Detectives/Criminal Investigators	40	35.92
29-2041 Emergency Medical Tech/Paramedics	20	16.58
49-9051 Electrical Power Line Installer/Repairer	5	25.60
47-2111 Electricians	5	21.58
33-2011 Fire Fighters	10	22.99
Industrial Machinery Mechanics	27% growth TX	14.33 TX
43-6013 Medical Secretaries	15	12.63

<b>Target Occupations for Middle Rio Grande WDA 2017 - 2019</b>		
43-6012 Legal Secretaries	13% growth TX	12.92 TX
29 2061 Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurses	25	18.23
43-6013 Medial Secretaries	15	12.63
47-2073 Operating Engineer/Construction Equipment	10	16.77
23-2011 Paralegals and Legal Assistants	27% growth TX	15.27 (TX)
33-3051 Police/Sheriffs Patrol Officers	20	21.80
29-2037 Radiologic Technologists and Techs	25% growth rate TX	17.86
29-1141 Registered Nurses	35	43.18
43-6014 Secretaries, Except Legal/Medical/Executive	25	12.45
53-3032 Truck Drivers, Heavy/Tractor-Trailer	45	19.16
51-4121 Welders/Cutters/Solderers/Brazers	10	28.10

Several occupations on the target list do not show up on the Board-specific TWC LMI data projections for 2014 – 2024. Those are Industrial Machinery Mechanics, Legal Secretaries, Paralegals and Legal Assistants, and Radiologic Technologists and Technicians. All show significant statewide growth according to the USDOL ONET web site.

**6. An analysis of the knowledge and skills needed to meet the employment needs of the employers in the region, including employment needs in in-demand sectors and occupations.**

**Board Response:**

Specific skills needs are dependent on the occupation though generally successful applicants need to be able to speak, read and write at an at least 12th grade level, understand at least high school level math and have some experience in the occupation field or industry.

For basic skills employers need applicants with active learning, active listening, critical thinking, reading comprehension, monitoring and assessing performance, using scientific methods, speaking to convey information and writing ability. Employers need applicants able to demonstrate social skills: coordination, instructing others, negotiating, persuasion, service orientation and social perceptiveness, and successful interpersonal relations. Many of these skills cannot be directly taught but must be learned through work ready instruction and experience on the job. Consequently it is extremely important to work with employers willing to give applicants the time to help acquire and advance these skills and abilities.

For specific occupations applicants need four sets of abilities: cognitive, physical, psychomotor, and sensory abilities. Cognitive abilities include skills such as deductive reasoning, fluency of ideas, inductive reasoning, information ordering, mathematical reasoning, oral comprehension and expression as well as others. ONETonline.org provides the required skills for any occupation an applicant might research and gain an understanding of what skills will be needed for specific occupations. Physical abilities relate to strength and flexibility, stamina and equilibrium. Psychomotor abilities refer to the capacity to manipulate and control objects to include dexterity and response orientation. Sensory abilities include depth perception, hearing sensitivity, near vision, auditory attention among others.

System skills, the capacity to be able to work with people to achieve goals, and technical skills can be obtained through occupational skills training provided by our education partners and funded through workforce development funding. The contractor determines through testing and assessment what skills an applicant may have and what skills need additional work. That capacity determines to a great extent what job opportunities an individual might be referred to by the case manager.

The vast majority of employers in the Middle Rio Grande WDA are small and mid-sized businesses. Therefore, the vast majority of employers using the workforce centers are small and mid-sized businesses. The Workforce Center System staff are the primary means of

identifying the needs of these employers on a day-to-day basis. Center Staff meet with employers to ascertain their needs, to encourage their use of business services through the workforce centers and to ensure that employers are receiving qualified applicants for their job openings.

Specific employer needs and how they are addressed are presented in the table below.

Employer Needs	How WSMRG addresses need
Qualified job applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruiting, screening and referral of qualified applicants</li> <li>• Extensive assessment/testing of applicants before referral – work skills, aptitudes and attitude</li> <li>• Ensure applicants are work ready – proper attire, motivated</li> </ul>
Assistance with job orders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualified staff assist with job order details, skills identification, updating orders, follow up on result of referrals</li> <li>• Job matching service</li> </ul>
Outreach of applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish quarterly job fairs for all businesses as well as industry specific job fairs such as oil and gas extraction industry</li> <li>• Staff job fair site – enable employers to participate through provision of logistics support</li> <li>• Publicize job fairs to general public</li> <li>• Provide interview facilities</li> <li>• Assist with Work Opportunity Tax Credit</li> </ul>
Job Applicants ready to work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soft skills (work maturity skills) assessment and training through job clubs, counseling, peer group interaction</li> <li>• Only qualified work ready applicants are referred</li> </ul>
Skilled job applicants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with employers to identify skills needed and find providers to offer skills training</li> <li>• Customized training to specific industry needs</li> </ul>
Assistance with expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On-site job application assistance</li> <li>• Specific outreach to particular individuals with skills sets being sought by employer</li> </ul>
Assistance with lay-offs/downsizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond quickly to layoff notice with rapid response activities</li> <li>• Meet on-site with employer/employees to present assistance with counseling, job search</li> <li>• Assist with referral to UI benefits</li> </ul>
Workforce partners who understand the industry and listen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional employer forums to discuss needs/trends</li> <li>• BSU staff knowledgeable about area industries</li> <li>• Business representatives on the WSMRG Board</li> <li>• Up to date labor market information</li> </ul>
Responsive to Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Periodic customer satisfaction surveys and corrective action</li> <li>• Continuous improvement mind set directed toward efficiency and accountability</li> </ul>

**7. 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.**

**Board Response:**

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 167,010 in the 2010 U.S. Census. The table below presents the breakdown by race/ethnicity and sex. The region is predominately Hispanic [note: Hispanic is an ethnicity. The Hispanic count includes white, black and other.]

All Ages by Race/Ethnicity	Population	Area Percent	Statewide Percent
White	145,041	86.8	70.4
Male	72,226	43.2	34.8
Female	72,815	43.6	35.5
Black	1,359	.8	11.8
Male	772	.5	5.7
Female	587	.4	6.1
Other	20,610	12.3	17.8
Male	10,183	6.1	9.0
Female	10,427	6.2	8.7
Hispanic	138,754	83.1	37.6
Male	68,593	41.1	18.9
Female	70,161	42.0	18.7

The region's population by age is presented below compared to the State percent.

<u>Age</u>	<u>Area Population</u>	<u>Area Percent</u>	<u>Statewide Population</u>	<u>Statewide Percent</u>
<b>Under 5</b>	13,622	8.2	1,928,473	7.7
<b>5-14</b>	28,027	16.8	3,810,117	15.2
<b>15-19</b>	14,147	8.5	1,883,124	7.5
<b>20-44</b>	52,459	31.4	8,888,934	35.3
<b>45-64</b>	37,232	22.3	6,033,027	24.0

**65+**                      21,523                      12.9                      2,601,886                      10.3

The region’s population is slightly younger with a greater percent of individuals 5 – 19 compared to the state average. The region has 26, 056 persons age 14-21 representing 15.6 percent of the population compared to a state wide percent of 14.7. Older individuals age 55 and older are 31.2 percent compared to the state percent of 30.9. The age cohort from 25-44, prime labor force participation ages, is below the state average of 28.1 percent with 40,550 or 24.3 percent of the population. Demographers indicate that declines in this cohort may point to a weakening economy with working age individuals moving out of the area.

Of the population age 18 and above Veterans made up 7.6 percent or 8,536 persons compared to a statewide percent of 9.3.

The 2010 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.

<u>Educational Attainment</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>Area Percent</u>	<u>Statewide Percent</u>
<b>Less than 9th Grade</b>	24,067	24.3	9.7
<b>9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, no diploma</b>	13,083	13.2	9.6
<b>H.S. graduate (inc. equiv.)</b>	24,452	24.7	25.3
<b>Some college, no degree</b>	17,687	17.9	22.8
<b>Associate Degree</b>	5,983	6.0	6.4
<b>Bachelor's Degree</b>	10,051	10.1	17.5
<b>Graduate or Prof. Degree</b>	3,687	3.7	8.7

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.

<b>Middle Rio Grande WDA Labor Force Statistics</b>				
	<b>Oct-16</b>	<b>Sep-16</b>	<b>Oct-15</b>	<b>OTY</b>
<b>CLF</b>	72,241	73,149	72,555	-314
<b>Employed</b>	66,984	67,197	67,203	-219
<b>Unemployed</b>	5,257	5,952	5,352	-95
<b>Rate</b>	7.3%	8.1%	7.4%	-0.1%

The civilian labor force in the region has declined by 314 individuals from October 2015 to October 2016. The unemployment rate dipped slightly over the year, from 7.4% to 7.3%, still some of the highest unemployment rates in the state. This represents 5, 257 individuals available and looking for work.

**Middle Rio Grande WDA Poverty Status**

County	Population for whom Poverty Status is Determined	Population Determined to be in Poverty Status	Poverty Rate (percent per capita)
Dimmit County	10,587	2,003	18.90%
Edwards County	1,894	205	10.80%
Kinney County	3,221	572	17.80%
La Salle County	6,242	972	15.60%
Maverick County	55,773	14,872	26.70%
Real County	3,261	541	16.60%
Uvalde County	26,326	5,248	19.90%
Val Verde County	47,218	9,738	20.60%
Zavala County	11,806	3,943	33.40%
	166,328	38,094	23%

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 state wide 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 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. 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 the 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 Education and Health Services industry, and to a lesser extent the Leisure and Hospitality industry supporting the region’s growing tourism economy.

**8. An analysis of workforce development activities in the region, including education and training.**

Note: This analysis must include the strengths and weaknesses of workforce development activities and an evaluation of the effectiveness of programs and services. It must evaluate the Board’s capacity to provide workforce development activities to address the identified education and skills needs of the workforce. The analysis must include individuals with barriers to employment. The analysis also must address the employment needs of employers.

**Board Response:**

Workforce Solutions Middle Rio Grande and its contractor for workforce center system services and child care management services continue to meet or exceed TWC-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. Two measures were exceeded in the period October 2015 to September 2016.

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>End of Year Target</b>	<b>End of Year Performance</b>
Claimant Re-employment with 10 weeks	Meeting	52.19%	48%
# Employers Receiving Assistance	Meeting	1432	1383
<b>Measure</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>End of Year Target</b>	<b>End of Year Performance</b>
Staff Guided Entered Employment	Meeting	80%	81.18%
At Risk Employment Retention	Meeting	78%	78.36%
Total Job Seekers Educational Achievement	Exceeding	78.40%	89.47%
WIOA Youth Placement in Employment/Education	Meeting	69%	71%
WIOA Youth Literacy/Numeracy Gains	Exceeding	58%	71.43%
Choices Full Work Rate	Meeting	50%	51.92%
Average # Children (in Care) served per day	Meeting	1122	1,062

Source: Performance Analysis and Reporting MPR 4.0 TWC

## **Part B: Operational Elements**

The Operational Elements of the Guidelines are as follows:

- 1. A description of the workforce development system in the local area that identifies:**
  - a. the programs that are included in the system; and**
  - b. how the Board will support the strategy identified in the State Plan and work with the entities carrying out 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).**

### **Board Response:**

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 University.

- a. The publicly funded workforce center system consists of five full service centers in Dimmit, Maverick, Uvalde, Val Verde and Zavala Counties, and three satellite centers in Edwards, La Salle 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 WorkInTexas 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.

b. WSMRG supports the strategy for incorporating state agency plans to direct a coordinated approach to workforce development. WSMRG’s goals align with the TWC goals and objectives identified in the Combined State Plan. Those goals can be summarized as:

State Goal	WSMRG Goal/Objective
1. Give employers and individuals ready access to a network of high-quality information and services.	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.
2. Provide Texans access to literacy, education, vocational rehabilitation, and in-demand workplace skills necessary for self-sufficient employment and advancement.	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.
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 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.
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.

WSMRG’ objectives for each of the goals in support of the State Strategy can be found on pages 2 and 3 of this plan.

**2. A description of how the Board will work with entities carrying out core programs to:**

- a. expand access to employment, training, education, and supportive services for eligible individuals, particularly eligible individuals with barriers to employment;**

**Board Response:**

The entity carrying out core programs in the Middle Rio Grande WDA is the Middle Rio Grande Development Council. This Council of Governments has been the workforce center system operator since the Board was founded in 1996. This contractor was selected

through a competitive procurement process every five years. The MRGDC won each of these procurements and continues to provide workforce development services in the region.

The MRGDC 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 operations staff working in the workforce centers have years of experience in the programs that provide training and workforce development services to job seekers and employers.

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.

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 dislocate 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.

Job Seeker Needs	How WSMRG addresses need
Access to job listings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WorkinTexas job listings</li> <li>• Referrals to job openings</li> </ul>
Job search assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job search assistance</li> <li>• Job search workshops</li> <li>• Resume preparation</li> <li>• Copiers and fax machines</li> <li>• Resource room with internet access</li> <li>• Counseling/motivation assistance for ensure required activity to receive TANF or SNAP benefits</li> </ul>
Assessment and testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TABE testing</li> <li>• Comprehensive skills and barriers assessment</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to personality/aptitude testing</li> <li>• Referral to other partners for advance/specialty assessment</li> </ul>
Occupational skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom training in targeted occupations</li> <li>• Assistance accessing financial aid</li> <li>• Tuition assistance</li> <li>• Target occupation list of jobs in demand</li> <li>• Labor market information</li> <li>• Coordination with area colleges to provide training that meets employer needs</li> </ul>
Support while in training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation assistance</li> <li>• Child care services</li> <li>• Referral to medical assistance</li> <li>• Counseling and tutoring services</li> </ul>
Job placement after training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job development in key target industries</li> <li>• Industry specific job fairs</li> <li>• Employer recruitment assistance</li> <li>• Assistance with licensing/testing fees</li> </ul>
Job retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow up services to ensure job retention</li> <li>• Skills upgrade</li> </ul>

**b. facilitate the development of career pathways and co-enrollment, as appropriate, in core programs; and**

**Board Response:**

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.

MRGDC 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. MRGDC cohesively combine public-private partnerships, resources and funding, policies, data, and shared performance measures to successfully develop and scale quality, sustainable pathways. MRGDC 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."

MRGDC 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.

MRGDC 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.

**c. improve access to activities leading to a recognized postsecondary credential (including a credential that is an industry-recognized certificate or certification, portable, and stackable).**

**Board Response:**

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. MRGDC 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.

MRGDC 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, MRGDC will utilize Employer Outreach Specialist-Job Developers 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.

MRGDC participated in the statewide funding for industry-recognized skills certification initiative on the following credentials:

- Transportation/Warehouse-trucking, delivery-general
- Healthcare and Social Assistance
- Information Technology

### **3. A description of the strategies for coordinating programs and services for target populations.**

#### **Board Response:**

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 involves 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. MRGDC 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.

#### SAGE

The battery incorporate subtests that determine a customer's career and job interests, work attitudes, temperaments, numerical and verbal aptitude, reasoning abilities, mathematics and language abilities. Manipulative tests include motor coordination, spatial aptitude, eye-hand, foot, finger dexterity, and manual dexterity.

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 Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) 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:** WSMRG 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 and the training available from Southwest Texas Junior College and the Rio Grande Campus of Sul Ross University. 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 \$7,000 total 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 MRGDC 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 WSMRG'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 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.

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, MRGDC, 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
- Rocksprings
- Brackett
- Cotulla
- Eagle Pass
- Leakey
- Nueces Canyon Consolidated
- Uvalde Consolidated
- Sabinal
- Knippa
- Utopia
- San Felipe Del Rio
- Consolidated
- Comstock
- Crystal City
- La Pryor

Since it began operating the workforce system in the Middle Rio Grande region, MRGDC 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.

MRGDC 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, 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 & 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.

Finally, MRGDC'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. Workforce Solutions Middle Rio Grande became a part of the Border Workforce Alliance that includes a joint five-WDA successful application to serve out of school youth and school dropouts.

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

MRGDC 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, MRGDC 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 Halls, 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 Committee 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. (see PDF file)

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.

The Workforce Solutions System has partnered with the Eagle Ford Shale new employers who are actively seeking veterans. 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 transferrable skills learned in the military in order to more effectively place them in jobs and identifying the training needs for the gap needed or in demand by the new employers in the oil and gas sector.

**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 Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) have developed a memorandum of understanding.

The DARS 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 TRC counselor at the MRGWFB office as Commission staffing patterns permit.

Refer Commission clients to MRGWFB per established MRGWFB referral procedures.

WSMRG agrees to:

Provide WIA 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 DARS and WSMRG 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

#### **4. A description of the strategies and services that will be used in the local area:**

##### **a. To facilitate engagement of employers in the workforce development programs, including small employers and employers in in-demand industry sectors and occupations**

###### **Board Response:**

The majority of employers in the Middle Rio Grande region are classified as small businesses and family owned businesses. Most of the job postings and resultant placements made by the workforce center system are with small businesses. The employers who serve on the Board of Workforce Solutions Middle Rio Grande are small business owners or officers of small companies.

The in-demand industries noted elsewhere in this plan include Natural Resources and Mining, Trade, Transportation and Utilities, and Education and Health Services. These industries are targeted for special attention by the Business Services Unit to seek job postings, gain insight into the industry, and create a climate of partnership and cooperation between the private sector and public workforce development. Employers are contacted

regularly to ensure that the employer's needs are understood and that qualified applicants can be recruited for future job openings. When a significant expansion in a business occurs, MRGDC workforce center staff are ready to be on-site to assist the employer in staffing up the expansion.

**b. To support a local workforce development system that meets the needs of businesses in the local area**

**Board Response:**

WSMRG and MRGDC engage local employers in a manner that promotes the employer's ability to be successful in the region. The Business Services Unit contacts employers on a regular basis to determine their needs for qualified applicants and or labor market information or labor law assistance. Workforce centers have space dedicated to allow employers to meeting potential applicants, to conduct interviews at the centers or on-site at their place of business. MRGDC periodically conduct surveys of employers in particular industries (e.g. health care) to determine their potential for hiring graduates of occupational skills training and whether the region's training capacity will meet employer needs.

There are business resource centers in each of the full service centers that provide employers with access to labor information, meeting and interview space, computers with business software, and staff to assist them. The centers are also used by the Small Business Development Center representatives from Sul Ross University to meet with clients.

**c. To better coordinate workforce development programs and economic development**

**Board Response:**

WSMRG and its contractor MRGDC have a history of working with partner entities to promote the economic development of the Middle Rio Grande region. Whenever new companies are being recruited a representative of MRGDC is at the meetings pitching what workforce development services can do for the company. Economic development partners are kept informed of the developments in the workforce center system and the ways the workforce centers can help strengthen employers and increase the region's competitiveness.

WSMRG and MRGDC were partners with many entities in planning and managing the Eagle Ford Shale expansion in South Texas.

The impacts of this economic development have only begun to be felt. Whole communities are undergoing extensive change to accommodate the temporary and permanent workforce changes occurring as oil and gas extraction companies and support services for mining companies move into the region, demanding housing accommodations, access to amenities, acquiring lease access to ranches and farms, overwhelming local infrastructure with hundreds of trucks and thousands of new workers.

To address these challenges the Middle Rio Grande Development Council in concert with Workforce Solutions Middle Rio Grande Board undertook an extensive regional planning effort by establishing the Eagle Ford Shale Consortium. The Consortium represents over 20 South Texas counties who collaborate, partner and address the community realities that will be a result of the Eagle Ford Shale oil and gas exploration – and plan for the sustainable future of the Middle Rio Grande communities. The Consortium focuses on issues concerning education and workforce development, industry, community investment, infrastructure and natural resources, and community and economic development. The Eagle Ford Steering Committee is composed of a Chairman, Vice Chairman and Co-Chairs from each of the five Subcommittees:

Education & Workforce Development – composed of educational institutions, school districts, workforce development and recruitment organizations. This group focuses on current/future workforce education needs and works closely with local high schools, community colleges & universities.

Infrastructure and Natural Resources – composed of elected officials, utility companies, land owners, housing related entities and those involved with natural resources. This group focuses on matters related to development and maintenance of community infrastructure and good stewardship of resources.

Industry – composed of producers, service companies and industry associations. This group works closely with all other committees to forecast current and future labor needs, skill sets that will be required and educating the public on the oil and gas industry.

Community/Economic Development – composed of chambers of commerce, economic development groups, small business development centers and organizations dealing with social services. This group focuses on coordinating and implementing efforts between groups, identifying gaps and improvements areas for economic progress, so as to maximize the benefits from the Eagle Ford Shale development.

Community Investment – composed of land owners, company philanthropy departments and foundations, and others willing to invest in the Eagle Ford Region. This group focuses efforts on creating partnerships to maximize investments into the region and for worthwhile projects of value to communities.

The Eagle Ford Shale Consortium continues to meet periodically to assess the continued impact of rise and decline of employment opportunities and the impacts to both employment and community resources.

**d. To strengthen linkages 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.**

**Board Response:**

Unemployment insurance benefits are accessed through the Texas Workforce Commission web page. Requirements for receipt of benefits include searching for work. WSMRG and MRGDC 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.

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

**Board Response:**

WSMRG 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. WSMRG 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.

WSMRG 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.

- 6. A description of the one-stop delivery system in the local area, including explanations of the following:**
  - a. 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;**

**Board Response:**

WSMRG partners with Southwest Texas Junior College and Sul Ross University to provide occupational skills training for eligible customers. The various occupational training areas

are determined by the colleges with input from WSMRG and local employers who present their skills requirements for current and potential job openings. Periodic discussions are conducted with representatives of specific industries to gain feedback on what employers need and how graduates of these programs are faring in the job market. WSMRG also tracks enrolled customers to determine how their training is going and any problems or adjustments that might be needed to that training. Graduates are assisted with job search and are marketed by both WSMRG and the colleges to local businesses. Through this process there are substantial opportunities for discussing program deficiencies and ways to improve service delivery.

**b. 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;**

**Board Response:**

Services are provided to employers and job seekers in the more rural areas through the satellite workforce centers as well as by center staff visits to area schools and community centers. Job seekers are referred to WorkinTexas.com to register and access job order listing. Employers are able to access WorkinTexa.com through the Internet to post job orders, review applicant resumes, and obtain labor market and labor law information through referral to the Texas Workforce Commission web site.

Each resource room in each workforce center is equipped with personal computers connected to WorkinTexas (WIT) for either self-directed job search or staff assisted use. Job seekers are able to conduct job search and look at the labor market through the use of WIT or internet searches at various employer sites or application portals. Periodically employers recruiting are brought in and video broadcast to at least five workforce centers who conduct job clubs on a weekly basis. New employers can use the BSU Conference area with tools for new employers that need a back office for their start-up as they recruit and hire their employees. Employers are also identified for recruitment using SitesonTexas' business lists by county.

Workforce center offices use internet access to provide information to employers concerning the MRG region and to report information back to MRGDC offices in Carrizo Springs and Board offices in Uvalde.

Six of the workforce centers are equipped with distance learning resources providing video conferencing capabilities connected to SWT-Net and fifteen (15) school districts. The area colleges, partner agencies, the Board, MRGDC and employers and job seekers all have access to distance learning equipment and conference facilities on a scheduled basis. MRGDC has established a wide area network to tie the nine workforce centers together for data and telephone connectivity with full Internet services for conferencing, data reporting and email communication.

MRGDC staff are also using Facebook to provide an additional tool for job seeker outreach and notification to interested parties about the MRG workforce development system.

- c. How entities within the one-stop delivery system, including the one-stop operators and the one-stop partners, will comply with WIOA §188, 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; and**

**Board Response:**

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 Texas Workforce Commission monitors ADA compliance regarding physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, program, services, technology, and materials for individuals with disability.

- d. The roles and resource contributions of the one-stop partners.**

**Board Response:**

WSMRG has in place memoranda of understanding with its one-stop partners to coordinate the operation, access and delivery of workforce development services through the workforce center system. The MOUs are presented on page [redacted]. Required and optional partners include:

- Texas Veterans Commission
- Apprenticeship
- National and Community Services Act
- Postsecondary Vocational Education Activities under the Carl D. Perkins Act
- Senior Community Service Employment Program
- Coordinated Choices Case Management with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission
- Unemployment Insurance
- Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
- Vocational rehabilitation programs and services
- Job Corps services under WIOA youth
- Native American programs under WIOA
- Community Services Block Grant programs

- Employment and training services provided through grantees of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (YouthBuild)
- Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs or local housing authority
- Community Development Block Grant recipients
- Local education agencies
- Vocational education agencies
- Colleges
- Extension Services
- Fatherhood initiative programs or other child support programs
- Army National Guard employment and training programs
- Texas Juvenile Justice Department
- Juvenile Probation Commission
- Texas Department of Criminal Justice
- Migrant and Seasonal Farm worker youth educational services
- National Farm worker Jobs Program Grantee
- Domestic violence intervention programs
- Community-based organizations

The general role of each MOU partner is to coordinate services among agencies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of services to our mutual customers. Some partner agencies are accessed through the workforce center system and some are accessed through formal referral of customers in need of services. Partner agencies meet periodically to assess the effectiveness of each partnership and explore ways to improve service delivery and access to resources.

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, current 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.”*

**7. A description and assessment of the type and availability of adult and dislocated worker employment and training activities in the local area.**

**Board Response:**

The workforce center system provides access to workforce development services for adults and dislocated workers. These services include:

- Assessment and testing to identify barriers to placement in a job paying a self-sufficient wage.
- Occupational skills training in occupations projected to be in demand in the region
- Basic skills remediation for those who need remediation in math, reading and language
- Case management and counseling for program participants
- Labor market information to help inform job seekers about the economy
- Job search assistance both through WorkInTexas and referrals to job openings posted by employers
- Referral to partner services in the region as needed to ameliorate barriers to program participation and employment
- A business services unit that listens to employers skills needs and anticipates ways to meet those needs
- Adult basic education and ESL programs for those needing such services

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

**Board Response:**

The local Rapid Response Team consisting 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, MRGDC, 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.

**9. A description and assessment of the type and availability of workforce investment activities for youth in the local area, including activities for youth who have disabilities. This description must include an identification of successful models of such activities.**

**Board Response:**

WSMRG and MRGDC 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 WIA.

The MRGDC 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 encourage 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: MRGDC 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. MRGDC staff refer customers to high school diploma equivalency classes.
- Paid/unpaid work experiences that have academic and occupational education as a component of the w/experience: MRGDC 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 which 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 customers on an as needed basis. Case managers will make a determination of need and make the appropriate referral for services. Support services are tracked as a part of overall case management.
- Adult mentoring: MRGDC 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: MRGDC 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 is 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: MRGDC host job fairs and labor market information is available at the fairs as well as on the WSMRG 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, MRGDC 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.

**10. A description of how the Board will coordinate relevant secondary- and postsecondary- education programs and activities with education and workforce investment activities to coordinate strategies, enhance services, and avoid duplication of services.**

**Board Response:**

MRGDC 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, 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 & 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.

Finally, MRGDC'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. Workforce Solutions Middle Rio Grande became a part of the Border Workforce Alliance that includes a joint five-WDA successful application to serve out of school youth and school dropouts.

**11. A description of how the Board will provide transportation, including public transportation, and other appropriate support services in the local area in coordination with WIOA Title I workforce investment activities.**

**Board Response:**

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.

WSMRG and MRGDC 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 assistance with vehicle repairs.

**12. 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.**

**Board Response:**

Wagner-Peyser employment services are operated through the workforce center system. TWC staff are supervised by the workforce center management. Employment service activities are thus coordinated on a day to day basis. This approach is mandated by Texas statute and TWC.

**13. A description of how the Board will coordinate WIOA Title I workforce investment activities with adult education and literacy 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.**

**Board Response:**

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 MRGDC 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 reflects 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.

MRGDC 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, MRGDC 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.

MRGDC has integrated with SWTJC –AEL by inviting and conducting GED class 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 TexasWorks 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.

**14. 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 U.S.C. 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 U.S.C. 720 et seq.) (other than §112 or part C of that title (29 U.S.C. 732, 741) and are subject to §121(f)) in accordance with §101(a)(11) of the Rehabilitation Act (29 U.S.C. 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.**

**Board Response:**

MOU's are attached to this document.

**15. An 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).**

**Board Response:**

The fiscal agent for the Middle Rio Grande WDA is the Middle Rio Grande Development Council. The organization is a Council of Government, 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 Commissions.

**16. A description of the competitive process that will be used to award the sub-grants and contracts for WIOA Title I activities.**

**Board Response:**

Workforce Solutions Middle Rio Grande uses a competitive procurement process to select contractors for the WIOA funded workforce center system activities and child care management systems. The Board releases a request for proposal for operation of the workforce center system and child care management systems in the Middle Rio Grande WDA. The RFP contains the requirements and restrictions concerning the contracting and operation of the programs as well as the scoring criteria and timeline for the procurement. The RFP details the submission requirements and narrative and budget instructions. The Board maintains a “bidders list” of entities which might be interested in submitting a proposal. A notice of the availability of the procurement is posted in local newspapers, the WSMRG web page and sent to entities on the bidders list. A “bidders’ conference” is held either on-site or by telephone to discuss the RFP elements and answer questions. A question/answer document is posted a few days after the bidders’ conference and emailed to entities on the bidders list. Proposals are due at the assigned due date and time. Late proposals are not accepted.

Proposals received are submitted to an independent evaluation team for evaluation using a standardized scoring instrument based on the RFP scoring criteria and instructions. The independent evaluation team submits its report to the Board detailing the evaluation score and strengths and weaknesses of each proposal. The Board reviews the evaluation report and takes action on a staff recommendation to select a proposer for contract negotiations. If negotiations are successful a contract is signed.

Proposers are notified of the action taken by the Board. Proposers may elect to receive a debriefing on the evaluation of their proposal. Entities that want to appeal the decision may follow the Board’s appeal process within a certain time period from the date of Board action on the procurement.

**17. 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 local 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 local area.**

**Board Response:**

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.

**18. A description of the actions the Board will take toward becoming or remaining a high-performing Board.**

**Board Response:**

WSMRG achieved all performance measures in FY2016 and is on track to perform in a similar manner for FY2017. 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.

**19. A description of how training services outlined in WIOA §134 will be provided through the use of Individual Training Accounts (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.**

**Board Response:**

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 \$7,000 per individual customer. Customers have the choice of occupational study based on the target occupation list and availability of the training in the region.

**20. 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.**

**Board Response:**

The workforce center system uses the Texas Workforce Commission's TWIST program as an integrated technology enabled intake and case management system. Participant information is securely stored in a manner that can be retrieved by authorized personnel. Case notes can be written and recalled as needed. Customer program activity is tracked

from start to finish. Assessment information and service plans area stored and readily available for review or update.

- 21. 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.**

**Board Response:**

WSMRG and the workforce center system operator MRGDC ensure that priority for services will be given to recipients of public assistance, other low income individuals and individuals who are basic skills deficient.

- 22. 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 Local 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.**

**Board Response:**

ITAs are provided to eligible individuals enrolling in occupational skills training in an occupation of their choice (and on the target occupations list). The limitations to the ITA are that it can be for no more than \$7,000 per person and has a life of two years.

- 23. A description of the design framework for youth programs in the local area, and how the 14 program elements required in §681.460 of the Final Regulations are to be made available within that framework.**

**Board Response:**

The description of youth program activities is presented in the response to question 9.

- 24. A description of how the Board will encourage Registered Apprenticeship programs in its area to register with the eligible training provider system in order to receive WIOA funding.**

**Board Response:**

There are no registered apprenticeship programs in the Middle Rio Grande WDA. The Board stands ready to support the establishment of apprenticeships if they are begun in this region.

**25. A description of the Board's strategy and commitment to support ApprenticeshipTexas efforts across the state, as applicable.**

**Board Response:**

The Board stands ready to support the establishment of apprenticeships if they are begun in this region.

**Part C: Public Comment**

A description of the process used by the Board, consistent with WIOA §108(d), to provide a 30-day public comment period before submission of the plan, including an opportunity to have input into the development of the Local Plan, particularly for representatives of businesses, education, and labor organizations. Comments submitted during the public comment period that represent disagreement with the plan must be submitted with the Local Plan.

**Board Response:**