

Middle Rio Grande Workforce Development Board Plan Program Years 2025–2028

PART 1: BOARD VISION AND STRATEGIES

A. Vision and Goals

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

Board Vision:

The vision which the Workforce Solutions Middle Rio Grande Board (Board) will pursue in its endeavors is of a region in which all residents have the greatest possible opportunity for full and effective economic participation, private enterprise has the maximum opportunity to grow and develop in an orderly manner, and public services are organized and delivered in the most efficient and cost effective manner possible; a region in which all people have the greatest possible opportunity for economic advancement, businesses have the broadest possible opportunity to grow and develop, and government has the highest possible capacity to provide quality public service without constituting a burden on either the people or the economy.

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

Board Goals:

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

Objectives:

1. To develop a fully functioning one stop career center system that streamlines employment related services and provides services to all job seekers and employers in a hassle-free, user-friendly environment driven by customer need.

2. Increase the availability of services in the region.
3. Enhance the quality of services in the region.

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

Objectives:

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

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

Objectives:

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

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

Objectives:

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

B. Board Strategies

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

Board Strategies:

Adult Education and Literacy

The Board also has a close collaboration with Southwest Texas Junior College GED/AEL program. When clients are identified with this barrier, referrals are made immediately to the GED/AEL program. Thirty-three customers were assisted with GED/AEL programming last year.

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

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

- Engage in innovative adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career information. This will help adult learners obtain college credits and achieve basic skill gains.

WFSMRG has integrated its services with SWTJC -AEL by inviting and conducting GED classes at our four larger workforce centers. The class consists 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-software management skills. Hands-on activities consist of using the Texas Works for researching occupations of their interest and focusing on demand industries and occupations with data and wage information in our region. Employers have engaged and participated in providing information to the students regarding their aspect of the type of individual they are looking for, interview questions and positive responses and overall hiring processing. These events have been a huge success. The Board will identify a review team and implement the review of proposals for the local adult education competition based on Agency guidance.

Vocational Rehabilitation

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

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

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

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

contractor staffing patterns and budgets. These services include, but are not limited to:

- Assessment and counseling
- Vocational training
- On-the-Job training
- Work experience
- Job search training
- Supportive services
- Job development
- Job placement
- Follow-up
- Refer clients to the Commission per established Commission referral procedures.

The VRS and the Board agree to the following general provisions: Funding of a mutual client's program of services will be shared by both parties to the maximum extent possible.

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

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

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

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

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselors co-located at the three larger center work extensively with the Student HireAbility Navigator (SHN), independent school districts, Education Service Center-15, Education Service

Center-20 and Vocational Rehabilitation Region 6 and Southwest Texas College Disability Support Services to schedule activities at the schools developing careers pathways in conjunction with the school counselors to promote awareness and availability of pre-employment transition services and Workforce Solutions resources to schools, parents, and students. Pre-Employment Transition Services in form of Charting the course were conducted to transitioning students and parents to promote awareness and availability of services and resources available in the workforce system area. A great working relationship has been developed by VR, SHN and Workforce Solutions and VR Region 6 staff to work collaboratively in providing the most needed services to WFS system youth and community resource fairs.

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

C. High-Performing Board

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

The Board achieved twenty of the twenty-one TWC/USDOL performance measure targets in FY2024. 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 become 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 to enhance staff capabilities through the system.

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

data to adjust and enhance objectives under a continuous improvement model.

The Board will continue to recruit quality board members that represent the region and represent the major industries in the workforce development area.

The Board will ensure that an effective fiscal management system is in place to ensure funds are allocated and spent properly.

PART 2. ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE ANALYSIS

A. Regional Economic and Employment Needs Analysis

References: WIOA §108(b)(1)(A); 20 CFR §679.560(a)(1); WIOA §108(b)(1)(B); 20 CFR §679.560(a)(2); WD Letter 24-20, Change 1

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.

Employment by Industry (3rd Quarter 2024, Percent Change)

Industry	Employment	% of Total	% Quarterly Change	% Yearly Change
Natural Resources and Mining	3,922	6.5%	-0.3%	-5.7%
Construction	1,756	2.9%	-0.5%	-3.9%
Manufacturing	2,697	4.5%	-2.2%	-5.6%
Trade, Transportation and Utilities	11,815	19.7%	0.0%	0.8%
Information	347	0.6%	-0.9%	-2.3%
Financial Activities	1,873	3.1%	0.6%	-2.6%
Professional and Business Services	3,598	6.0%	-2.3%	-3.7%
Education and Health Services	18,569	30.9%	-1.8%	0.7%
Leisure and Hospitality	7,356	12.2%	-1.3%	1.8%
Other Services	889	1.5%	-3.8%	8.7%
Public Administration	7,300	12.1%	-0.4%	1.0%

The top five industries in the Middle Rio Grande region in terms of employment numbers are Education and Health Services (30.9%), Trade, Transportation and Utilities (19.7%), Leisure and Hospitality (12.2%), Public Administration (12.1%) and Natural Resources and Mining (6.5%). Though it is not the largest industry in terms of employees, the Natural Resources and Mining sector has a huge impact on the economy of the region, bring in outside workers who need additional services, or experience significant layoffs as the price of petroleum products fluctuations.

Note: The above chart provides employment as of the 3rd quarter of 2024. The data in the sectors discussion below is based on the Texas Workforce Commission's projections for 2022 to 2032, noting employment for 2022.

Education and Health Services, with nearly 31 percent of employment in the region, reflects the characteristics of a rural economy, where the largest employers are school and hospitals. This sector includes Educational Services and Health Care and Social Services. The Health Care and Social Services industry includes Ambulatory Health Care Services, Hospitals, Nursing and Residential Care Facilities and Social Assistance. By far the larger employer is Health Care and Social Services with 10,173 employees compared to 7,162 for Educational Services. The Elementary and Secondary Schools sector represents nearly 91% of employment in the Education and Health Services with 6,492 employees in 2022.

The **Leisure and Hospitality** The Leisure and Hospitality sector is part of the service-providing industries super sector group. The Leisure and Hospitality super sector consists of Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation, and Accommodation and Food Services. The employment numbers indicate that tourism is a major economic activity in the region. The Accommodation and Food Services industry dominates the Leisure and Hospitality sector with 5,681 employees in 2022, compared to Arts, Entertainment and Recreation with only 106 employees. As noted in the chart above, Leisure and Hospitality are one of the few sectors not showing a decline in employment for the third quarter of 2024.

The other sector with significant and steady employment is the **Trade, Transportation and Utilities** sector, with 19.7% of employment (or 11,815 persons) for the region. The trade, transportation and utilities industry sells wholesale and retail merchandise, transports passengers and cargo and provides utility services. The industry, sometimes called a “super sector,” thus comprises four distinct sectors — retail trade, wholesale trade, transportation and warehousing and utilities. Retail Trade is the dominant industry with 7,809 employees compared to 1,166 for Wholesale Trade.

The **Public Administration** Sector includes Federal, State and Local Government industries. With 10,067 employees in 2022. The largest number of employees in the sector is in Local Government with 5,292 employees in 2022. These industries do not include Education, Hospitals, and the Postal Services. This sector also appears to be less affected by the general downturn in employment noted in the other sectors.

Natural Resources and Mining employed 3,780 people in 2022. The bulk of these people (64%) were employed in Support Activities for Mining with 2,420 people employed.

Oil and Gas Extraction: The Eagle Ford Shale Play

The Middle Rio Grande Workforce Development Area comprises approximately the western third of the Eagle Ford Shale region. The 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. 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

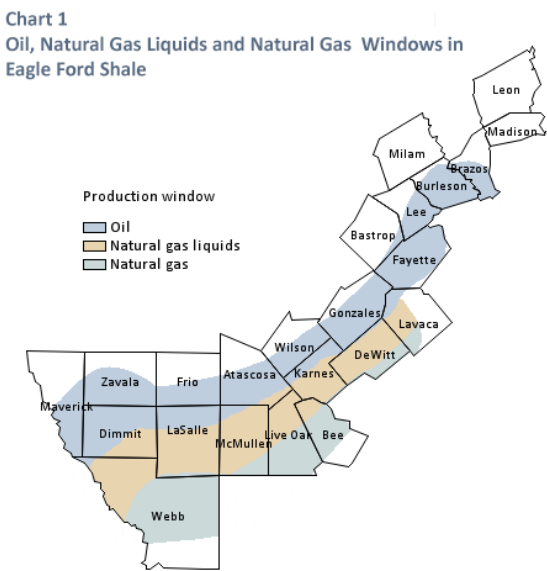
Leisure and Hospitality occupations and retail trade. The increase in production of fossil fuels led to an “oil glut” and prices dropped, imperiling the industry and leading to layoffs and idling of rigs and support units. Layoffs hit the Support Activities for Mining hard as well as the Oil and Gas 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 Eagle Ford Shale in South Texas produces oil and natural gas. In January 2025, the Eagle Ford Shale was producing about 1.1 million barrels of oil per day, which is about 8.8% of the United States' oil production.

According to the Energy Information Administration, the currently defined boundaries of the Eagle Ford Shale formation fall within a 23-county region.

During the fourth quarter of 2022, six counties produced 71.3 percent of Eagle Ford's oil: Karnes, De Witt, La Salle, Dimmit, Gonzales, and McMullen. Karnes, Dimmit, LaSalle and DeWitt counties also produce a large portion of the region's natural gas. Webb county (in the South Texas WDA) is by far the region's largest producer of natural gas, with production averaging 2.7 billion cubic feet per day in the fourth quarter 2022.

The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas provided Charts 1 through 8 describing the Eagle Ford Shale oil and gas activity.

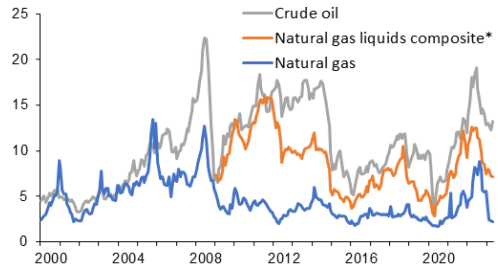


SOURCE: Energy Information Administration

The northernmost window contains high concentrations of oil while the southernmost window contains high concentrations of natural gas. And the central window contains natural gas liquids, such as ethane, propane and butane, which are used to produce a variety of industrial products.

These windows have played an important part in the story of the Eagle Ford, as they allow drillers to target different areas depending upon which commodity is most valuable. While companies initially focused on the area's natural gas resources, the other windows have attracted the lion share of activity over the past decade, due to the relatively low price of natural gas in the United States (Chart 2)

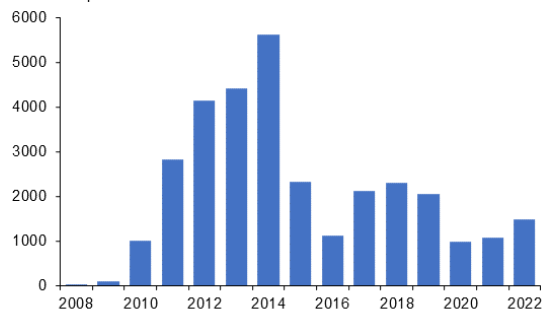
Chart 2
Prices for crude oil, natural gas liquids, and natural gas
Dollars per MMBtu



NOTE: *EIA's weighted average of the spot prices of natural gas liquids, where the weights are proportional to gas processing plant production volumes.
SOURCE: Energy Information Administration (EIA).

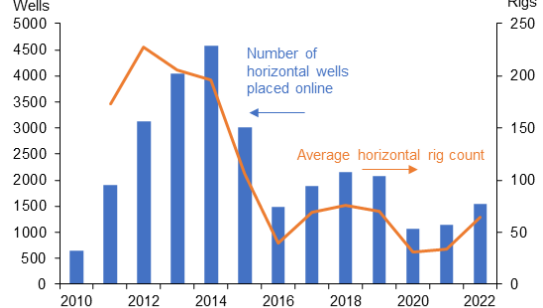
Petrohawk Energy Corp. completed the Eagle Ford's first well in October 2008. Activity was slow to pick up at first, due to the onset of the Great Recession and a sharp decline in natural gas prices. Starting in 2010, though, the area experienced a gold rush that lasted through 2014. The number of drilling permits (Chart 3) and completed wells (Chart 4) skyrocketed, and both oil and gas production followed suit. By the end of 2014 the area was producing 18 percent the country's oil and 8 percent of its natural gas (Chart 5).

Chart 3
Drilling permits issued in Eagle Ford
Number of permits



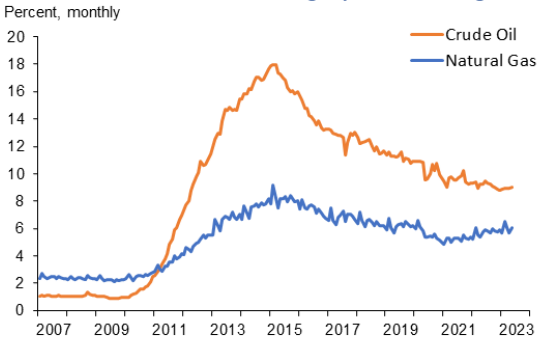
SOURCE: Railroad Commission of Texas.

Chart 4
Eagle Ford horizontal rig count and wells placed online



NOTE: Average horizontal rig count for 2011 is from 2/4/2011 till 12/30/2011.
SOURCES: WellDatabase, Baker Hughes.

Chart 5
Share of U.S. crude oil and natural gas produced in Eagle Ford

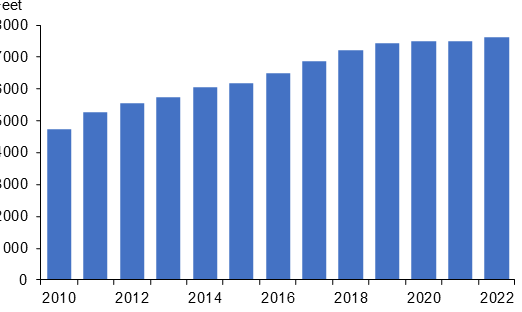


SOURCE: Energy Information Administration.

The gold rush ended even faster than it began, though. The boom had been supported by a period of relatively high oil prices but at the end of 2014 those prices declined precipitously. This led to a sharp cutback in drilling activity both inside and outside the Eagle Ford. As in other areas in the country, lower prices spurred E&P companies operating in the Eagle Ford to become more efficient in a variety of ways. This has included shifting drilling activity to the best acreage, finding ways to optimize well spacing and completions design, and reducing costs by increasing scale.

Companies also have made efforts to increase the horizontal lateral length of the wells being drilled (Chart 6). Those lengths have leveled off in recent years, though, to an average of about 7,500 feet. This has had impacts on the well-level economics relative to some other basins, which have seen more substantial changes in lateral length. For example, in the Permian Basin and the Bakken companies drill wells with lateral lengths of near 10,000 feet, on average. While production for new wells in the Eagle Ford saw improvement in the initial years, that improvement has also flatlined in recent years (Chart 7).

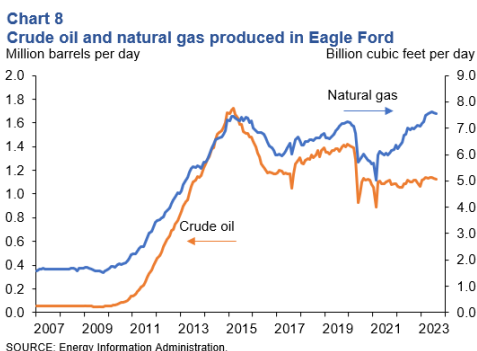
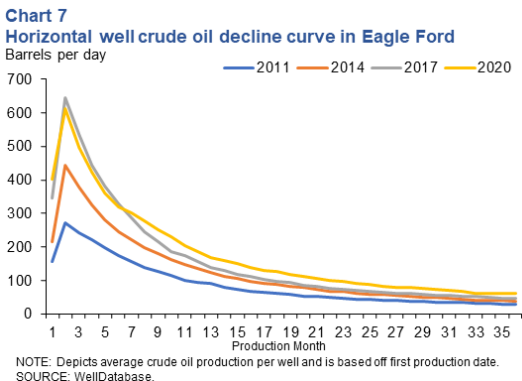
Chart 6
Eagle Ford average horizontal lateral length for new wells



NOTE: Date placed online used for categorizing new wells into specific years.
SOURCE: WellDatabase.

Estimates from the Energy Information Administration for 2021 estimate the Eagle Ford still contains 30.0 trillion cubic feet in technically recoverable natural gas and 3.6 billion barrels in technically recoverable oil. With the diversity of its resources and its close proximity to

the coast, which reduces transportation cost versus other basins, the Eagle Ford is poised to continue producing for many years to come. However, significant growth is unlikely in the coming years in the current pricing environment, as the basin has matured and most of the “sweet” spots in the basin have already been drilled.



Tight oil production in the Eagle Ford came in at about 1.1 million b/d in April 2023 (after upcoming revisions, horizontal wells only). April data is only currently available for 90% of the wells, which explains the apparent drop you’re seeing for April in the chart above. Natural gas production for that month was about 6.6 Bcf/d.

In the first 3 months of this year, almost 10% more horizontal wells came online compared with the same period last year (379 vs 347).

However, since the steep fall in hydrocarbon pricing in the 2nd half of last year, drilling activity is falling again and as of last week, 58 rigs were drilling horizontal wells. This was down from 74 rigs less than a year ago (source: Baker Hughes), which constitutes the biggest percentage decline among the 3 major US shale basins.

The TWC industry growth projections for 2032 present an optimistic view on growth in the Middle Rio Grande region. All the major employment

sectors are showing double-digit growth in the chart below. One may assume the projections are tied closely to the continued growth of the oil and gas economy though the quarterly numbers in the chart above show some evidence of decline as the price of petroleum products decrease through over-production. The current Administration’s emphasis on “drill baby drill” does not take into account the economics of too much production over a short period of time. Reductions in the price of oil products will contribute to a decline in the other industries dependent on that sector’s employees as customers.

Projected Top Ten Fastest Growing Industries (% Growth 2022-2032)	Percent Growth
Child Care Services	35.1
Department Stores	31.5
Oil and Gas Extraction	29.7
Employment Services	29.0
Restaurants and Other Eating Places	28.7
Building Material and Supplies Dealers	25.8
Utility System Construction	23.8
Outpatient Care Centers	21.0
Traveler Accommodation	20.7
Support Activities for Mining	20.7
Services to Buildings and Dwellings	20.6
Other Ambulatory Health Care Services	20.4
Office Administrative Services	18.6
Warehouse Clubs, Supercenters, and Other General Merchandise Retailers	18.3
General Medical and Surgical Hospitals	15.0
Automobile Dealers	10.8
Local Government, Except. Education & Hospitals	7.5
Individual and Family Services	6.0
Offices of Physicians	3.3
Building Equipment Contractors	2.0
Other Specialty Trade Contractors	1.8
Legal Services	1.6
Rental and leasing services (5322, 5323, and 5324 only)	1.0
Federal Government, Except Postal Services	1.0
State Government, Except. Education & Hospitals	.3

The in-demand industries and in-demand occupations are presented in Attachment 1 of the Board plan.

Target Occupations

The in-demand industry sectors list, the in-demand occupations list and the target occupations list are contained in Attachment 1 of the plan. Target occupations are 1) occupations that are in demand (i.e. have projected growth or employ a significant number of people and therefore have significant replacement turnover), 2) have a dedicated training component, and 3) provide wages that contribute to self-sufficiency. The analysis looked at occupations with an entry wage of \$12.00 per hour OR, if less than \$12.00 per hour, have an “experienced” wage over \$14.00 per hour. These occupations may be included in the target list as a first step on the career ladder which should lead to an increase in wages. Potential training time paid by WIOA funds is up to two years.

The following occupations are deemed to be target occupations for the Middle Grande region. The growth data does not reflect another element in available jobs: replacement of individuals leaving for another job or retiring. In occupations with significant employment there are usually more replacement openings than new openings based on growth.

Middle Rio Grande Target Occupations

Target Occupation	Annual Average Employment 2022	Annual Average Employment 2032	Number Change 2022-2032	Percent Growth 2022-2032	Annual change in Employment Due to Growth
Cooks, Restaurant	365	557	192	52.6%	19
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	1,219	1,407	188	15.4%	19
General and Operations Managers	1,453	1668	215	14.8%	22
First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers	574	720	146	25.4%	15
Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	821	904	83	10.1%	8
Roustabouts, Oil and Gas	385	462	77	20.0%	8
Light Truck Drivers	357	432	75	21.0%	8
First-Line Supervisors of Retail Workers	825	895	70	8.5%	7
Childcare Workers	347	414	67	19.3%	7
First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers	400	465	65	16.3%	6
Medical Assistants	285	345	60	21.1%	6
Pre-School Teachers, Except Special Education	175	215	40	22.9%	4
Registered Nurses	836	887	51	6.1%	5

Target Occupation	Annual Average Employment 2022	Annual Average Employment 2032	Number Change 2022-2032	Percent Growth 2022-2032	Annual change in Employment Due to Growth
Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career and Technical Education	679	687	8	1.2%	1
Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	1094	1105	11	1.0%	1
Business Operations Specialists	1610	1740	130	8.1%	13
Social and Human Services Assistants	328	350	22	6.7%	2
Health Technologists and Technicians	1466	1611	145	9.9%	14
Radiologic Technologists and Technicians	99	114	15	15.2%	2
Pharmacy Technicians	168	203	35	20.8%	4
Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers	686	743	57	8.3%	6
Information and Records Clerks	2421	2546	125	5.2%	12
Carpenters	71	87	16	22.5%	2
Electricians	137	152	15	10.9%	2
Plumbers, Pipefitters and Steamfitters	97	106	9	9.3%	1
Automotive Service Technicians	443	472	29	6.5%	3
Bus and Truck Mechanics and Diesel Engine Specialists	135	146	11	8.1%	1
Industrial Machinery Mechanics	184	222	38	20.7%	4
Electrical Power-line Installers and Repairers	70	76	6	8.6%	1
Wellhead Pumpers	201	249	48	23.9%	5
Machinists	50	53	3	6.0%	1
Welders, Cutters, Solderers and Brazers	122	129	7	5.7%	1
Telecommunications Line Installers and Repairers	85	109	24	28.2%	3
Dental Assistants	73	92	19	26.0%	2
Phlebotomists	95	117	22	23.2%	2
Emergency Medical Technicians	200	235	35	17.5%	4
Firefighters and Prevention Workers	55	60	5	9.1%	1
Licensed Practical and Vocational Nurses	509	496	-13	-2.6%	1
Correctional Officers and Jailers	612	590	-22	-3.6%	1

Knowledge and Skills Analysis

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.

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	Recruiting, screening and referral of qualified applicants Extensive assessment/testing of applicants before referral – work skills, aptitudes and attitude, Ensure applicants are work ready – proper attire, motivated
Assistance with job orders	Qualified staff assist with job order details, skills identification, updating orders, follow-up on result of referrals. Job matching service
Outreach of applicants	Establish quarterly job fairs for all businesses as well as industry specific job fairs such as oil and gas extraction industry. Staff job fair site – enable employers to participate through provision of logistics support. Publicize job fairs to general public, provide interview facilities. Assist with Work Opportunity Tax Credit
Job Applicants ready to work	Soft skills (work maturity skills) assessment and training through job clubs, counseling, peer group interaction Only qualified work ready applicants are referred
Skilled job applicants	Work with employers to identify skills needed and find providers to offer skills training. Customized training to specific industry needs
Assistance with expansion	On-site job application assistance Specific outreach to particular individuals with skills sets being sought by employer
Assistance with layoffs/downsizing	Respond quickly to layoff notice with rapid response activities. Meet on-site with employer/employees to present assistance with counseling, job search. Assist with referral to UI benefits
Workforce partners who understand the industry and listen	Regional employer forums to discuss needs/trends. BSU staff knowledgeable about area industries Business representatives on the WSMRG Board Up to date labor market information
Responsive to Change	Periodic customer satisfaction surveys and corrective action Continuous improvement mind set directed toward efficiency and accountability

B. Labor Force Analysis and Trends

The table on the next page presents labor force statistics for the Middle Rio Grande region, the state of Texas, and the United States. For the Middle Rio Grande region, the civilian labor force has increased 3.6 percent from December 2023. While the unemployment rate increased one percent over December 2023, the number of unemployed increased by 23.7 % over 2023. The unemployment rate for the region is 5.8% compared to 3.7 % for the State. The national unemployment rate mirrors the State at 3.8 % as of December 2024. The Middle Rio Grande regional economy is not doing as well as the State or nation. An additional indication of a slowing economy is the number of unemployment insurance claims. December 2024 unemployment claims for the region increased 37.6 percent of December 2023.

Middle Rio Labor Force Statistics				
	Dev 2024	Nov-24	Dec-23	Yearly Change
Civilian Labor Force	76,120	75,771	73,468	2,652
Employed	71,723	71,587	69,913	1,810
Unemployed	4,397	4184	3,555	842
Unemployment Rate	5.8%	5.5%	4.8%	1.0%
Texas Labor Force Statistics				
	Dec-24	Nov-24	Dec-23	Yearly Change
Civilian Labor Force	15,591,398	15,620,707	15,090,824	500,574
Employed	15,012,352	14,965,379	14,564,917	447,445
Unemployed	579,036	655,328	525,907	53,129
Unemployment Rate	3.7%	4.2%	3.5%	0.2%
US Labor Force Statistics				
	Dec-24	Nov-24	Dec-23	Yearly Change
Civilian Labor Force	167,746,000	168,164,000	166,661,000	1,085,000
Employed	161,294,000	161,456,000	160,754,000	540,000
Unemployed	6,708,000	6,708,000	5,907,000	545,000
Unemployment Rate	3.8%	4.0%	3.5%	0.3%

US Labor Force Statistics				
Continued Claims for the Week of the 12th				
	Dec-24	Nov-24	Dec-23	Yearly Change
MRG	1,338	855	972	366
Texas	122,026	116,908	114,107	7,919

Unemployment rates (TWC LMI data) in the region have fluctuated from 5.1 to 6.4 percent. State and national rates are lower: 3.5 to 4.5 percent for Texas and 3.5 to 4.5 for the U.S. The State rates closely track the U.S. unemployment rates. One potential cause of the difference between the region and the State/Nation is the lack of a significantly diversified economy in the Middle Rio Grande. The local economy is dependent on service jobs and the fluctuations in oil prices and production.

Historical Unemployment Rates

Month	MRG	Texas	US
Dec 24	5.8	3.7	3.8
Nov 24	5.5	4.2	4.0
Oct 24	5.6	4.1	3.9
Sep 24	5.4	4.1	3.9
Aug 24	5.6	4.4	4.4
Jul 24	5.8	4.4	4.5
June 24	6.4	4.5	4.3
May 24	5.5	3.8	3.7
Apr 24	5.1	3.5	3.5
Mar 24	5.8	4.1	3.9
Feb 24	6.6	4.4	4.2
Jan 24	5.7	4.1	4.1

The primary functions of workforce development programs are to impart skills to improve employability and address barriers to employment faced by program participants. The demographics of individuals facing barriers to employment are presented below. (Source: Texas Demographic Center)

Middle Rio Grande WDA Population Change 2020 – 2024 (based on January 2024 Estimates)			
County	2020	2024 (est.)	Percent of change
Dimmit	8,615	8,130	-5.6

Edwards	1,422	1,383	-2.7
Kinney	3,129	3,203	2.4
La Salle	6,664	6,630	-0.5
Maverick	57,887	57,757	-0.2
Real	2,758	2,793	1.3
Uvalde	24,564	24,827	1.1
Val Verde	47,586	47,565	0.0
Zavala	9,670	9,494	-1.8
Total	162,295	161,782	-0.003

Similar to other rural areas in Texas, Middle Rio Grande is experiencing a slight loss of population, with five of the nine counties losing population between 2020 and 2024. Population loss affects the local economy in that there are fewer customers for businesses. Population reduction affects business decisions, including where a new company is likely to locate in the region. Two of the three major population areas, Uvalde and Val Verde had a steady population or slight growth (in Uvalde County).

Barriers to Employment

Workforce programs are specifically directed to those most in need of assistance, those with barriers to employment or barriers to participate in training programs. Workforce programs during the last year service 2,474 school dropouts, 43 homeless individuals and 1120 low-income individuals. Additionally, 284 individuals self-identified as having a disability including two disabled veterans.

Poverty -

Poverty continues to be a barrier to employment. Without resources a job seeker is unable to find and commute to a job. Employment can bring additional costs in the form of transportation and child care costs while working.

The chart below demonstrates that the poverty rates in Middle Rio Grande have increased since the last planning cycle. All nine counties in the region have a higher poverty rate than the national or state averages. In three counties, Dimmit, La Salle and Zavala, the rate is double the national average. (Source: Census.gov)

Percent in Poverty by County – Middle Rio Grande WDA

Year	Name	Percent in Poverty
2023	United States	12.6
2023	Texas	13.7
2023	Dimmit	25.1
2023	Edwards	20.7
2023	Kinney	21.0
2023	La Salle	29
2023	Maverick	21.9
2023	Real	16.6
2023	Uvalde	24.9
2023	Val Verde	21.3
2023	Zavala	29.1
Number of Middle Rio Grande Counties with Poverty Above the U.S. Poverty Rate		9

Educational Attainment-

The table below presents educational attainment by county for the Middle Rio Grande region. Unfortunately, education attainment continues to be a barrier to employment for many people in the region. Eight of the nine counties in the region are above the state average for individuals without a high school diploma. All nine counties are below the state average for at least a bachelor’s degree. The Middle Rio Grande population has a significantly lower education rate than either the State or the Nation. This translates into a workforce that has a substantial number of individuals without the skills to successfully complete occupational skills training that might result in a high wage high skill job. Consequently, a significant effort needs to be made to bring up reading and math skills in the job seeking population. Individuals with limited education attainment have a very difficult time completing occupational skills training.

Education Attainment by County (age 25+)		
County	Percent No High School Diploma	Bachelor’s Degree or Higher
Dimmit	27.2	14.6
Edwards	25.6	19.0
Kinney	15.4	13.3
La Salle	37.6	5.4
Maverick	35.4	15.8
Real	10.9	20.9
Uvalde	23.9	19.1

Education Attainment by County (age 25+)		
County	Percent No High School Diploma	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Val Verde	26.5	20.2
Zavala	27.4	13.8
Texas	14.8	32.3
United States	10.9	34.3
# Counties Above Texas Rate	8	0
# Counties Above National Rate	8	0

Source: National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities 2022

Veteran Status

County	Number of Veterans 9/30/2024
Dimmit	413
Edwards	110
Kinney	251
La Salle	146
Maverick	1,183
Real	322
Uvalde	1268
Val Verde	3,165
Zavala	343
Total	7,201

Source: National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

The number of Veterans in the region has declined since the last Board plan, from 8,536 to 7,201 in 2024. Veterans face employment barriers due to mental and physical disabilities, homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, low educational attainment, and general problems fitting in with civilian life after their service. The Texas Veterans Commission provides services to veterans through its Veterans Employment Services which works with local workforce boards to provide activities that enhance the employability of veterans. Services include:

- Converting military occupation to civilian occupations for resume and job search
- Job matching and referrals
- Resume assistance
- Employer outreach
- Job search workshops
- Vocational guidance

- Labor market information and referrals to training.
- Other supportive services.

Veterans are a priority service population in the workforce center system.

Dislocated Workers

An individual who has been laid off or terminated as the result of a mass lay-off or plant closure, especially those that result from adverse consequences of trade agreements or long-term economic trends are called dislocated workers. These customers face different barriers to employment than the general population of job seekers. They have job skills and work experience but have been laid off due to economic conditions or skills obsolescence.

Dislocated workers need counseling, both personal and financial, skills retraining and support to allow them to be retrained in another occupation. The Trade Adjustment Act (TAA) provided dislocated workers with the means to access training for those who are eligible for that program. Dislocated Workers not eligible for TAA can access workforce development services through the workforce center system. Services include job search assistance, case management, referral to outside services, occupational skills training in a target occupation in the region, support services such as childcare and transportation and employment placement services.

Individuals with Disability or Lacking Health Insurance

The Middle Rio Grande region is home to over 23,659 individuals with some form of disability that affects their daily life functions. Such disabilities are often barriers to finding and maintaining employment. The table presents data on the number of individuals with disabilities by county in the Middle Rio Grande region.

The Board's considers individuals with disabilities to be a priority service group. All workforce centers are fully accessible to disabled customers. Arrangements have been made with partner agencies for the provision of additional assistance for disabled customers as needed. The co- location of VR staff in the workforce centers gives individuals with disabilities enhanced options for receiving services to provide access to employment. VR assistance may include job coaching, interpreters, sign language assistance, transportation, occupational training, adaptive equipment, and counseling.

Every workforce center office has auxiliary aid for the seeing impaired, which includes a magnifier, Zoom Text, and JAWS screen reader. For hearing

impaired customers, offices are equipped with TDD, TTY and Relay Texas. Resource room staff have been trained to use this assistive technology.

Individuals with Disabilities by County 2022
Persons Without Health Insurance by County, 2022

County	Individuals with Disability (estimate)	Number of Persons without Health Insurance (under age 65)	Percent Uninsured
Dimmit	1,567	574	22.7%
Edwards	192	91	34.9%
Kinney	1,000	105	23.6%
La Salle	605	340	24.4%
Maverick	6,957	4,844	30.7%
Real	832	140	27.5%
Uvalde	4,758	1688	26.9%
Val Verde	6,110	3206	27.9%
Zavala	1,638	590	19.6%
Texas	3,549,223	4,760,829	18.8
Total	23,659	11,578	

Sources: Research & Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities, University of Montana; U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Health Insurance Estimates

The lack of health insurance is a barrier to employment if the job seeker has poor health or suffers a major (or even minor) health emergency. Funds spent on health care take away from resources needed for employment, transportation and childcare. All nine of the Middle Rio Grande counties have a higher rate of people without insurance than the state average of 18.8 percent. Workforce partners share referrals of individuals in need with community resource partners who may be able to help with emergency expenses, assistance with health care tasks, transportation and childcare.

C. Workforce Development Analysis

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

The Middle Rio Grande Workforce Board 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. A general assessment of workforce development activities is presented below:

1. General Workforce Development Activities in The Region

Workforce development programs funded through the Middle Rio Grande Workforce Board and the Texas Workforce Commission meet some of the need for training and skills development, career education, job placement and counseling. The coordination between the Board, the contractors and the education community has helped to enhance the services provided. The Board will focus on continued development of career pathways for youth, skills training for welfare recipients and dislocated workers, and continuous improvement of workforce center systems.

The table below presents the final PY2024 performance for the Middle Rio Grande Workforce Board. Thirteen of the twenty-two measure targets were met (MP) or exceeded (+P). Nine of the measures were not meeting. Board and workforce center system staff are working to raise performance for that measure in PY2025.

Measure	Status	% of Target	Target
Employed Q2 Post Exit - Adult	-P	83.29%	85.00%
Employed Q4 Post Exit – Adult	-P	73.24%	82.60%
Median Earnings Q2 Post Exit – Adult	MP	98.59%	\$7,300
Credential Rate – Adult	+P	127.51%	75.60%
Measurable Skills Gains – Adult	MP	103.70%	78.30%
Employed Q2 Post Exit – Dislocated Worker (DW)	MP	105.29%	85.00%
Employed Q4 Post Exit – DW	-P	88.24%	85.00%
Median Earnings Q2 Post Exit - DW	-P	80.55%	\$9870
Credential Rate – DW	MP	94.12%	85.00%
Measurable Skills Gains – DW	MP	101.73%	81.00%
Employed/Enrolled Q2 Post Exit – Youth	-P	69.01%	73.90%
Employed/Enrolled Q4 Post Exit – Youth	-P	74.96%	66.70%
Median Earnings Q2 Post Exit - Youth	MP	97.34%	\$3,200
Credential Rate – Youth	-P	65.15%	48.20%
Measurable Skills Gains – Youth	+P	115.92%	44.60%
Employed/Enrolled Q2 Post Exit - C&T Participants	+P	107.58%	66.00%
Employed/Enrolled Q2-Q4 Post Exit C&T Participants	-P	88.21%	84.00%
Credential Rate – C&T Participants	-P	94.51%	71.00%

Measure	Status	% of Target	Target
Claimant Reemployment within 10 weeks	MP	95.30%	60.00%
Employers Receiving Texas Talent Assistance	+P		
Choices Full Engagement Rate	+P	120.20%	50.00%
Average # Children Served per day	MP	99.63%	100.00%

2. Education Activities, Including Early Childhood Education (ECE) And K-12

The Middle Rio Grande workforce center contractor, Middle Rio Grande Development Council, also operates the child care management system. MRGDC coordinates with child care providers as a part of the child care services program by providing subsidized child care to families enabling families to work and/or attend training. In addition, the Board promotes and implements the Texas Rising Star program engaging and supporting current TRS providers and those interested in participating in the program.

The Board is a member of several community partnerships designed to improve/support school readiness and early childhood education, including Avance, Kids Are First (head start programs), Texas Rising Star daycares and TRIO programs. These partnerships add another layer of support to the current providers and educate new providers on the benefits of quality child care.

3. Training Activities

Funding determines the number of individuals who have the opportunity to enter occupational skills training programs. Training is provided primarily by the community college in the region, Southwest Texas Junior College. The College adapts training to meet the employers' need for skilled job applicants. Customers receive the support services needed to allow them to continue in training. Upon completion of training, customers are provided assistance with finding employment and follow up by case managers to address any barriers they might have after being hired.

4. Strengths and Weaknesses of Activities

The Board's ability to fund training programs is hindered by a lack of training available in the region. There are only two colleges in the area, and a very limited number of proprietary occupational training schools, which can be very expensive.

5. Effectiveness of Programs and Services

The workforce center system, workforce programs, and child care programs have been effective in serving the needs of employers and job seekers in the region. Quarterly meetings are held with community-based agencies to keep informed of the community and to identify accessible resources. Workforce contractor staff attend those meetings for awareness and to establish points of contact with the agencies and to synchronize referrals of services when necessary.

6. Board's Capacity to Provide Workforce Development Activities

Numerous members of the Middle Rio Grande Workforce Board have been representing business and community interests for many years. The Board staff have extensive experience in workforce development programs.

7. Individuals with Barriers to Employment

The Board has prioritized individuals with barriers to employment as needed the most in terms of resources and staff time. The workforce development system provides remedial education for those needing enhancement of basic skills, occupational skills training for those lacking skills the employers demand, case management for those needing career guidance and assistance with addressing barriers, and support services such as transportation and child care to assist customers with barriers in completing their training and obtaining employment.

8. Employment Needs of Employers

The Middle Rio Grande Workforce Board membership consists of at least 51% employers. These employer Board members represent a significant cross section of employers in the region. The Board itself is the primary source of employer input and feedback for workforce development efforts. New and emerging industries and occupations are discussed as a part of the planning for target occupations and the identification of changing needs of employers for qualified, skilled applicants. The workforce center system's business services unit (BSU) is also a source of information on employer needs. The BSU representatives are in regular contact with employers, finding ways to assist the employer in finding skilled employees. This information is presented to the Board during its meetings in the form of contractor progress reports. Any new or changing employer needs are discussed and addressed through the workforce center system or through the training providers.

The BSU team members attend chamber of commerce meetings to learn first-hand the needs and issues of businesses. BSU staff attend various chamber

functions and participate in community events to learn more of the needs of employers and to share information about how Workforce Services can assist them.

PART 3: CORE PROGRAMS

A. Workforce Development System

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

The workforce center system in the Middle Rio Grande region consists of offices in Uvalde, Carrizo Springs, Eagle Pass, Cotulla, Crystal City, and Del Rio. The Board office is in Uvalde. Programs that may be accessed at each of these locations are listed below:

- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provides customers with access to job search assistance, occupational skills training, assessment and testing, case management, work experience, support services to encourage participation, placement services and follow up to ensure continued success in the placement. Employers may place job orders through WorkInTexas.com 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. WIOA youth participants have access to career pathways and information about occupations that can lead to self-sufficiency. Participants learn occupational skills and earn industry recognized certification.
- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)/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) Employment and Training program assists SNAP recipients with job search, job seeking skills, and referral to services to address barriers to employment and job placement.
- Child Care Services supports families working and/or in training by providing scholarships for child care services. Early childhood education programs within the child care facilities engage and

promote early learning of the children, preparing them for school.

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 College and Sul Ross University.

The Board is comprised of representatives of area businesses, partner agencies, education entities, labor, adult education representatives, and representatives from the child care industry. The Board provides planning and oversight of workforce programs and the operation of the workforce center system. The Board serves as a forum for partners to meet and discuss critical workforce, education and training issues, determine the needs of employers for a skilled productive workforce and ensure that job seekers have access to opportunities for training and job placement.

Services are provided through a region-wide workforce center system providing ready access to all services and programs funded through the Texas Workforce Commission. Partner agencies have representatives within the workforce centers or are easily reached by phone or email to assist in coordinating services to our mutual customers. The Board oversees the operation of the workforce center system by selecting a workforce center system contractor and the child care services contractor to directly staff the workforce centers and operate the programs available to customers. The workforce center operator and child care contractor are selected through a competitive procurement process.

The Middle Rio Grande Workforce Development Board supports the State Agencies' plan to coordinate workforce development services through the Combined State Plan. This Combined Plan is the strategic direction provided to workforce development state agencies to address education and workforce development challenges in the State. Those agencies are the Texas Education Agency, The Higher Education Coordinating Board, the Texas Workforce Commission, the Texas Veterans Commission, and the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. The Combined State Plan directs each of these agencies to adopt the goals, objectives, and strategies pertinent to each Agency and system. The Board is subject to the strategies and objectives of the Texas Workforce Commission, as well as the Tri-Agency partnership of the Texas Workforce Commission, the Texas Education Agency and the Higher Education Coordinating Board.

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

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

Expanding Access -

The entity carrying out core programs in the Middle Rio Grande WDA is the Middle Rio Grande Development Council (MRGDC). 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 by the Middle Rio Grande workforce system are presented in the table below.

Job Seeker Needs	How WSMRG addresses need
Access to job listings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WorkinTexas job listings • Referrals to job openings
Job search assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job search assistance • Job search workshops • Resume preparation • Copiers and fax machines • Resource room with internet access • Counseling/motivation assistance for ensure required activity to receive TANF or SNAP benefits
Assessment and testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TABE testing • Comprehensive skills and barriers assessment • Access to personality/aptitude testing • Referral to other partners for advance/specialty assessment
Occupational skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom training in targeted occupations • Assistance accessing financial aid. • Tuition assistance • Target occupation list of jobs in demand • Labor market information • Coordination with area colleges to provide training that meets employer needs
Support while in training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation assistance • Child care services • Referral to medical assistance • Counseling and tutoring services
Job placement after training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job development in key target industries • Industry specific job fairs • Employer recruitment assistance • Assistance with licensing/testing fees
Job retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow up services to ensure job retention. • Skills upgrade

Career Pathways -

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 combines 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 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 pathways and strategies.

Credentials/Certifications

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

PART 4: ONE-STOP SERVICE DELIVERY

A. One-Stop Service Delivery System

The Middle Rio Grande board reviews the WDA's targeted occupation list at least annually. The review includes discussions about whether the occupations and the resulting training of job seekers and workers continue to meet employers' needs. Members from the business community and post-secondary institutions sit on the Board, allowing for open communication about the effectiveness of the training and needs for improvement. The community colleges have active advisory committees, which include employers, who provide feedback on the skills/knowledge of the employees they hire from the training programs. The Board's workforce contractor maintains a working relationship with each provider, offering opportunities to share information/feedback to the provider about the effectiveness of the training programs for the employer and job seeker/worker. Each of the above assists the Board in ensuring the continuous improvement of the eligible providers.

Eligible Providers -

The Middle Rio Grande Workforce Board's fourth goal is: Ensure the success of workforce development programs through accountability, evaluation, and a rigorous continuous improvement process.

WSMRG partners with Southwest Texas 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. Employer Engagement, Economic Development, and Unemployment Insurance Program Coordination

Facilitate engagement of employers in the workforce development programs, including small employers and employers in in-demand industry sectors, in-demand occupations and target occupations.

The Board coordinates its service strategies with the Chambers of Commerce and economic development entities in the region. Both the Chambers of Commerce and the Board serve as prime contributors to business development for the Middle Rio Grande region, and act to diversify the region's economy by expanding business growth opportunities and workforce development. The Economic Development staff of the Chambers are the primary contact for prospective businesses. Economic Development assists the Board by providing access to regional employers and employers considering locating to the region. The Board assists with economic development by providing funds for workforce training and business services.

Support a local workforce development system that meets the needs of businesses in the local area.

To meet the needs of industry locally, the Board has strategically placed workforce center system offices in seven locations in the nine counties that make up the workforce development area. Within our offices we provide comprehensive recruitment services, LMI and specialized testing to assist employers. Staff develop employer-based training opportunities for programs based on the Board's targeted occupational list. During the course of the program year, the workforce centers host several job fairs for all industry sectors and host targeted events for specialized industry groups on a smaller scale.

Better coordinate workforce development programs and economic development

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

The Board and MRGDC, as the center operator, engage the region's economic development partners in Hiring Red White and You Job Fairs for Veterans. During new industry recruitment, the partners allow Center Staff

to participate in the process, providing prospective businesses with information on skills programs, the supply of qualified applicants and the potential for training strategies to fit their business needs. The Board and the economic development community have worked together in organizing several Skills Development Grant meetings to promote new training opportunities.

Additionally, the Business Services team engages employers through local chambers, regional hiring events, and Board partnerships.

Strengthening linkages between the one-stop delivery system and unemployment insurance programs

Unemployment insurance benefits are accessed through the Texas Workforce Commission. Requirements for receipt of benefits include work search. The workforce center system provides UI recipients, specifically targeting Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RSEA) claimants, with assistance aimed at moving the individual back into employment, using the resources and tools available in the Workforce Solutions offices. Services were provided to individuals seeking assistance with connecting with TWC to file UI claims or to seek help with other questions/problems they have encountered. The local workforce staff provide what help they can or transfer the caller to the UI call centers. Information is shared with claimants about enrolling in short term training to improve their employability or occupational skills training if they need a different skill set for a new occupation.

C. Coordination of Wagner-Peyser Services

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

Wagner-Peyser employment services are operated through the workforce center system. Currently, TWC Employment Service staff are supervised by the workforce center management. Employment service activities are thus coordinated on a day-to-day basis. This approach is currently under review and is expected to change to Employer Service staff supervision being transferred to a TWC Employment Service supervisor.

Currently the workforce center system office have five Wagner-Peyser staff positions that have the responsibility of coordinating Employment Services for the region. These individuals are located with all of the other core programs within the offices.

D. Integrated, Technology-Enabled Intake and Case

Management

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

The workforce center system uses the Texas Workforce Commission's WIT 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. The Board's workforce center system contractor uses the system to store documentation supporting customers' eligibility for TANF/Choices, SNAP E&T, and WIOA program case management.

E. Third Party Partnership in SNAP Employment and Training Programs

The Middle Rio Grande Workforce Board is planning for the implementation/expansion of TPP for fiscal year 2028. During the current fiscal year, the Board staff and the workforce services contractor will communicate with potential partners and develop strategies for implementing TPP.

PART 5: WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES

A. Rapid Response Activity Coordination

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

The local Rapid Response Team consists of the workforce center system 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.

B. Youth Activities and Services

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

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 8th 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 the development of an employment plan and educational plan that will result in the selection of a career in a high demand occupation. Occupations are listed in the target occupation list in Part A of this plan.
- Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as a workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster is provided through Summer Employment Opportunities that are directly linked to academic and occupational Learning. In addition to learning occupational skills, youth are provided with work experience that builds work maturity skills, enhancing their ability and confidence in finding employment after graduation. This program option is targeted to those populations that are in greatest need, i.e. Out-of-school youth, youth leaving the foster system, youth leaving the judicial system and the homeless. Summer employment opportunities will still be available for in-school youth with barriers to success.
- Leadership Development activities may include community service and peer-centered activities which encourage responsibility and other positive social behaviors during non-school hours. Activities focus on how to get acquainted with new people, organizing ideas, learning

leadership qualities, public speaking, creating confidence, listening skills, building trust, vision and planning skills, team projects, and personality types. These activities will be initiated in coordination with school districts and Southwest Texas 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 are provided to customer initially during the initial assessment and then on an as needed basis to address any problems or barriers the customer may have during their participation. Guidance and counseling efforts will be tracked in the customer's case notes.
- Financial literacy education: MRGDC will be seeking a means to provide financial literacy education either through coordination with school districts or through a procured independent contractor. Lessons will include such topics as money and goals, protecting your identity, saving, credit, staying out of debt, understanding pay, etc.
- Entrepreneurial skills training: This activity will be provided as an addition to financial literacy training. Topics will include social and

cultural aspects, concepts of business and economics, types of businesses, skills and abilities required for entrepreneurship.

- Labor market and employment information about in demand industry sectors in the 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 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 College.

C. Coordination with Secondary and Postsecondary Education Programs

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

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 College (SWTC) 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 slowly and

gradually build their skills for success, which could enhance the opportunities for those in poverty to get a job, get a better job, and then get a career. A key strategy is to focus on core competencies that are consistent across several industry clusters; graduates will have a broader knowledge base that will make them eligible for openings in multiple industries while simultaneously improving literacy, soft skills, and occupational skills.

Because partnerships and collaboration among the public, private and nonprofit sectors are essential to successfully establish, build and sustain workforce and economic development systems, MRGDC continues an effort with local non-profits to work holistically with families to provide parenting classes, tutoring in the home, and life skills training with outreach through the One-Stop centers. At the same time, the MRGDC is working through the MRGDC Education Committee in collaboration with independent school districts, SWTC, 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 South Texas College and SRSRGC. This has promise to lower 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 SWTC 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.

D. Child Care and Early Learning

References: 40 TAC §809.12

The Middle Rio Grande Workforce Board members represent companies who have a vested interest in the economy and support their employees. Information is routinely shared with these members about the value of early learning, especially through the Texas Rising Star program, and how early learning impacts future learning as the children enter school.

MRGWB and MRGDC promote the effectiveness of the child care industry by promoting and providing opportunities for provider professional growth, and resources to improve the quality of care offered in the child care facilities that participate in the Board's child care subsidy program. The Board uses funds through the Child Care Quality grants to strengthen the efforts in the child

care facilities to enhance school readiness. The funds are specifically designed to enhance the quality of care offered either by supporting staff professional development or the quality of child care delivered in the classrooms. These initiatives provide child care conferences, TRS mentoring, and provide funds for child care teachers interested in pursuing a CDA or an associate degree in early childhood education.

Supporting the Child Care Industry

- Participant in joint projects and community events that involve all stakeholders. Includes educational fairs, community service projects, or cultural events that bring people together.
- Sharing of resources, such as educational materials, facilities, and expertise, to support collaborative efforts and maximize the impact of initiatives.

Employer Partnerships

- Conduct WIT email blasts to employers with active accounts, announcing the availability of child care services for their employees.
- Participate in both center-based and community-based job fairs to promote child care services and establish connections with potential employers.

Educational Outreach

- Collaborate with schools and colleges to integrate child care awareness into their programs and provide resources for parents and students.
- Serve on various educational committees and advocate for child care awareness and resources.

Community Engagement

- Participate in community-based events to educate the community about the importance of early childhood education and available child care services.

E. Transportation and Other Support Services

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

The only public transportation in the Middle Rio Grande counties is the Southwest Area Regional Transit District. SWART is federally and state funded through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the Texas Department of Transportation's (TxDOT) Section 5311 Rural Public Transportation Program. The agency is also required to raise local funds to match the federally allocated funds each year. SWART contains a fleet of fifty-two (52) vehicles and operates in an eight (8) county service area. Over 150,000 one-way trips are performed on an annual basis, traveling over 1,490,000 miles. SWART's fleet of vehicles contains sizes from low floor mini-vans to large passenger buses that can seat up to 28 riders. All of the vehicles are

wheelchair accessible and are equipped with on-board security cameras. SWART is unique in its vehicle maintenance program as all maintenance is performed in-house at two locations, Uvalde and Eagle Pass.

Local and out-of-area routes are provided in each county based on the needs of the riders. Door-to-door deviated routes and para-transit services are offered throughout the region. Although SWART provides unique transit alternatives to its riders, it has set a state-wide precedence in the area of coordination. Through inter-local agreements with the City of Del Rio Transportation program and a close relationship with inter-city providers, SWART is able to offer seamless modes of transportation for residents in the region to anywhere in the United States.

All core programs that are available in the workforce center system offices offer appropriate supportive services to eligible customers. These services include but are not limited to gas cards, mileage reimbursement, child care, utilities, and rental assistance. Transportation assistance may include repairing vehicles, assistance with car insurance, and one or two car payments as the need is documented to allow a customer to continue in training or employment on an emergency basis.

Referrals to other support services are provided through referral to our partners as necessary.

F. Coordination of Adult Education and Literacy

References: WIOA §108(b)(13); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(12); WD 18-23, Change 2

Young people in the Middle Rio Grande 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 recommendations and referral practically double the client base for each side. Joint promotions and advertising reflect solid relationships and partnerships.

Referrals potentially leading to adult education activities that “help eligible individuals transition to postsecondary education and WIOA education and training or employment, or for concurrent enrollment activities,” so long eligibility and requirements are met.

- Encourage the use of integrated education and training and workforce preparation activities. Engage in innovative adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career information. This will help adult learners obtain college credits and achieve basic skill gains.

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 SWTC –AEL by inviting and conducting GED class at our four larger workforce centers. Class consists 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 WorkinTexas 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 regard 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.

PART 6: ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKERS

A. Adult and Dislocated Worker Employment and Training

The Middle Rio Grande Board provides funds through individual training accounts for training in targeted occupations. Individuals interested in training and eligible for WIOA are encouraged to review the targeted occupations list and the training available from area community colleges and other eligible training providers. The Southwest Texas College has a strong working relationship with the Board and with area employers. The colleges 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 \$8,000 per year.

The targeted occupation list, which is developed by the Board, is shared with the community college and other eligible training providers to ensure training is available to eligible participants in their areas of interest. The list is also used by the community colleges when considering new training programs. Community college representatives serve as MRG Board members.

Additional training opportunities for adults and dislocated workers include AEL programs, literacy programs, and English as a Second Language training for those who have low levels of English fluency. Workshops on job skills development, job search, basic financial management skills, and other topics are provided as needs are identified. These may be conducted at the workforce centers or on request at an on-site location.

Short-term courses are available through Southwest Texas College that lead to industry recognized certifications that may result in entry level employability in occupations posted in WIT. Occupational training includes Commercial Drivers License, Lineman, Licensed Vocational Nurse, Registered Nurse and any training listed on the eligible provider training list.

The workforce center system offices and our community college partners provide outreach and identify eligible adults and dislocated workers. The six workforce center offices strategically located in our nine-county region give the Board the opportunity to recruit adults and dislocated worker applicants from the entire region. This offers a face-to-face opportunity for our workforce center staff to interact with the target population. As the staff talk with the dislocated workers through the UI/RESEA orientation classes or through individual discussions, the long-term benefits of the training are shared with the affected customers. In addition, the staff make personal contact with those dislocated workers who are close to exhausting their UI benefits to discuss their training opportunities. Including the Texas Veterans Commission staff is another component in our outreach process to ensure the Veterans served by

TVC are aware of the opportunities this grant will provide the dislocated Veteran worker.

The types of 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.

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

The Board's priority of service policy states: Services will be targeted and provided to:

1. Veterans
2. Eligible foster youth
3. Recipients of public assistance
4. Low-income individuals
5. Other individuals meeting WIOA adult eligibility requirements, especially individuals that are basic skills deficient.

PART 7: FISCAL AGENT, GRANTS AND CONTRACTS

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

A. Fiscal Agent

Middle Rio Grande Chief Elected Officials designated the Middle Rio Grande Development Council as the grant recipient and fiscal entity for this workforce area and as such is responsible for disbursement of grant funds.

B. Sub-Grants and Contracts

References: WIOA §108(b)(16); 20 CFR §679.560(b)(15)

MRG uses a competitive procurement process to select contractors for the WIOA funded workforce center system activities and child care services. The Board releases a request for proposals for the operation of the workforce center system and child care services in the Middle Rio Grande WDA. The RFP contains the requirements and restrictions concerning 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 list of bidders' entities which might be interested in submitting a proposal. A notice of the availability of the procurement is posted in local newspapers, on the Board's web page and sent to entities on the bidders' list. A bidders' conference is held either on-site or virtually to discuss the RFP elements and answer questions. A question/answer document is posted 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 RFP scoring criteria and instructions. The evaluation team is selected through request for qualification procurement process. The independent evaluation team submits its report to the Board detailing the evaluation score and strengths and weaknesses of each proposal. The Middle Rio Grande Board of Directors reviews the evaluation report and selects 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 wishing to appeal the decision may follow the Board's appeal process within the designated time period as stated in the RFP.

PART 8: PERFORMANCE

A. Board Performance Targets

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. A table presenting PY2024 final performance is on page 26.

PART 9: TRAINING AND SERVICES

A. Individual Training Accounts

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

Individual Training Accounts are provided to customers to pay for occupational skills training in targeted occupations. Training is usually provided by Southwest Texas College. ITAs have a life of up to two years from issue and a ceiling of \$8,000 per individual customer. Customers have the choice of occupational study based on the target occupation list and availability of the training in the region.

B. ITA Limitations

References: 20 CFR §663.420; WD Letter 14-19, Change 2

The Board's individual training account maximum amount is \$8,000 per fiscal year per eligible individual. Training is generally limited to two years maximum. Exceptions to this policy may be provided based on need and individual circumstances. Requests for an exception will be considered by the Board's Executive Director on a case-by-case basis.

PART 10: APPRENTICESHIP

A. Registered Apprenticeship Programs

The Middle Rio Grande Region has had limited registered Apprenticeship programs. These include construction, plumbing and mechanic trades. To encourage more participation in the apprenticeship career path, the workforce center staff will work with area secondary schools in promoting CTE for Apprenticeships. This would allow students an opportunity to enter their junior year and possibly have a journeyman status in some apprenticeship program after their second year of college. The Board's primary focus will be on the following areas: Electrical, Plumbing and Construction with some internships with local employers.

According to the Texas Workforce Commissions' *Report on Available Apprenticeships in Texas, Program Year 2024*, there are no current apprenticeship programs in the Middle Rio Grande workforce development area.

B. Apprenticeship Texas

Apprenticeship is a type of training that helps people get ready for skilled jobs. In apprenticeship programs, individuals get paid while you work and

learn on the job from experienced workers. Individuals also attend classes that relate to their job to learn even more. These programs usually take about one to five years to complete, following the rules set by the industry.

Apprenticeships give individuals an education that is focused on practical skills, which can lead to well-paying jobs. Companies also use these programs to find and keep talented workers with high skills.

The Middle Rio Grande Workforce Board will be supportive of any local efforts to begin an apprenticeship program. Board and workforce center system staff will coordinate with any entity wishing to submit an application for an apprenticeship program. Board staff can provide labor market information to the applicant. Workforce center staff will help identify potential students who might benefit from an apprenticeship.

PART 11: PUBLIC COMMENT

The 2025-2029 State Plan was posted on the WFBMRG website starting on February 28, 2025, to March 17, 2025. Advertisement was done via social media for public comments.

Appendix: Texas Workforce Investment Council Requirements Local Board Plan Requirements for Alignment to the Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan

System Goals and Objectives

1. Employers Goal – Delivery of Relevant Education and Training Programs

Plan narrative pertinent to the employer goal and training may be found on pages 1-5.

WSMRG's second Board goal is focused on employers: Goal Two: The workforce of the Middle Rio Grande Workforce Development Area will possess the necessary skills and education to meet the present and future needs of employers.

The objectives are:

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

The Board and its contractor, the Middle Rio Grande Development Council, work closely with employers to ensure referred applicants meet the minimum prerequisites for employment openings. Job applicants are screened and tested, coached on job seeking and job interview skills, and given labor market information about the employer. The Board members serve as ambassadors of workforce development to their communities, gaining insight into business needs and promoting workforce development and program graduates to employers. Business Services Staff are part of economic development teams that work with expanding businesses and new incoming employers to understand their staffing needs and help design a comprehensive package for new businesses to encourage relocation or expansion.

The measure for this goal is the TWC contracted measure: Number of Employers Receiving Workforce Assistance

Board staff and contractor staff serve on ISD and community college advisory committees for career and technology programs. Staff share information/data regarding employer needs which is verified by employers who also serve on these committees.

Board members represent a significant cross section of employers in the region. The Board itself is the primary source of employer input and feedback for workforce development efforts. New and emerging industries and occupations are discussed as a part of the planning for target occupations and the identification of changing needs of employers for qualified, skilled applicants. The workforce center system's business services unit (BSU) is also a source of information on employer needs. The BSU representatives are in daily contact with employers, accessing ways to assist the employer in finding skilled employees. This information is presented to the Board during its meetings in the form of contractor progress reports. Any new or changing employer needs are discussed and addressed through the workforce center system or through the training providers. Even with the impact of the pandemic on the economy, the business services unit was able to serve 1,269 employers last year.

The BSU team members attend virtual chamber of commerce meetings to learn first-hand the needs and issues of businesses. BSU staff attend various chamber functions and participate in community events to learn more of the needs of employers and to share information about how Workforce Services can assist them.

Upskilling and reskilling are actions that are intended to provide or improve skill sets for job seekers and employees alike. The difference between these two concepts lies in the objective of the training: whereas upskilling aims to teach employees new skills to optimize their performance; reskilling — also known as professional recycling — sets out to train employees to adapt to a different post within the company.

Reskilling and upskilling activities for adults include taking online courses through platforms, participating in mentorship programs, attending workshops, pursuing certifications, developing new technical skills, honing soft skills like communication and leadership, shadowing colleagues in different roles, volunteering for projects outside the current job's usual scope, and actively seeking out opportunities to learn new tools and technologies relevant to the field or desired career path.

Upskilling activities provided by the Board, the workforce center operator and the community education partners include occupational skills training in occupations deemed to be in demand (likelihood of growth in openings), short term coursework (whether on-line or in-person workshops) to improve job seeking skills, interview skills, and workforce maturity skills (so called “soft skills”).

Short term credential programs for literacy and adult education are available through the workforce centers and through the adult education and literacy providers. Some of the Board’s target occupations do not require long training times. The necessary skills for entry level positions can be obtained through short-term credential programs and on the job experience. The Board is coordinating with area training partners to implement credential programs. Jobs that require at least a high school diploma and some post-secondary non-degree awards are well suited to short term credential programs.

The Board works cooperatively with local higher education partners to identify areas of opportunity for short term credentialing. In addition, the Board supports the development of short-term credentialing by facilitating access to grant and WIOA funding that can support development of credentials and eventual training. The Board works with the Workforce Development and Training Division of Southwest Texas College. The College offers coursework in computers, including web site design, health care careers such as certified nurse aide training, clinical medical assistant training, phlebotomy technician training, medical billing and coding, heavy equipment training, a powerline technician program, and professional truck driver training.

The Board is conducting an inventory of short-term credentials and industry-based certifications in the region. Working with education partners, the Board will identify skills areas that are currently offered and propose skill areas that could lend themselves to this type of training component.

Populations that may benefit from short term credential programs are those individuals that are deficient in reading and math skills, individuals with little or no work experience, and individuals who have been dislocated and need some additional skills to help make them more competitive in the labor market.

The Board will track program data for upskilling, reskilling and short term credentialing to include program enrollments and completions, attainment of certifications and employment outcomes. Participants are encouraged to report to case managers their attainments and outcomes and provide documentation of that attainment.

2. Learners Goal – Expansion of Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship

The discussion concerning apprenticeships can be found on pages 2, 5, 50 and 51 of the Board plan.

Ideally, work-based learning opportunities for unskilled or low skilled individuals reflect the skills needs of employers. The Board has developed work-based learning opportunities for youth but effective adult work-based learning requires the participation of employers who are willing to combine paid work with new skills development on the job. BSU staff will identify potential employers who might be interested in providing work-based learning opportunities in demand occupations. These employers will be asked to assist with developing the training curriculum centered on specific job skills for the occupation.

Work-based learning opportunities are available to youth participants as a part of their work experience assignment as well as through Career Education and Technology courses through area high schools. Work-based learning opportunities are also available to adults through Adult Education programs and short-term credential programs through area colleges. The Board is seeking employer partnerships to sponsor work-based learning opportunities.

3. Partners Goal – Alignment to Support Career Pathways

Alignment to support career pathways is discussed on pages 2, 26, 30, 31 and 32 of the Board plan documents.

WSMRG Board goal number three addresses partnerships - 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. The objectives for this goal are:

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.

The focus for the Board on collaboration with education is to ensure access to skills that enhance customer's ability to obtain self-sufficiency. For employers the collaboration is to meet their employment needs and create opportunities for additional job openings for job seeking customers. Creating partnerships with economic development agencies allows the workforce to be a part of community investment decisions and recruiting new or expanding businesses.

The measures for achieving customer success are the TWC contract measures for youth.

The measures for educational attainment are the TWC contract measures for credential rate for youth and measurable skills gains for youth.

4. Policy and Planning Goal – Relevant Data Sets

Discussion of data elements and performance can be found on pages 2, 3, 19, 33, 39, 54 and 55 of the Board plan documents.

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

Objectives:

1. All workforce development performance criteria will be exceeded by Board 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

The Board and its contractor share labor market intelligence with employers to plan for future labor demands. This exchange of qualitative and quantitative data will allow the Board to assist businesses with developing and maintaining a highly skilled labor force. Motivate our youth to select definite career paths after high school graduation and teach them transferable job skills needed to progress through the career pipeline.

The Board strives for accountability through performance data. Performance measures are understood and inculcated into the operations of the workforce center system. Standards are exceeded through the diligent application of the skills, knowledge and abilities of the Board and the workforce center system contractor in providing quality, effective workforce solutions to employers and job seekers, as well as quality child care services for those in need.

Performance data reports are shared across the workforce center system to present the status of operations and programs and identify areas for improvement. Board management and contractor staff meet monthly to discuss programs and performance data. Specific issues affecting performance are analyzed and recommendations considered to address performance gaps. Industry certifications are tracked and documented by the local case manager in the customer folder.

The child care contractor engages with child care providers and employers to expand the availability of high-quality child care. Child care staff provide monthly reports to Board management to help determine potential areas for new child care provider recruitment. BSU and Child Care staff have developed close relationships with the region's major employers in an effort to promote employer-provided child care, especially in rural areas where child care providers are few.

The Board is ready to work with TWC and TWIC on identifying and compiling additional data elements as a means to improve overall performance and access to program services.

WSMRG has integrated workforce programs and child care programs into the operation of the workforce center system. With full-service offices in Carrizo Springs, Uvalde, Del Rio, Eagle Pass, Crystal City and satellite offices in Rocksprings, Cotulla and Leakey, access to both workforce and child care services are provided to customers in need of services. Child Care may also be accessed through a toll-free phone number. One contractor, Middle Rio Grande Development Council has operated these programs for many years and has a record of success in contracted performance, fiscal accountability and community involvement.

Strategic Opportunities

Strategic Opportunity 1 – Employer Engagement

Discussion about employer engagement can be found on the following pages of the Board plan document: pages 36-37.

The Board and its contractors engage with employers every day in the course of their operations of the workforce center system and the child care network.

Workforce center contractor staff have developed strong working relationships with employers in the course of their work to help place customers in employment that promotes individual self-sufficiency. BSU staff are in daily contact with company Human Resources personnel to ascertain their employment needs and anticipate changing skill requirements within their particular industry. Contractor staff attend chamber of commerce meetings and participate in economic development forums and seminars.

Board staff keep up to date with employment trends through the review of the Texas Workforce Commission labor market information publications and notices and share these with the full Board.

Board members are also a primary source of information for companies in the region. Private sector Board members represent many of the major employers in the region and are always ready to share information with Board staff regarding trends in their industry.

Strategic Opportunity 2 – Improving Outcomes for Texans with Barriers to Employment

Discussion regarding elimination of barriers to employment can be found on the following pages of the Board plan document: pages 21-25.

The elimination of barriers to employment is a major undertaking of the workforce center system and the child care network. Specific discussion can be found in the pages noted above.

The Board receives comprehensive reports regarding the types of barriers identified by workforce center staff and child care staff. The Board and its contractors work with area social service agencies, non-profits and local government to identify resources to help ameliorate individual barriers through program referrals to these partners. Referrals are documented and are subject to a 30- and 60-day follow-up by center staff to ensure that each individual is receiving appropriate services to address their needs.

Workforce Center staff and child care staff are provided with information from TWC and other state agencies serving shared customers concerning trends in need and work with the Board to adjust program strategies as needed to ensure that each individual is able to succeed in the program. Staff attend workshops provided by area partners that examine barriers to employment and discuss strategies to coordinate services without duplication of effort.

Workforce Center customer orientation provides customers with an initial understanding of services available, and the role of center staff in helping foster a sense of trust with the case manager. This allows customers to be open in sharing their needs and experiences with case managers, improving the customer's service experience.

Strategic Opportunity 3 – Use of Data to Support Investment Decisions

Discussion regarding use of data to improve system performance is found throughout the plan. Data elements are used to identify target occupations, determine workforce needs of employers, understand demand for child care services, tracking customer and performance data to identify areas of deficiency or problems in the smooth flow of customers through the workforce center and child care systems. Additional discussion is found on pages 3, 7, 19, 32, 39, 54, and 55 of the Board plan documents.

The Board is always interested in ways to improve or streamline the workforce development system and the child care management system. When a promising tool or strategy is identified, the Board management staff discuss these opportunities with the workforce center system operator and the child care management as appropriate. Where a decision is made to purchase new tools or technologies the Board staff use the required procurement processes to make the purchase. Contractor staff are provided with information on the changes and report back to the Board the efficacy of such program changes or additions.